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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

MYSTERY and ADVENTURE in LOWER CALIFORNIA

A Threefold Cord

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of

"Swordflame," "Nuala O'Malley," *etc.*

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A Threefold Cord

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Sword-Flame," "Mr. Shen of Shensi," "Nuala O'Malley," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AN HONEST LAWYER.

"I CAN'T help it," declared Captain Kezia Rends impressively, staring down at the whisky bottle on the table. "I've always held that King Solomon was a seafaring man in his day. It stands to reason."

"*Ex tenebris lux*," quoted his companion. "Which is to say, me friend, that even a wooden-skulled old seadog may be havin' the luck to elucidate somethin' new. Sure, I'll bite! Why was King Solomon a sailor, now?"

"I am not joking, sir," returned Captain Rends. His grim mouth snapped shut.

He was a grim man, every inch of him—a stark New Englander, heavy lidded of eye, rough and scarred of face, huge of hand. His square and grizzled beard protruded in a way to leave no doubt of the massive chin beneath; his upper lip was clean-shaven, and his mouth was habitually compressed into a thin line.

"I am not joking, Mr. Yore," he repeated slowly. "When I say that King Solomon was a seaman, I have good and sufficient reasons for the statement. No honest man jokes about Holy Writ, and I'll thank you to—"

"Oh, no offense, man! No offense!" broke in Yore. "What 'll be your reasons for this statement, may I ask?"

Rends inspected him steadily, and not without suspicion. Denis Ajax Yore, some time fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, was a peculiar man.

For one thing, his head was as round and bald as a billiard ball, and his neck was thin and scrawny; his snappy black eyes, his long, nervous fingers, and the vibrant energy betrayed in every word and movement might have showed a keen observer that here was a living volcano of action, though it might long lie dormant.

His voice was surprisingly deep and melodious, while that of Captain Kezia Rends was comparable only to a muffled foghorn. When the seaman forgot himself, his booming tones filled a room like a resonant drum.

"Well," he stated, "mebbe you'll recollect that there's a word in Ecclesiastes to the effect that a threefold cord is not quickly broken?"

Yore nodded, a smile touching lightly on his lips.

"Well, then, how did Solomon come to say that, sir? Because he'd been a seaman and had laid up sennit in his day—aye, and worked many a long hour over rope-yarn on the fo'c's'le! It stands to reason. A landsman don't know anything about three-stranded yarn. That goes to show, likewise, that seamen in Bible days made rope-yarn same's they do now. Yes, sir. I've always said that King Solomon was a seaman—"

He raised his three fingers of liquor and drank sturdily.

"Quite plausible, cap'n," nodded Yore, and dismissed the subject abruptly. "I wonder if your friend can find this place?"

Rends wiped his lips and began to fill his black pipe.

"Yes, sir, he can. We sat here together when we went into that damage suit over the Molly bumping that fool ferry craft and smashing her. As I've told you before, it took Owen exactly half an hour to win that case out o' court, seeing the ferry had her port light placed improperly accordin' to the regulations—"

Yore waved his hand impatiently. He had heard that story until he was sick of it. Captain Rends had been so enthusiastic over the young Los Angeles lawyer that the Irishman would have been suspicious had he not known Rends for many a long year.

Yes, he had heard quite enough of the case which had been won for Rends by Patrick Owen. The lawyer's given-name rather predisposed the Irishman in his favor, but Yore was too worldly wise to trust to such things.

The two men were sitting at a table in a private room of the Sailors' Haven in San Pedro. It might be stated that the Sailors' Haven was not a philanthropic institution, such efforts being wisely left to the Seamen's Institute, just across the harbor. To the passing eye it was a saloon upon the harbor's brim—yet it was more.

Its private rooms contained, nine times out of ten, men who did not drink; men like Yore, who had money and brains and activity, and men like Rends, who had hard fists and sea-skill.

And this was not the first time that these same two men had occupied a private room at the Sailors' Haven. Rends and Yore had known each other of old. Rends owned a small topsail schooner, one of the few wind-jammers which still carry lumber to San Pedro from the northern Oregon ports, and he was a seaman of the old type, oftener met with at San Pedro or the north ports than elsewhere on the Pacific Coast.

The Irishman, on the other hand, was a kestrel-hawk of fortune, known far and wide, by land and sea, among those who ply the sorry trade of adventurer. He had more luck than most, said they with some bitterness. And it was quite true.

A gentleman by birth and training, Yore was well equipped to draw luck in his direction. His ventures might not have been altogether honest; it was rumored that he had robbed pearlers in the Gulf of California, that he had run arms down the west coast of Mexico, and that he had dallied with illicit sealing.

Such allegations were untrue, however—in the main. Yore's Irish blood sped him to adventure, but when he went afield it was usually with some plan so bizarre and unheard of that the wonder was he ever succeeded at all. Yet he did suceed, and often, and he was no stranger in San Pedro.

For San Pedro is not a haven for the unsuccessful. It exists for and by the Pacific Coast traffic; it is "wide open," and the rebuilt hulk which bears the sign of the Seamen's Institute is hard put to it to make any headway against the liquor traffic on the west shore.

The port is not a pleasant place to live, for these and other reasons. It is commercial, pure and simple; cut off by hills and mudflats from the rest of mankind, picturesque with Mexicans and cholos and longshoremen and navy uniforms and motion-picture actors, it does traffic in all that these men desire, from whisky to womenkind.

Yet it is ever a place of beginnings. The lumber tramps end here, true, but nothing else does. From here the passenger craft ply up the coast; from here an immense fishing industry sets forth to the Catalinas and the coast beds; from here goes forth a

network of human endeavor, to San Francisco on the north, San Diego in the south, and even to revolution-scarred lower California and far Honolulu and Panama.

"If there's any man can give us the law on this point," said Rends heavily, "it's young Owen. Mind, I'll not risk the law."

"You'll not be havin' to," retorted Yore. "I let you summon Owen here merely to satisfy you. I know enough of international law meself—hello! There's our man."

A voice proceeded from the front of the groggery—an irritated but level voice inquiring for Rends. A moment later the door of the private room swung in and the voice opened fire abruptly:

"Confound you, captain! Why don't you have me meet you in a decent place? I don't propose going to saloons to meet my clients."

"Glad to see you, sir." Rends rose with outstretched hand, as though he had not heard the remarks. "I'm glad to see you, even if our last meeting did cost me fifty dollars. This is my friend, Mr. Yore."

"Denis Ajax Yore, sir, some time fellow of Trinity College, Dublin," corrected Yore. "It's glad I am to meet you, Mr. Owen."

The new arrival stared at Yore in some surprise, then dropped into the chair which Rends pushed out for him.

Patrick Owen was not a handsome young man of Apollolike figure. To be sure, he was wider than most men across the shoulders, and his wrists were significant of great strength; but he was not gracefully built. His strength came from ax-work in the woods of Washington.

There, while working in lumber camps, he had studied and read law. At twenty-three he had saved up enough money to start in practise with, as he thought; his California examination passed with flying colors, he had opened an office in Los Angeles, and had settled down to wait for the approach of fame. This had been eight months ago.

City life had not wiped the seal of the woods from his face. It was a hard face for so young a man—hard, in the sense that Captain Rends was a hard man; hardened by sun and wind, strengthened by the virile quickening of nature.

The nose was prominent and thin-nostriled; the mouth was firm and strong of jaw; the eyes were deep brown, and their level gaze was very disconcerting to most men. At the present moment that gaze was turned on Rends, and the seaman met it with approval.

"Me friend Rends was tellin' me about you," said Yore easily. "I'd like to know if you're Irish, young man."

"I'm here to talk business, not family," returned Owen coldly. "But I don't mind saying that I'm an American citizen. Who my father was is none of your business. Now, Captain Rends, I presume you're in another legal tangle?"

Yore accepted his rebuke with a wry face, Rends grinning in slow delight.

"Not a tangle, Mr. Owen," he returned cautiously. "We want a bit of advice, no more. And, mind, you'll not charge me fifty dollars this time."

Owen smiled, looking into the seaman's shaggy browed eyes. His smile flung a quick light into his face—a light which did not come there often, for he seldom smiled unless utterly at his ease.

"If you want my advice, captain, I'll charge what I think it's worth. Come, what's the trouble? Another ferry-boat?"

"Not this time," answered Rends seriously. "This here talk is all shipshape, I take it? In confidence, that is?"

"So far as I'm concerned, yes. You'll have to answer for Mr. Yore."

The Irishman grinned delightedly, and eyed Owen with increasing favor. Rends nodded solemnly, prodding a huge thumb into his pipe.

"Here's the lay of it, sir. Mr. Yore wants me to go a trip for him, and I want to know first that everything's above board. No bucking the law for me, you understand?"

Owen nodded, frowning a little.

"The cruise is to lower California, Mr. Owen. There are a goodly number of old missions thereabouts, most of 'em in ruins, and almost neglected except by Indians. I ain't responsible for all this, mind—it's what Mr. Yore says."

Owen, who had already sensed this fact, nodded again.

"Well"—the seaman paused to puff his pipe alight—"the idee is that in them missions there's stuff we could pick up for the taking. You tell him the rest of it, Mr. Yore. I ain't got the details logged myself."

Yore leaned forward and obeyed.

"Many of those deserted missions have been guarded by the remnant of the Indians, Owen. They do be holdin' some elegant paintings, I hear, such as Murillos and Salvator Rosas; then there's the matter of onyx fonts and bric-à-brac, to say nothing of books printed by the padres for the Indians. All these are to be had, d'ye mind?"

Owen listened in blank astonishment. He would have suspected some joke but for the immobile, serious seaman. Kezia Rends had an extremely rudimentary sense of humor, as he knew already.

"But—do you actually mean that you two men are going down there to loot the missions?" he asked. "What good would the stuff be to any one?"

"Good as gold, me lad!" exulted Yore. "Trust me for that. The point is, would we be breakin' any law? Can ye tell us that, now?"

Owen could do so, but he wished to take his own time about it and digest this amazing information more thoroughly. He had never heard of so harebrained an enterprise in his life, and yet it appealed to him.

Since coming to southern California he had read a good deal about the early history of the country. Second thought showed him that there might be something in Yore's scheme, after all.

He knew that the lower California missions had been founded and cared for by the Jesuits; and when this order was expelled in 1768 these flourishing missions had gone into swift decay and had been plundered for the sake of the new Franciscan missions in upper California.

Yet the few travelers who had visited the peninsula had brought back strange tales of old paintings preserved in the ruined buildings, of wonderful architecture, of bells which the Indians still rang, of books and missals clung to as fetishes by Indian hands. Yes, there was plunder there for the taking, he knew.

"I don't know a thing about Mexican law," he said slowly, "and in any case the fighting down there has turned the country upside down. But the mission ruins would still belong to the church—"

"That's exactly the point," broke in Yore eagerly, spreading a paper on the table. "Look at this. I just got back from Mexico, and while there I managed to do the padres a good turn. They gave me this — permission to take what I wanted from the ruined missions, provided that I destroyed nothing."

Owen mentally noted that Denis Yore could speak without accent when he wished: glancing at the paper, he found it written in Spanish and dangling with huge seals.

"It may or may not be what you say," he began. "I don't know a word of Spanish, and if the thing is genuine—"

"Mr. Yore's word is enough, sir," broke in Rends.

"I'm not doubting his word," said Owen. "Well, then, I can see nothing against the plan."

"No fear o' gunboats hauling me to?" inquired Rends.

"Not a bit of it. If that document is what you say, it covers the whole case."

Captain Rends sighed in relief. Yore smiled, and his twinkling black eyes rested on those of Owen, then shifted to the seaman.

"Good! Then all's clear, Captain Rends?"

"All's clear, sir."

"Sure, that 'll be good news for me bank-account! Now, my promising young offshoot of the law, if ye'll be tellin' me your fee—"

"One hundred dollars," said Owen calmly.

Captain Kezia Rends stiffened in his chair, and his mouth opened in stupefied amazement. A hint of fire leaped into Yore's black eyes—a hint of anger which might have disquieted many a man. But Owen gazed at them both as though quite unconscious of the sensation he had created.

"One—hundred—dollars!" gasped the big seaman. "Come, none o' that, Mr. Owen! You've not even had to turn over a lawbook—"

"See here, is it trying to rob us you are?" demanded Yore swiftly. "This is a divil of a business! Five dollars would be good pay for the bit of a word we've had with you, Owen!"

Owen's steady gaze settled on Yore, and under it the Irishman fell silent.

"I'm not trying to rob you at all, Mr. Yore. I'm robbing you."

Rends's voice boomed out loudly:

"I can't help it! Blast you, here I go and send for you, and Mr. Yore he relies on me—"

"Easy," and Owen laughed suddenly. "Hand over that hundred, Yore, and I'll explain."

"I'm hoping ye'll do explaining to the tune o' ninety-five dollars, me lad," grimaced Yore. He extracted a fat bill-fold from his pocket and pulled out two fifty-dollar notes. Owen took them with a nod.

"Thank you. Well, Captain Rends, I'm sorry that I've not justified your good opinion of me, but, as a matter of fact, I had to find one hundred dollars before to-morrow noon or be ejected from my law office. I've paid no rent for two months, I haven't had a case since I last saw you, and I'm three weeks in debt at my boarding-house. There are more lawyers in Los Angeles than—"

"Tut, tut!" broke in Yore with a keen look. "I've never known a lawyer yet in this country who couldn't be gettin' along what with land frauds and accidents—"

Owen's eyes struck him suddenly, and so sharp and hard were they that Yore fell silent again out of sheer amazement.

"I'm no ambulance-chaser, Mr. Yore, and I've too much respect for myself and my profession to go into any crooked work. You'll kindly keep your insinuations to yourself."

Yore stared at him for a long moment, then suddenly broke into a cackling laugh and stretched his hand over the table.

"Shake, Patrick me lad! I've struck two things this night that I never thought I'd be findin' in San Pedro—an honest lawyer and a man who could make Denis Ajax Yore pay him a dollar a word for givin' advice. Divil take me, but I'm proud to meet ye!"

"You're not done with me yet," said Owen as he shook hands. "I want to apply for a position with this piratical expedition of yours—if you can make it worth my while. I'm broke except for this hundred of yours, which is far mortgaged. If I'm to keep on being an honest lawyer, I'll have to accumulate enough money to pay rent and board-bills until cases come in. Well, how about it?"

CHAPTER II.

"EL AMO."

PATRICK OWEN was quite serious in his proposal.

Although he would not admit it, his eight months in Los Angeles had been bitterly discouraging. Money was far tighter here than elsewhere in the country; the city was flooded with jobless men besides being a mecca for tramps, and the professions were far overcrowded.

The "boosters" had overdone their work. The fair-year was drawing people into the southwest in herds. Every one who was ill or inefficient seemed to have crowded into California, thinking it a land of milk and honey; and the result, logically, was that this latter-day paradise was far swung off balance and was staggering under the unemployed.

In his eight months of practise, Owen had not had as many paying cases. The hundred dollars wrung from Yore would barely pull his head above water, and by this time he was too conversant with the situation to be optimistic. He must get a job or starve, lawyer or not.

As Yore had hinted, there was money for those who would stoop to it. But Owen had placed the ethics of his profession too high to lower them, even in extremity. In consequence he suffered.

With a little money, enough to tide him over a year, he felt certain that he could establish himself. So, partly on the impulse of the moment and partly on swift, solid reasoning, he applied for a place in Yore's party.

"If I were another type o' man, me lad," observed Yore, "I'd say yes to ye and then

make ye wish ye'd never stuck me for that hundred. But we've shaken hands on that and it's done with. Now, if the cap'n says yes, we'll talk terms."

Rends was quite clearly taken by surprise —not only by Owen's application, but also by Yore's reception of it. His shaggy brows down-drawn, he puffed silently at his pipe for a moment, then nodded.

"For a landsman," he stated judicially, "I'd sooner have Mr. Owen than any other man I know."

Owen flushed a little. It suddenly occurred to him that these two men were paying him a compliment which was rare with them; and it was so. But, because he was used to seeing other men step aside before his level eye and his wide shoulders, he only nodded and turned to the Irishman again, retaining his peculiarly aggressive position.

"Make me a proposition, Yore. Salary or shares?"

"Take your choice, Patrick me lad! Cap'n Rends attends to the sailing part, for we go by his schooner. He gets one-fourth of the net profits, with a guarantee charter in case we fail. If ye think ye can be handling me men, I'll make ye second in command of the land forces."

Owen's dark eyes narrowed.

"I'll handle any set of men you throw at me. I've been boss of donkey gangs in Washington timber camps, and after that anything comes easy."

"Good." Yore smiled, as if to himself. "Ye can have your choice, me lad, between a hundred a month and all found, or one-fourth of me own share of the proceeds—after the cap'n has taken his share."

The young lawyer looked down at the stained table-top, considering. He was quite well aware that this was a quiet test of him.

A hundred a month, clear, would be a tempting stake; but the expedition would hardly last over a month or two. He had never met Yore previously, but he did not consider the Irishman a fool, by any means! Then there was Kezia Rends.

The big seaman was not the man to gamble on anything but a sure win. He had extracted a guarantee from Yore, true, but he seemed to be figuring more on his fourth of the net profits than on the guarantee. Owen nodded again.

"I'll take the share," he said quietly.

"Patrick, me lad, I observe that ye have brains," smiled Yore. The big seaman laid down his pipe and cleared his throat portentously.

"I can't help it—I always said King Solomon was a seaman, sir. A threefold cord is not quickly broken, says he; it stands to reason, it does! Will you join me in a glass to our success, Mr. Owen? Mr. Yore don't drink."

"Neither do I, unfortunately," returned Owen. "I can only say that I'm glad to be with you, and that I hope we'll win out. What's the program, Yore?"

"You and I'll go back to the city," said Yore. "I'm going to put half a dozen of me own men aboard the Molly to-morrow, and we leave the day after. I'll drop in on you in the morning, Owen, and we'll lay out a course. So here's to a merry cruise and a profitable one, me friends! A threefold cord it is, and I'm thinkin' there are few men strong enough to be breakin' it!"

The three rose and clasped hands. As Owen looked into the eyes of the others he felt gratified, for he knew that he touched fingers with two men who were true as steel, and whether the trip made him money or not, it would, at least, strand a threefold cord which would not be quickly broken.

But outside the door of the private room a lithe figure straightened up and slid away through the side door of the Sailors' Haven into the street. Silent as a shade, the figure flitted swiftly to a rear street and then hastened on to the low Mexican shacks and adobes which stood on the fringe of town.

He halted before one of these—a low, dark adobe—and tapped lightly at the door. It swung back, and he entered a room where two candles gave a dim light. Removing his wide hat, he betrayed the debased, cunning, cruel features of a cholo—the contemptuous designation applied to the vicious low caste of the Californias, who come from lower stock than the lowest of Mexico.

The man who received him was of quite another type. At first glance he might have been taken for an old pioneer, with his long

snowy hair, silvery beard, and light blue eyes. But the eyes were sharp and crafty, the nose was hooked high, and the mouth was indomitable, ruthless; the seeming benevolence of this old man was belied by a very definite atmosphere of evil, which hung about him like a garment.

For a long moment he inspected the arrival, who stood with lowered gaze and uncovered head, clearly nervous. Then the old man spoke, and his tongue was the purest Castilian.

"You have word for me? You learned their plans?"

"*Si*, El Amo." So the old man was termed by those who served him — the master. Not the more usual "*mi señor amo*" of California, but simply El Amo, the master.

"I overheard everything—their plans and numbers—"

"Speak, then."

The cholo gripped his hat nervously and obeyed.

"The bald-headed vulture whom you hate, and the big sailor, and a lawyer from Los Angeles were together. The lawyer is to join them; his name is Owen. The vulture is to put a half-dozen men on the boat, and they leave the day after to-morrow."

"They go to Baja California, then?"

"*Si*, El Amo. They go to seek some kind of treasure in the missions, but did not say which missions they would visit."

The old man fell to pawing his beard. His hands were long and vigorous, as was his very large body, and against the silver white of his beard his fingers showed swarthy in the dim light.

The two candles sputtered, but the old man looked down at the earthen floor, only the long fingers twining through his beard in motion. As though in answer to that motion a huge shadow detached itself from the end of the room. The cholo went livid, took a backward step, and crossed himself in an agony of fear.

The shadow grew into the shape of a great dog—a mastiff of gigantic size. He padded leisurely across the room, his huge paws thudding on the earth, and gave the cholo a single, long look which struck the man more livid still.

Then he settled down with his drooping, slavering jaw across the feet of the old man, who at first paid no heed. He, too, was old, for his muzzle was tipped with gray; but no ivory was whiter than the great fangs his yawn exhibited. El Amo looked down at him and chuckled softly.

"Eh, *señor?* You smell work afoot; eh? Very good, Pedro; you may depart. Come back early in the morning and I will give you your house again, for I, too, will leave in the morning."

The cholo left hastily, as though glad to be gone, while the dog looked after him in lazy ease. Outside the cholo paused to cross himself again, then slipped away and was gone in the darkness of night.

These things did not come to the ears of Patrick Owen until later — so much later that they did him no good whatever.

With the next morning he bestirred himself mightily. His whole past evening's experiences would have seemed a wild dream but for those two crisp fifty-dollar bills in a land where bills were strange money save among tourists.

As Owen came down to his office, which was on Hill Street, near First, and handy to the court-house, whither he had wended but seldom, he stopped at a bank and changed the two notes to currency. They had been issued by an El Paso bank, he noted, and this proved Yore's tale of having come direct from Mexico.

At his office he paid his landlord to date and arranged to have his few effects stored until his return. He also sent a messenger to his boarding-house to pay his bill and bring his suit-case to the office. Hardly had this been done when his door opened to admit Yore.

"The top of the mornin' to ye, Patrick me lad! All clear?"

"All clear," answered Owen as the other dropped into a chair unbidden.

"Well, I'm in a mortal hurry the day, so let's get down to the business in hand. First, here's an old map I picked up."

He produced a yellowed sheet of paper, which Owen found to be a copy of Venegas's map of lower California, dated 1757. Yore stated that it had been given him by a priest in Mexico City.

"It doesn't show the northern missions, but it's all I've got so far. What you must do to-day, me lad, is to hunt up any books ye can find on the country, for it's little I know of it."

Owen glanced up in surprise. He had fancied that Yore must, at least, have some definite knowledge to go on.

"Surely you know where you're going?"

"Divil a bit!" and the other grinned. "See here, I'll be frank. All I know is what I gathered in Mexico. Also, in 1863, a bunch of Americans raided two or three of the missions and carried off a few paintings by Murillo, Velasquez, and Cabrera. But I gathered information in Mexico City, me lad."

Owen was astonished, but Yore hastened on and gave him no chance for questions.

"There used to be three caminos, or trails, down the peninsula. They're quite impossible except for mules, so we'll have to be goin' by ship and take trips inwards. Now glance at this map."

Forcing himself to give attention, Owen found that Yore was pointing to the Mission of Santa Gertrudis, on the east coast.

"There's little left of this place," said Yore, "but drop down to San Ignacio—but that's not it. Ah—here we are, at San José de Comondu. Now note the triangle. Here's Loreto on the coast, the old capital in Spanish days. About twenty-four miles to the southwest is this San Francisco Xavier, the finest old place ever built in the Californias, they say.

"Thirty miles north of San Xavier lies Comondu. A camino runs from Loreto to San Xavier. Another comes down from Comondu and connects north of San Xavier. Another connects Comondu with Loreto. There's your triangle."

"Well, what about it?" asked Owen, who was somewhat mystified.

"It's these three places, me lad, we'll visit first, or rather, the two inland missions. I've heard that they have lots of stuff —Comondu has a dozen paintings left and San Xavier has more. Then there's San Rosalio, in perfect preservation, and Purisima, where we'll find pickings. Then Santa Gertrudis—"

So he ran on in rapid sequence, while Owen listened half-heartedly. Something had occurred to him, of which he had not thought the previous evening — something awakened by the old map, perhaps. He cut into Yore's discourse rudely, voicing his thought.

"Wait a minute. This sounds all very fine, Yore, but it has its bad points. According to your own account these missions have kept their stuff for a hundred years and more; what right have we to loot them? After all, they're historic. Their contents should be preserved instead of looted and scattered. And what if the Indians won't let us carry off what we will? You can't very well grab things by force. It—"

"Ah, Patrick me lad—let me speak!"

Yore quietly folded up his map and pocketed it, as if realizing that its discussion was ended for the present. He bit the end from a cigar and settled back in his chair, his black eyes shrewd and alert under Owen's steady gaze.

"You're quite right, lad, in what ye say. But listen, now. All lower California is lawless what with the revolutions. It's a wild and bare land in the south part, and what's left of the church in Mexico can't pretend to care for the old places. They gave me the concession for that reason.

"And I'm not looting them, Patrick. If we left the stuff there it 'd be looted by worse hands than mine. But I've arranged with the biggest museum in the country to buy the stuff and care for it. Of course, we'll make our bit of money, and why not?"

He paused to allow his argument to sink it.

Owen had caught his view-point, and knew that it was good. The lower part of the peninsula was absolutely lawless, he knew well; it had become a haven for rogues and vagabonds, and only its desert waste prevented it from harboring all the picked villains of Mexico and vicinity.

Mountainous, rugged, desert, with lovely valleys set like gems where the old padres had founded their missions, the country in its long leagues of emptiness had been given over to the strong hand. The larger foreign concessions endured; the small mining men, mostly French or Americans, had been driven out.

Rumor had drifted the report north that here and there bands of men had settled—men outlawed from Mexico, bandits and overwild scions of revolution and blood as yet untouched by the long arm of the government.

And even had it been otherwise, Yore's project was permissible. It was no crime to collect what little was left from the wasted years to take it to refuge and harborage in the States, to gather the relics of an elder day and preserve them—at a price.

"Is there no protection for the stuff there?" questioned Owen at last. "Are there not priests—"

"Not half a dozen in the whole peninsula," said Yore conclusively. "And they'll make no trouble, for the concession is addressed to them in particular. Besides, they care little for the old things. I'm taking them some cheap, tawdry pictures and things, which they'll gladly exchange for. And it's the Indians, mind, who have preserved the old stuff."

Not without impatience Yore went on to explain his plan, which was simplicity itself. Much of the remaining mission property, such as vestments, books, and other small objects, was in the hands of natives who lived in the ruins and near by. The problem would be to get this property from them.

This Yore purposed to do by trading, buying, or using force as a final resort. Captain Rends's schooner was even then taking on several cases of trading goods, and Yore was taking his men along in case of a row, which he frankly admitted was possible; he would avoid trouble, if he could, but he was quite determined on making a clean sweep of the old missions, as every object he could obtain meant money to him.

"It looks all right, I admit," nodded Owen finally. "But it's vague, Yore."

"All such things are vague, me lad. I'm taking a chance, no more."

"Have you any idea what books I can get hold of?"

"Not a ghost of one," said Yore cheerfully and rose. "Now, I must be wastin' no more of me valuable time on the likes of you. Meet me at the Sailors' Haven, San Pedro, at nine to-night, and we'll go aboard. We sail at daybreak, so be there. And mind the books."

"I will," returned Owen, and the other took his departure, whistling a gay air from "Pinafore" through the corridor.

Off in the morning! Owen found it hard to credit. The whole affair had broken so swiftly upon him that still he half-doubted the wisdom of it all. But when he remembered the dreary days of waiting for clients who came not, when he looked ahead to the sea trip and the holiday and the possible profit, he knew that he had acted well and wisely.

The scheme was harebrained, of course. It had no certitude of even partial success save in Yore's cheery optimism and self-confidence. Yet it was one bound to strike the imagination, and already Owen found himself casting forward in his mind to the things and places which he would see.

Few Americans had seen them. The peninsula had not been favored of tourists, especially in late years, and the lower portion was a rugged land, almost inaccessible save to natives—

The young lawyer started abruptly and came to his feet. His office door had opened, and, facing him, was a woman—or a girl? Owen stared in blank amazement until she spoke.

"Is this Mr. Owen?"

"I beg your pardon!" He wakened to action, holding out a chair which she accepted with a quiet gesture of assent. "Yes, I am Mr. Owen."

The words were inane, but he could think of nothing else to say. What a girl she was, he thought! Dressed in sober gray, yet dressed as only the Rue de la Paix could dress one—this fact was lost on him; it was on her face that his eyes were riveted, with so frank an admiration, so clean a joy, that the girl facing him could not but smile.

She was beautiful; her eyes a deep blue, shaded by dark lashes, her hair a sunny golden brown — but what words can describe a woman? It is not in features that character lies, but it is the soul behind the features which bespeaks personality.

And there was abundance of personality,

character, in this girl's face. It fascinated Owen, who had never been a ladies' man. She seemed very cool, not at all like a client: her first words not only confirmed this impression but set poor Owen to floundering in helpless amazement.

"Mr. Owen, I believe that you intend going on a trip to lower California with Mr. Yore?"

The young lawyer stared at her, wondering a thousand things.

"Why—well, yes," he stammered, and hid his amazement with a smile, which was not this time returned. "You are a friend of Yore—"

"I am not," she retorted, angry and yet without losing her calm poise. But as her eyes searched Owen's face they warmed slightly, as though she had thought to see a very different type of man.

"I am no friend of Mr. Yore," she continued, giving him no time to recover. "However, I have come to make you a definite proposition, Mr. Owen. May I consider that what I say will be confidential?"

Startled though he was, Owen had taken warning. If she was not a friend of Yore, what was she? The thought put him on guard instantly.

"No," he returned, his puzzled wonder lending to his strong face an expression of honest struggle. "No, I can't promise that, if it has something in it that Yore should know."

"At least, then, consider it a confidence for the space of a week from to-day."

"Very well." Owen sensed antagonism in her manner, but now that he was on his guard, his gaze bit into her straightly. She met the look without flinching, and laid her hand-bag on the desk before her.

"Thank you, sir. In this bag is one thousand dollars in cash. If you agree to break off all relation with Mr. Yore the bag is yours."

Not a muscle of Owen's face changed. Her words disclaiming friendship with Yore had been bitter; so, then, she was an enemy—and this was a bribe!

It was characteristic of Owen's straightforward nature that he never once thought of the thousand dollars as money, but merely as a bribe. He smiled slightly, and his smile said far more than his words.

"Quite useless, my dear madam. I am sorry that you are not a man so that I could better express my opinion of your efforts at bribery."

She flushed a little, and he was glad to see the crimson steal into her cheeks.

"It is not a bribe, sir," she answered, for the first time showing a trace of hesitation. "It is the price of your life. If you go on this trip, you will die as surely as you sit here. Accept this money, or agree to stay in Los Angeles—"

"My dear young lady"—and Owen smiled again, being very angry—"as surely as I sit here, I would keep my pledged word to Mr. Yore, if I were to die to-morrow because of it. That is all."

She looked at him for a moment very steadily. Then with a nod she caught up the hand-bag and rose.

"I am sorry, Mr. Owen. Good day!"

The door slammed behind her. Owen half leaped up to follow, then sank back into his chair again.

"Good Heavens!" he muttered, staring helplessly at the door. "What have I run into, I wonder?"

But there was none to make answer.

CHAPTER III.

THE CORD HOLDS.

"TIME for lunch!" Owen rose and took a last look around the room. "Good-by, old office—it's little luck you've ever fetched me!"

He would not return, so he took his suitcase and departed for the Pacific Electric station to check it. Having the sorry remnant of his hundred dollars, he determined to lunch at the Alexandria and take his after-dinner coffee at a small Greek coffee-house on Fourth Street, which he often visited, having a liking for the strong Turkish mixture.

As he strode through the streets, and later sat at the *table à deux* in the quiet hotel dining-room, his thoughts were busy with his strange visitor of an hour previously.

Who was she? In what manner had Yore made an enemy of so lovely a girl? Owen conned over the little Irishman in his mind, but could find nothing to answer him. Yore was a gentleman; a soldier of fortune, perhaps, but no less a gentleman. Owen knew very well that when it came to the fair sex there was nothing but chivalry in Yore's nature.

Yet, on the other hand, the girl had said that the money was not a bribe, but was the price of his life. At thought of this Owen frowned uneasily. The very vagueness of the concealed threat, the cool, confident manner of the girl, impressed him strongly. Then he started suddenly.

"Great Scott! How did that girl know I was going with Yore when I didn't know it myself until last night? Some one must have been watching us at San Pedro; eh?"

He concluded finally that the girl must be representing some enemies of Yore from other days, and the thought was disquieting in the extreme. Naturally the Irishman would have his foes, being a man of vigor and action; but to judge from this girl his foes were by no means in lowly places. She had radiated wealth, culture, refinement.

"And my lips are sealed for a week," thought Owen ruefully as he rose to depart. "Well, I can, at least, ask Yore a question, anyway!"

Shaking off the weight of perplexity from his mind he left the hotel and gained Fourth Street, turning down toward the wholesale district. As usual this section of the city was thronged at every corner with ragged men who industriously "panhandled" every one who passed.

Owen strode on, paying no heed to the solicitations which poured on him from every hand, for constant experience had hardened him to such appeals. But as he neared the Greek coffee-house, which was his objective, he was met pointblank by a man who would not be passed over. Owen looked down at him, pausing.

"Just a dime, mister—I ain't had a meal for two days!"

So weak, so hopeless, so characterless was the upturned face that it stirred disgust and pity in Owen. He nodded toward the coffee-house.

"Come along, pardner."

The man followed him to the door, followed him inside to a table. The place was well filled with swarthy Greeks, one or two of whom nodded to Owen.

"Coffee, sweet, for two," ordered the latter as a waiter approached. "And bring my friend something to eat — whatever you're serving to-day."

Then he gave his attention to his companion and guessed that the man was really hungry.

"It's mighty good of you, mister," said the other hesitantly. "I'm tryin' hard to get down to El Toro, where I can get a job fruit-picking."

"No work here; eh?" said Owen. "Are you a tramp?"

"No, sir, not me. I been out in this country three years now, workin' steady. All I want is honest work, mister; if I'd wanted anything else I could ha' had a job only an hour ago with some greasers."

Owen eyed the weak face, nodding comprehension. The man's next words startled him, however.

"Ye see, mister, I know Mexican pretty well, and I hears an old feller hiring some cholos over at the plaza this morning. I darned near took on with him, only I ain't fitted for rough work in no place like the peninsula."

"What's that?" asked Owen suddenly. "What peninsula?"

"Lower California. This here old guy was raisin' men to go down there—but not me, no sir! I'd sooner starve in God's country any time than go down there."

Owen reflected, for the coincidence caught his fancy. Parties bound for lower California were rare. Could this have any connection with the mysterious girl?

He questioned the man, and found that the "old feller" referred to was an old man, presumably a Mexican, accompanied by a great mastiff. No girl had been with him, however, and he had not stated the nature of the work for which he was hiring men.

Frowning over this, Owen said no more on the subject. It was a far guess that the old man might have some connection with Yore and with the girl, and it was

improbable; but he determined to mention the matter to Yore that night, for on that subject his lips were not sealed.

When his coffee was finished he slid a quarter across the table to his companion, paid the waiter, and left. He had a commission to perform for Yore, and wished to say farewell to one or two friends. So he bent his steps toward a Broadway bookstore.

As he had anticipated, he found that books on the peninsula were pitifully scarce, and maps harder still to obtain. He managed to procure hydrographic charts, but even these were guaranteed to be inaccurate where the interior of the peninsula was concerned; after some search he also procured two volumes which dealt in part with the missions of the peninsula, quoting largely from reports of the early padres themselves. This was the extent of his ability to secure data on the subject, and so he desisted.

He dined that evening at the Alexandria, and his dinner left him little more than his fare to San Pedro. After writing a few letters in the hotel he departed to the station, got his suit-case, and went aboard his car.

"It's been a full day, all right," he mused as he was whirled across the mud flats and the "Cerritos Slough" toward the harbor. "But I'd like to know who that girl was! She couldn't be connected with the old man, because he was a Mexican and she was American as they make 'em. I'll bet I got mixed up in something queer when I tackled Denis Ajax Yore! But whatever Captain Rends is in, is straight as a string."

With this consoling reflection he comforted himself, and alighted at San Pedro a few minutes before the time set by Yore. Crossing to the Sailors' Haven he ascertained that the Irishman was in a private room as before; a moment later he joined Yore and dropped into a chair.

"Well, Patrick me lad," chirped the Irishman with his usual cheerfulness, "did ye get the books?"

"Right here," nodded Owen, filling his pipe and lighting it. He had decided to attack the other frankly, and proceeded to do so.

"Tell me something, Yore. Is everything in this expedition open and aboveboard, exactly as it was stated last night?"

"Quite so, me lad," said the other with a keen glance. "Why?"

"Never mind now." Owen hesitated, then continued: "Do you know a girl with blue eyes, dressed in gray?"

Yore chuckled.

"I niver did see a girl with eyes dressed at all, Patrick! Come, is it a pipe-dhream ye've been having the day?"

"I'm not fooling," snapped Owen, who was in no mood for jest. It was evident that Yore knew nothing of the girl. "Do you know an old man, a Mexican, who owns a large mastiff?"

He had that day encountered more than one surprising thing, but what now took place was the most startling of all. Yore's chuckle seemed frozen on his face at the final question.

In fact, the whole man seemed frozen where he sat, gripping the table-edge, staring at Owen. In the light his bald head shone like an egg, and his intensely black eyes gleamed as jet diamonds from between narrowed lids. Then, so slowly that Owen did not sense it at first, alarm and terror and hatred crept over Yore's face, transforming it into a mask of livid fear.

"Hands up—quick!"

Yore must have moved like a flash of light: Owen was staring into a revolver, and above it the Irishman's black eyes blazed luridly. Amazed beyond words, Owen raised his hands. He noted that sudden sweat was streaming on the other's brow.

"Man, tell me what you know about that devil, and pray God you clear yourself!"

All Yore's flippant manner had vanished in a whirl of awful earnestness which impressed Owen far beyond the mere words.

"Put down that gun and don't be a fool!" he snapped, hesitating between anger and amazement. "Brace up, Yore—what's the matter with you?"

The other did not obey, but Owen saw the trigger-finger tighten.

"Patrick Owen," said Yore very steadily, "I am no fool! But you know something that I must know. Explain what you just said, and do it quickly."

Here was mystery, indeed!

Owen realized in a flash that his mention of the old man had galvanized Yore into life — smitten him into deathly earnest. There was something behind all this, and, comprehending that much, Owen remained cool where he might have done worse.

Still looking into the revolver and keeping his hands raised, he quietly told Yore all that he knew save for the visit of the girl; on this point Yore seemed quite oblivious, being interested only in the old man with the mastiff. When the tale was done, Yore lowered his revolver and sank into his chair again, mopping at his brow and staring hard at Owen.

"I—I beg your pardon, Patrick Owen!" he said thickly. "I misdoubted you, for which I am sorry. Wait a moment—I'll explain."

Owen lowered his arms and caught up his pipe again, waiting. After a long minute Yore continued:

"Me lad, you have brought me word this night that I had never thought to hear from mortal man! Now, listen, for I'll hold neither you nor Cap'n Rends to our bargain if either of you wants to break it. This old man, of whom you were told, is the bitterest devil ever let loose on this earth, and hates me like the devil hates holy water!"

He paused, licking his lips. Then, with an effort, he attempted to recover his old jocular air, succeeding rather badly.

"I did be meetin' him five years ago in Yucatan. He was a big man there in the sisal line, with plantations and all and millions in money. I worsted him in a little scrap, and he set out to get me. He was near doin' it, and for three years we fought each other like Kilkenny cats.

"Patrick, me lad, I can't tell you the worst of him. He had Yaquis on his plantation, and tortured 'em like a boy tortures flies. He's an old man, and that mastiff of his is old, but I've seen him take two buck Indians and crack their heads together, then fling them to the dog for finishing. That's but a sample, mind?

"A year ago, before Huerta fell, I smashed the old divil through the government. I got Huerta to smash him, d'ye see? All he had was confiscated, and he dropped out of sight with a price on his head. I thought him dead, or out of the way. And now you bring him up—he's meanin' to meet me in lower California and trap me, lad!"

"But who is he?" asked Owen slowly.

"He has a long Spanish name, me lad, which means nothing at all. He's known far and wide as El Amo, which is to say, bein' translated, the master; as a matter o' fact, he's a direct descendant of Cortez —in the Indian line, d'ye see? He's of the blue-eyed and yellow-haired old Spanish type, and what a devil, what a devil!"

"Blue-eyed!" Owen sat up suddenly and spoke before he thought. "The girl was blue-eyed—"

"Eh—what girl?"

Owen looked across the table steadily.

"Yore, something occurred to-day which I passed my word I'd not divulge to you until a week had passed. But—do you know of any girl connected with your El Amo?"

"None." Yore was puzzled in turn, and showed it. "He had a daughter, years ago, who ran off with an American civil engineer. He's no other family."

"Well, it's of no great moment," reflected Owen, feeling ridiculously relieved that his fair visitor of the morning could not be connected with El Amo. Yet on second consideration it looked very much as if there were some connection after all.

"Now, Patrick, me lad"—and Yore leaned over the table, his face very earnest —"I've no doubt that this El Amo is after me. If we go on this trip together, and if he gets me, you'll suffer too. So I release you from your agreement. What'll ye do?"

Owen considered. There were several things he might do. He might break off relations with Yore and return to Los Angeles on the chance of the girl visiting him again and handing him the thousand dollars.

He had no doubt now that the bribe had been tendered in good faith, partly for his own sake and partly to separate him from Yore. He had no doubt that there was danger being plotted for them by this old man of mystery.

Yet, balanced against this danger into

which he was not at all compelled to thrust himself, there was his pact with Yore, his liking for the man, his liking for Rends. He felt intuitively that Yore was "square," was to be relied on in a pinch, was a man to tie to thoroughly.

"I'm with you," he said simply.

Only then was he aware that the other man, in watching him, had been under a tense strain. With a little sigh Yore relaxed; then his hand shot across the table, and there was a light in his face which Owen could not mistake.

"Oh, Patrick, me lad, I'm glad—glad! I've seldom met a man like yourself, and I like you fine. Now let's go aboard and see if Rends wishes to withdraw."

He said it very simply, as if he were in doubt on the matter, and as if he quite expected that Rends would back out. This quality in him struck Owen anew—this honest, frank, self-dependence which blamed no man. Yet Yore had been hard hit that night, he knew.

They walked together across the railroad tracks to the water-front, where a boat from the schooner was waiting at the ferry-landing. Two men were in her, and at a word from Yore they hoisted a lantern in the bow and fell to the oars.

It was a long pull to where the Molly lay anchored inside the breakwater, and the trip was made in silence. Finally the black mass of the vessel loomed up beneath her riding-lights; Yore answered the gruff hail which Rends sent at them, and their boat drifted up beneath the counter.

Owen scrambled over the side and was gripped by Rends himself. Yore followed at once, and at once demanded that they seek the cabin. All three descended an evil-smelling companionway and entered a small cabin where a smoky lamp burned in gimbals.

Yore wasted no time on preliminaries.

"Sit down, cap'n," he said, standing before them with strange earnestness stamped on his features, his great hooked nose standing out sharp and keen. "I have something to tell you. El Amo is after me."

To Owen it was evident that the big seaman had heard of El Amo long ere this. Rends, who had been reaching for a pipe from the wall-rack, turned around quickly and dropped into a chair, where he sat gazing at Yore with mouth agape. But he said nothing.

The Irishman quietly outlined Owen's story. He absolved Captain Kezia Rends from their partnership agreement, and told the seaman that he was at perfect liberty to cancel the charter and withdraw, in view of the too probable dangers which might await them from El Amo.

When he had finished Rends cleared his throat boomingly:

"Has Mr. Owen backed out, sir?" he inquired.

"He refused to do so," answered Yore. "But his action is not to influence you, cap'n. You have your boat at stake, while we have somewhat less."

Rends scratched his grizzled head and looked up at the swinging lamp, his shaggy brows shading his stern eyes.

"You and me have seen some queer things together, Mr. Yore," he answered, very slowly, so that for a moment Owen fancied he was minded to withdraw. "Yes, sir, we have. If I don't mistake, sir, we have."

He paused, still staring up at the lamp. Then his eyes came down to Yore.

"Mr. Yore, you mind what I was speakin' of last night—about that there three-fold cord King Solomon wrote about? Well, sir, in another place he wrote that the wounds of a friend are faithful. So they are, Mr. Yore. I can't help it—it 'ud take a bigger man than El Amo to break this cord of ours, sir. By the way, your men just came aboard to-night. I'd better be setting watches."

With no more than this, he stamped up to the deck, whence his booming voice could be heard at intervals. Owen looked at Yore.

"Then he sticks?"

"Sticks?" Yore chuckled softly, but his eyes were very bright and his voice was not quite steady. "Sticks, is it? Patrick, me lad, till hell freezes over ye'll niver be findin' a truer man than Kezia Rends. God bless him!"

But Owen wished that his lips were not

sealed regarding the girl who had visited him that morning.

CHAPTER IV.

PREMONITION.

FOR five days the Molly plowed south under a light breeze, and at the end of that period was off Cape San Quentin. Meantime, many things had happened.

The schooner was a dirty little craft, as was natural after having engaged in the coast lumbering business, and Owen was disgusted with her. Due to the fair wind, he had suffered no illness from his first sea-voyage. This proved to be fortunate for him, as he had his hands full on the second day out.

Yore had put six men aboard. These, with the two mates and two of Rends's original crew, made the schooner crowded both fore and aft. The two mates were dour men who have no place in this narrative; but Yore's henchmen were interesting to Owen for many reasons.

None of them were gentlemen in any sense of the word, it seemed. They appeared to know the ways of a ship perfectly. They were one and all fighters—scarred, coarse-mouthed, heavy-fisted fellows who swore by Yore, for no apparent reason. But they were of the type which Owen had known in the woods, although they were not woodsmen.

Certain of them had been in the army, he learned. There was Harris, a grizzled man who hailed originally from Chicago; Watson, a mere boy from Biloxi, yet all but wrecked from drink and dissipation; Hayne, a stalwart ex-lance-corporal who chewed tobacco unceasingly; and Chubb, a New Yorker with the most astonishing gift of profanity Owen had ever encountered. Mallock, who seemed to be their leader, was a bow-legged Texan. The sixth man was an alert little Englishman named Franklin, who said little but said it in a most pronounced Bow Bells accent.

Yore had announced that Owen was second in command, and they received the statement without comment. But what Owen expected came to pass on the second day out, and it came in such fashion that he never decided whether it were intent or accident.

The lawyer was standing by the starboard rail watching a school of humpback whales a half-mile distant, when Mallock came lurching into him with a roll of the ship, and cursed him out of the way.

Owen said nothing, but struck. He went into the fight methodically, without rancor; he, as well as every one else, realized that this was the test without which the men would never accept his authority. A shout from the helmsman brought Rends and Yore on deck, where the rest were already watching, but none offered to interfere.

Owen determined to make his authority felt, and did so. Mallock, who fought with savage directness, landed one stinging blow to the jaw, and it stirred Owen into sudden anger. He did not love to fight, but he acted on the principle first elucidated by Joshua, that an enemy should be hit hard, sent to the ropes, and knocked out for the count in as little time as possible.

Consequently, Mallock went down five times under as many blows; Owen's right smashed in to the jaw five times, and at the end Mallock slid down the deck unconscious. His amazed and awed comrades sluiced a bucket of water over him and he staggered up. Catching sight of Owen up the deck, he grinned shakily and approached with hand outstretched.

"I reckon, suh," he drawled, "that you are a betteh man than I am. I apologize for them words of mine, Mr. Owen."

Owen looked at him, laughed a little, and gripped his hand. He was quite untouched save for that one blow, and after this his word was unquestioned of any man. When he had rejoined Rends and Yore on the quarter-deck, the seaman slapped him on the back.

"Mr. Owen, that was a good fight."

"I'm sorry I lost my temper a bit," said the lawyer apologetically.

"Lost your temper? Then God help the man who stands up to you when you're angry!" exclaimed Rends solemnly, and stamped below.

As the days passed, Owen came to a

better understanding of Yore and his men. The latter had been with the Irishman for two or three years, it appeared, and from the rangy Mallock down to young Watson were absolutely dependable, faithful, and efficient. Owen's uneasiness anent El Amo became gradually less as he came to know his men better.

On the fifth day, with Cape Quentin over the port horizon, Yore and Rends called him to a council of war. The books and charts he had obtained in Los Angeles had been gone over by all three, and Captain Rends was anxious to get definite orders, for his papers were made out to Loreto and La Paz.

"We had best begin with the triangle I referred ye to, me lad," said Yore, when they assembled in the cabin. "Comondu and San Xavier, I mean."

Owen nodded. "Yes, according to what we can find, there are paintings to be had at both places. Then there's San Ignacio, to the north, where the padres had the finest library in the Californias."

"Stick to the triangle, me lad," said Yore. "Suppose we're at Loreto now. I'll go to Comondu, then come back along the trail to San Xavier; you go to the latter place and wait for me."

"Lay a course for Loreto, sir?" asked Rends, who was sitting back folding a tattered, dog-eared book.

"Yes." Yore frowned suddenly. "But I'd like to have the Molly out o' the way while we're up-country, cap'n. If you knew of a snug little bay, where she could lie up and wait for us, and no one the wiser? Ye see, me friends, El Amo will be watching out if me suspicions are correct, and I'm not wanting to be givin' him our location."

"I had thought of that, sir," said Rends impressively. "Yes, sir. Now this here book is the 'North Pacific Pilot,' issued in London in 1870. With your permission—"

Yore broke in with a cackling laugh.

"A chart forty-five years old? Divil take it, Rends, our present charts know little enough of the Gulf waters! Drop your 'North Pacific Pilot' overboard, man. This is no farmers' almanac voyage, even if you are an authority on fertilizer."

The big seaman flushed. As Owen knew already, Kezia Rends had dreamed for many a year of leaving the sea and starting a fertilizer company; indeed, he would discuss his dream with any one who would listen.

"I am not jesting, Mr. Yore," he stated with some asperity, glaring at Yore from under his shaggy brows. "I'm the skipper of this craft—"

"Oh, heavens, man—no offense!" cried Yore resignedly. "Go ahead."

"With your permission, then, I'll read you a bit from this work o' mine."

Rends adjusted a pair of spectacles and thumbed over the tattered pages of his book; he was a slow man and cautious, but one who was seldom guilty of making mistakes.

"Carmen Island," he said as he thumbed, "lies off Loreto, as you'll see by those charts. Now, listen to this."

Owen leaned over the Irishman's shoulder, watching the chart before them as the skipper read off a passage from his book.

"'A little bay, Port Escondido, situated on the shore almost due west from the south end of Carmen, is said to have a depth of five fathoms and to be capable of accommodating vessels in perfect security.'"

Rends looked up.

"Now, Mr. Yore, that there bay is eleven miles south of Loreto. Mebbe you'll see it already on the chart."

Yore was already searching the hydrographic chart on the table, and as Owen followed the long finger up the east coast of the peninsula, he heard the Irishman grunt disgustedly. There was no Port Escondido shown. Captain Rends beamed on them with satisfied triumph when informed of this fact.

"O' course there's none. It ain't on maps, either, but it's here in this 'North Pacific Pilot,' you'll observe. Now, Mr. Yore, mebbe you'll give us the meaning of Escondido, since you know the Spanish tongue."

"It means 'hidden,' cap'n," returned Yore humbly, with a wink at Owen.

"Right-o! Well, sir, I can take you to Loreto all shipshape, then run down to Escondido and lie up out o' sight. We'll

be off Cape San Lucas and be turning up into the Gulf in a little better than two days, for a blow is coming up to-night."

Yore at once gave his assent to this plan, which was in reality an excellent one for the purpose of keeping the schooner out of sight of El Amo. This concluded, Rends leaned back and listened while Owen and Yore discussed the plan of campaign ashore.

This was simple enough. Yore had wired ahead to an agent at La Paz, who would meet them at Loreto with horses and pack-mules. Then, while Owen went on south with two men to San Xavier, Yore would go to Comondu and perhaps to Purisima mission, just beyond.

"But you may need all the men at Comondu," objected Owen, "for that's a well-settled valley, and the people may object to the old church being looted."

"Not they," chuckled the Irishman. "Prosperous people, and cholos at that, won't object, Patrick, me lad. It's at the small places like Mulege or Gertrudis or San Xavier, where there are Indians left, that we'll be findin' trouble."

Having finished with "the triangle," as he called it, Yore proposed to rejoin the ship and coast on to Mulege bay. After going over the mission there, they would coast on, loot San Ignacio, Santa Gertrudis, and Dolores, then return to the more southerly missions toward La Paz and the cape.

On all these trips an armed escort would be highly necessary. The larger settlements might be safe, but of these there were few; and the caminos were certain to be beset with thieves and assassins.

"The Gulf itself is full of thieves," said Yore. "The pearl-beds have been robbed, and there has been rank piracy done more than once lately."

"There is nothing new, then," observed Rends. "Cavendish burned Manila galleons in the Gulf, Dutch pirates swept it bare—"

"And now comes Captain Rends and Denis Yore," laughed Owen, "bent on loot and burnings and piracies! Well, if we have a storm to-night I know one filibuster who will be mighty seasick unless he's lucky."

And to his great unhappiness, Owen was not lucky. By midnight he was desperately ill, while the Molly was driving along before a stiff gale and rolling like a mad thing.

This *mal de mer* was a new thing to Owen, and he existed through three days of misery, utter and absolute. He was the only man on board to be so affected, and strangely enough, it was Mallock who nursed him. Yet not strangely, either; Owen found the rough Texan to possess a very tender heart, and a liking sprang up between the two men which was destined to bear good fruit later.

On the third day Owen came on deck after his first meal, to find the schooner bearing around Cape Pulmo and heading north into the historic Gulf of California, the old "Sea of Cortez." And by this time he had learned enough to know that they were indeed heading into historic if not famous waters.

Drake had passed not far from here; Cavendish had come after him, raiding the Gulf; Dutch pirates and French, and, in later days, freebooters from the Argentine who had plundered sacred Loreto and left her desolate. An American, Bean, had looted Acapulco to the south and had carried his depredations thither; in the days of the gold rush, party after party of forlorn Argonauts had streamed up the Gulf in the endeavor to reach upper California overland from La Paz, though few of them had succeeded. And here Cortez had sailed and settled—Cortez, the greatest robber of them all; here William Walker had fought half over the peninsula; here American regulars had battled in the Mexican War, and here, finally, revolutionist and cientifico had swept all things into chaos.

"Well, Patrick, me lad, have ye anything to be tellin' me?"

Owen turned, surprised, to see Yore surveying him with head cocked on one side, birdlike. He remembered that the other had visited him on the previous day and had questioned him about something, but he had been too miserably ill to pay attention.

"Anything to tell you? What do you mean?"

The Irishman's eyes twinkled.

"Faith, and has a bit of sickness driven all thought of blue eyes from your head?"

Like a flash, Owen remembered. The week was up, and Yore had not forgotten it; he was now free to tell of the girl who had visited him on that last morning in Los Angeles! Oddly enough, however, Owen now felt rather reluctant to speak of it, for the girl had become a very sweet memory to him, enemy though she might be.

"I don't know that it's important," he rejoined, "but you had better know."

So, leaning against the rail and drinking in the hot sunshine of the Gulf, he told of his visitor and of the proffered bribe. Yore listened without comment, frowning slightly.

"I can't make it out, Patrick," he commented. "Unless the girl is connected with El Amo—wait, some of the lads might know."

Turning, he hailed Mallock and Hayne, who were sluicing the deck near by. They saluted, as they always did to Yore, and he had Owen describe the girl to them again. Neither of them knew of any such person.

"It ain't likely—*spat*—to be his daughter," returned Hayne, spitting far over the rail as he spoke. "She run off with an American twenty year ago, we heard."

"She may not be connected with El Amo," suggested Owen. "Surely, Yore, you have other enemies?"

The two men grinned and Yore made a wry face.

"I reckon he has," drawled Mallock. "But you got us plumb mixed up, Owen."

Yore took the lawyer's arm and walked him up the deck to the companionway. Then he halted and turned.

"Patrick, me lad, I never harmed a woman in my time, so don't worry. I don't know your blue-eyed lady, but if she's in the toils of El Amo—God be good to her!"

And with this comforting thought, he vanished, saying nothing about the thousand-dollar bribe. Owen was not thinking of this, however.

Was that girl a tool of El Amo? Who was this mysterious old man whom Yore seemed to fear and hate so virulently? Beyond question, a man of force and character, it seemed; old, yet able to make himself feared by younger men who themselves were out of the ordinary.

This El Amo must be a wonderful person, and Owen rather hoped to meet him. He saw no great reason to fear an aged Mexican feudal lord who happened to be fond of torturing natives; Patrick Owen had never seen the man who could inspire fear in him, and he despised Mexicans.

Yet the girl—the girl! Here his thought paused in vain perplexity, and he half sighed that he had not been able to learn something of her, to remain in Los Angeles and search her out. For he had read in her eyes that she might hate him, but did not despise him; that she had found him something else than she had expected; and her parting words—"I am sorry!"—recurred to him with new meaning.

That same evening he was stretched out beneath the stern-boat, half asleep and dreamily watching the silver-brilliant stars, when Hayne, the big tobacco-chewing cavalryman, approached the wheel to relieve young Watson. Their voices roused him to sudden wakefulness.

"Kid," exclaimed Hayne, for so the dissipated young Southerner was known, "Kid, old Harris says—*spat*—that his rheumatiz is hurtin'. We ain't never known that sign to fail, have we?"

"Not yet," returned Watson, his soft, musical voice sweet on the night. "I allow you-all ain't forgot how his rheumatiz come on jest before Billy was killed."

"And it was that cussed El Amo who killed Billy," said Hayne reflectively. "Plugged him when he was beggin' for mercy, too."

"Served Billy dead right, suh," came Watson's voice, after a moment. "You'll neveh heah *me* beg for no mercy. You don't guess we're a goin' to find the old man waitin' for us, Hayne?"

"Well—*spat*—I wouldn't be surprised, Kid. The boss is goin' to serve out guns to-morrow, but orders is to keep 'em hid. You want to steer clear o' them greaser women when we make port, Kid."

"Don't you-all preach to me," and Watson moved off. "Long as you 'tend to spit-

tin' clear of the deck you done got yo' hands full. So-long."

"So-long," rejoined Hayne mechanically, and silence fell save for the creak of tiller-chains and the bellying slap of the sails overhead.

Owen looked up at the stars. So Yore meant to keep his men armed, eh? That might have been expected, of course, yet it took Owen by surprise. And to judge by this conversation, the former meetings of Yore and El Amo had resulted grimly.

That little touch about the rheumatism struck home to him with peculiar force. While no whit superstitious himself, he had seen too much of hard-worked men who ran daily risks from falling redwoods or donkey-hauls not to realize that old Harris had expressed a very vivid premonition by means of bodily aches, to avoid ridicule.

Owen had seen this same thing often before. Old O'Brien, who had run the donkey up in the Shoshone camp, had twice complained of corns; and each morning thereafter he had been injured by a section of giant timber crashing through the brush at the end of the haul-line.

All this was the expression of a sixth sense, voiced by rude men who depended largely on that unknown sense for safety and warning. Owen knew this, and he began to think that if El Amo were awaiting them, trouble might be brooding. And it would have been easy for a motor-driven boat to have reached La Paz or Loreto far ahead of the wallowing Molly.

"Well," he concluded, "some day I'm going on a hunt of my own, for a certain party with blue eyes and a gray gown. And when I find her, something is going to happen—or else Patrick Owen isn't the man he thinks he is!"

With this egotistical commentary, he turned in and slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER V.

SURPRISE.

LORETO!

Owen and Yore were standing in the ancient church—the mother of all the California missions. They walked up the long, narrow, vaulted nave to the shattered stone altar, and Yore pointed silently to the onyx fonts, the three large paintings, the five empty frames.

All was eloquent of disuse, abandonment, neglect. A priest came once a year, and women prayed in the chapels, and an Indian struck the bells on the roof, but this was all. Behind the shrines the tattered old tapestries waved forlornly, and the walls were rain-stained.

"And to think that this place once blazed with ropes of pearls!" said Yore. "Ah, Patrick, me lad, wait till we see the other places; this has been pillaged until only shreds of the old beauty are left— *Look out!*"

Owen, who had been staring up at the three dim old paintings, felt himself flung violently aside. Something whistled through the air and clattered on the stone wall; then he saw Yore leap forward at a shadowy figure which had arisen from behind one of the broken onyx fonts.

The Irishman had acted like a flash, but he came to as sudden a halt. Before Owen had more than recovered his balance, he heard an angry flood of Spanish; the shadowy figure evolved into an old Indian woman, furiously addressing Yore. The latter was bowing and endeavoring to make reply, but with her voice rising to a shrill scream of rage, the old woman rushed by.

"What on earth's the matter?" cried Owen, amazed and wondering.

Before answering him, Yore stepped to the wall and picked something from the stone cubes that floored the church. He examined it, then held it out; it proved to be a short, heavy knife, excellent for throwing.

"The old lady was trying her hand at killing me," he said with a chuckle. "She said I had come to rob the mission church—faith, me lad, she did be cursing me!"

Owen stared at his companion, who was rubbing his chin lugubriously.

"Are you in earnest, Yore? Was that knife flung at you?"

"It was, me lad. And more by token, some one has been spreadin' bad reports of me, I'm thinking. If I could have questioned the old lady, now—"

"But—good Heavens, man, why didn't you hang on to her?" broke out Owen quickly. "The old hag might have murdered you! It's not too late to get the local police after her—"

"Tut, tut, me lad! She's not to blame. Sure I could have caught hold of her, only for the fact that she was a woman. God bless her honest heart! She's not to blame if some one has lied to her. And I'm thinking that me friend El Amo has been here. Come, let's get outside."

In helpless bewilderment, Owen followed to the open air. His angry wonder, however, was strongly tinged with admiration for Denis Ajax Yore; the incident had given him a deep insight into the other's nature, for Yore might easily have cornered the old virago had he wished.

But no—that was not the man's way. Remembering how quick had been that leap, remembering what sinewy strength lay in the Irishman's lithe figure, Owen realized that had the would-be assassin been a man, he would have fared badly.

Yore had only bowed, however—for he had found himself facing a woman. Then it was that Owen comprehended the nature of this man; the tender, chivalrous heart of him who could rule such men as Mallock and Hayne and Watson with iron fingers. Yore was at bottom the old volatile type of Irishman who would laughingly fling away his life for a chivalrous thought or for a woman's whim, who would let an Indian hag attempt to knife him and lay no hand upon her—nay, would even excuse the deed!

Outside the ancient double doors, Owen found it hard to credit that murder had so nearly been done a moment before, yet there was the knife for evidence. Yore glanced at him quizzically.

"Well, Patrick, me lad, there is the first taste of El Amo for ye!"

"You think he instigated it?" frowned Owen.

"Belike. But come along and we'll meet with that agent of mine, who should be at the steamship office. He'll have horses and a guide all ready, I'm thinking."

Still finding it hard to realize, Owen strode along at Yore's side. They crossed the plaza, with its ancient buildings of curious architecture, and came to the steamship office of an American line which touched at Loreto and La Paz—or which had done so until the revolutions had swept all things aside.

And as they went, Owen had a glimpse of young Watson reeling into a mescal-shop farther on, with Chubb and Franklin following him and singing drunkenly. The whole situation disgusted him suddenly. He was not used to people who threw knives from behind church-fonts, to underhand tricks and assassinations; these were not the fighting ethics he had known in the woods of the northwest coast, and they were repellent to him.

At the office they found two men—the Mexican company agent and a tall, red-faced American who gripped Yore's hand with a yell of delight.

"Come away," he said, upon being introduced to Owen, who found that he was named Benson. "Come away, for this steamship agent is very busy and we must not disturb him further."

The Mexican smilingly protested that his office was at their disposal, but Benson led the way back to the street and crossed abruptly to the plaza. Then he halted and gripped Yore's hand again.

"You saved me from murdering that greaser, Yore," he exclaimed solemnly. "The pestering skunk has been prying into our business all day. Watch out for him."

"Got the horses and guides?" snapped Yore. "It's afternoon now, and I want to get off to-night after dark."

"Whew!" Benson stared at him and mopped his red face with a dirty handkerchief. "Yes, all's ready for you. Sixteen horses, two guides who know the country. Had to get greasers, though."

"All right." Yore turned to Owen. "Patrick, me lad, go and round up those three boys of mine—in that mescal joint at the other side the plaza. Take 'em down to the boat, and look out for trouble. I'll be down presently."

Owen nodded and turned. Yore and Benson went walking away toward the low-thatched Mexican huts which fringed the

plaza buildings, and they vanished down a side-street beyond the old mission church.

All these things had chanced since the Molly had cast anchor before the little town, an hour previously. Yore's first thought had been to visit the old church, for he was fired with all the eagerness of a boy to see the worst plundered of these missions for whose richer inland ruins he was bound. So, leaving Mallock to guard their boat, he had given the other three oarsmen shore-leave and had come with Owen to see the ruins. And then had come the first reminder of El Amo.

The American surveyed the little town as he walked toward the groggery in which his three men had vanished. Loreto attracted him, for it was sleepy and quiet and very peaceful—crowded into an arroyo with the Sierra Giganta reaching up into the blue sky on the one hand and the vermilion Sea of Cortez on the other, with Carmen Island and its gigantic salt-deposits on the horizon, and the brown sails of pearlers and fish-boats in the offing.

There were mules in the streets—mules, with the crupper and shoulder-straps in use on the steep caminos of Lower California; mules with great packs of fresh produce from the fertile arroyos of Comondu and San Ignacio, or with prospectors' tools and ore-sacks; horses, fewer in numbers and small, scrawny in appearance.

The swarthy Mexicans, half-breeds, and Indians seemed all to be armed, and seldom did Owen catch a glimpse of any white face. There were Chinamen from the Carmen salt-works, Indian pearlers, rancheros and vaqueros from the scattered interior ranches, and a few French from the Triunfo or Santa Rosalia mining towns.

Yet nowhere did Owen glimpse an American face. Indeed, he heard what he would have heard in no other part of the peninsula, save La Paz—the mutter of "gringo" as he passed by. Once, too, a squat muleteer paused directly in his path, hand on knife; but under the startlingly level gaze of the brown eyes and the shadow of the wide shoulders the man shrank aside with a mumbled apology. Owen smiled slightly, and passed on.

He found Watson, Franklin the cockney, and Chubb, the profane Bowery boy, engaged in an uproarious discussion of rotgut whisky, while the French bartender and the lounging half-breeds muttered and fingered knives. The three greeted him with a cheerful request to liquor up, but Owen was in no mood for pleasantry.

"Get out of here or I'll put you out," he said, and he said it quietly. "Yore was nearly murdered ten minutes ago, you drunken swine."

The words lashed them like a whip. Saying nothing, Chubb flung a coin across the bar and led the way out. Owen followed them and marshaled them down to the boat, where he found Mallock delightedly trying to encourage a cursing fisherman to fight. These henchmen of Yore's were out for a holiday, and only the news he gave them seemed to sober them into quietude. Mallock was the only one to pass comment.

"I seen the boss let a dope-crazy cholo woman shoot three times at him, once. Then he done shot the gun out of her hand and apologized 'cause he allowed it might have jarred her up a bit. Yes, suh. A no-account cholo woman, drunk with marihuana!"

Owen looked at him sharply, not quite crediting Yore's shooting ability.

"Eh? Then Yore must be a pretty fine shot."

"You ain't neveh seen him shoot, I reckon? Then you got a treat comin', suh. You cert'nly has!"

Yore and Benson rejoined them in twenty minutes, and they rowed out to the schooner. Here, with Rends and the other three men of Yore's band, they went into executive session on the quarter-deck, for the Irishman freely admitted his men to council.

Benson was returning to La Paz that night by motor-boat. It was decided that Mallock, Hayne, and Franklin should accompany Owen to San Xavier, the other three men going to Comondu with Yore and then coming down to San Xavier likewise. This division of forces would effect a great saving in time.

Meantime, Rends would lay up the schooner at Escondido, the hidden port, and wait there for a week. If Yore and

Owen returned to Loreto, it would be easy to get a fishing-boat and run down to Escondido, eleven miles south; if they had not returned by the end of a week, Rends was to come to Loreto and begin inquiries.

With this much settled, preparations for the actual march were begun. Packing-cases were broken out, trading goods, garish altar-pictures and vestments were made into compact horse-packs, and provisions for three days were rationed out. Then Owen discovered that the Irishman possessed the great faculty of reserve, both in words and resources.

"Patrick, me lad, come here a minute," and Yore beckoned him aside from the busy group, and fingered a small sheaf of papers. "Here's a circular letter addressed to any priest ye may happen to meet, though it's not likely. Here's another which will gain ye hospitality from any decent Mexicans, for there'll be no hotels in this country, d'ye mind."

"You must have moved pretty lively," grunted Owen in surprise. "Where'd you get those letters, Yore? Up-town?"

"No, in Mexico City a few months ago," grinned the other, his black eyes twinkling delight. "I'm better prepared than ye thought for, eh? Patrick, there's only one thing in which Denis Ajax Yore showed himself at fault."

"And what is that?" queried Owen, as the other paused expectantly.

"That, me lad, is El Amo. I'm not so sure I ought to let ye be trapesing around by yourself, now."

Yore glanced up, an expression of shrewd uneasiness flitting across his birdlike features. And gazing into the keen black eyes, Owen knew suddenly that here was a man who cared for him, who liked him well enough to be anxious over him. This feeling that he read in Yore's eyes touched him strangely.

For that bare instant the Irishman flung off the mask and exposed the tender heart of him beneath to Owen's eyes. It was a thing he did very seldom. Later, when Owen had seen what awful depths of ferocity and pitiless fury the man could display, he better realized that Yore was one of those who possess great capacity both for loving and hating. Being of this sort himself, he could understand it fully.

"Don't be foolish," he said soberly, frowning. "I'm not a baby, Yore."

"True for ye," grimaced the other. "Ye can depend on Mallock, me lad, but look cautious after the guide. And if ye can transact the business before I come, do so. 'Tis a saving of time we're after, d'ye mind."

Owen nodded, and they rejoined the group. Each man, including the leaders, was given a Winchester and cartridge-belt; their packs for the led horses weighed a good hundred pounds. Owen was given an old-style, heavy revolver, which he accepted with some distaste; he knew little of the weapon, and was prone to depend upon it more as a menace than as an aid in fighting. With a rifle, however, he was at home.

Darkness fell rapidly. After a meal eaten on the schooner's deck, with the shore-lights, riding-lights of small craft, and starlight all bedewing the darkened waters with sparkling diamond-points, the two boats were lowered away and they rowed ashore. As they disembarked, Rends shook hands with each man in turn, for he was going no farther.

"Good-by, Owen," said the big seaman, gripping hard the lawyer's hand. "I hope to see you safe again in a week or less. But mind this, sir, that there threefold cord we spoke of back at Pedro is still holding, sir. If aught goes wrong, you can trust to it that Kezia Rends won't be backward in doin' his share. Good luck!"

"So-long," returned Owen simply.

He felt that all this business of farewells, all these revolvers and rifles, all of it was mock heroic. It seemed to him that he had taken far more risks in the northern woods, hunting bears on hands and knees under the man-high gully brush, or chancing panthers with a cruising gang, than on this little jaunt into the desert and mountains.

There was danger, of course—danger from tarantula and deadly snake, danger of getting lost and perishing of thirst, danger from precipice and crag. But he was not impressed by any great danger from man. Four well-armed men would warn

off any wandering thieves, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

On leaving the boats and striking up through the town, the party separated as by mutual understanding. Benson and Yore, with Chubb, Watson, and old Harris grouped ahead; Owen, Mallock, Franklin, and Hayne followed after. Benson was leaving for La Paz again that night, and had a coasting boat engaged to take him down: beyond acting as agent for Yore, he had no share in the enterprise.

As they passed up through the streets, Owen fell a little behind his three men; Franklin was telling a cockney story more broad than witty, and it jarred on the American.

The spell of the starlit night hung heavily on the old town, which by this time was asleep except in the groggeries. The soft radiance transformed the seventeenth-century houses, the old adobes with their tule roofs, the cut-stone buildings erected by zealous friars when all the Americas were but a looting-ground for the Old World.

The battered façades were softened into their older beauty, and a scent of orange and pomegranate and olive hung heavily over the arroyo in which was built Loreto. Owen was gripped by the romance of the place.

He almost fancied that he could see conquistadores in casque and jack strolling these ancient streets: Walker's men fighting their way house by house; Argentine corsairs ruffling it through the plundered *calles*. The deeper shadows held mystery unfathomable, deep secrets of old time garnered into life by the silvern-glinting starlight.

From the hill on his right came the long-drawn, yapping cry of a marauding coyote, intent on his supper of gophers or field-mice and lonesome for its kind. Presently another of the sharp-nosed pests answered from the opposite hill, and for a few minutes the night was full of wailing. Then somewhere in the darkness a dog barked savagely, and the serenade ceased.

Owen came to an abrupt halt. From the shadows just ahead, between himself and his men, a lighter shadow had detached itself, following them in seeming ignorance of his presence.

Instantly his dreams were shattered into alertness.

A spy?

He leaped into life at the thought, and slipped into deeper shadows under the house-walls. The figure ahead halted, and he, too, waited; with stamping of feet and mutter of voices, the party of men drew on and turned a corner.

Instantly the spying figure darted forward, Owen after it like a great cat, silent but closing in on his prey. Fifteen feet divided them, and his long strides closed up the distance rapidly.

Like a dim blur in the semidarkness, the figure came to the corner which Yore and his party had turned. There it halted, peering cautiously after them. Owen stole forward, determining to bring in the spy as a prisoner and gain some definite information; ten feet, five feet—one long stride forward and he gripped his long arms about the dim figure.

He expected an oath, a scream, the swift flash of a knife, and so he gripped the tighter. But none of these things came. Instead, the figure twisted about in silent, savage ferocity, wrenched an arm free, and struck with clenched fist.

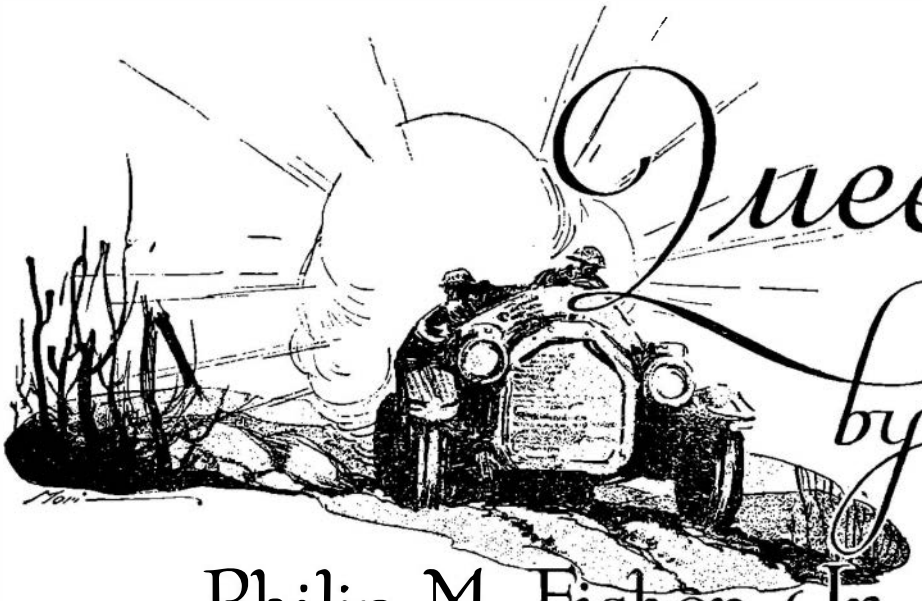
Owen laughed, for the fist went home on his cheek and stung. Then he laughed again, but this time in rare anger, for teeth had bitten into his wrist. Flinging out his strength, he gripped the two arms of the spy, brought them down and clenched them by the wrists in one hand, laughed again, and put his free hand to the throat of the dim figure in a terrible grasp.

Then, as they fought out into the starlight of the open street and the spy's sombrero fell away, Owen started and loosened his grip. Amazed, incredulous, he stared down into blue eyes agleam with uncontrollable rage.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed slowly. "You!"

It was the girl who had attempted to bribe him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.



Queer

by

Philip M. Fisher, Jr.

WITH a gesture that at once awakened my curiosity, Galworth drew me aside.

"You'll find him a bit queer," he whispered through my knitted ear-flaps.

"Queer?" I whispered back.

My old friend nodded gravely again.

"Um-hum. Queer. Religious an' all that sort of thing, you know."

He led me a bit farther and paused in the lee of a snow-capped mountain of empty seventy-fives.

"It gets some of 'em that way, you know. The racket, an' all that. It's pretty hellish times; 'specially when Fritz makes up his mind to move. A man can't think of much then 'cept to ram chewing gum into his ears an' keep an eye to the trench 'scope, and see his gas mask's handy, and smoke cigarettes if he's lucky 'nough to have folks."

I nodded over the pile of shells behind us.

"You said he's queer! You mean it makes them actually crazy?"

At that moment a low distant whine whirred in my ears. A moment more and it rose to a piercing scream, then roared menacingly directly overhead. Involuntarily I dodged. Lieutenant Galworth nodded heavily.

"See?" he said. "One of Fritz's reminders. A thirty-seven, likely. They come over every twenty minutes just to show us he's awake over there an' bent on making us take an active interest in life. You dodged—I didn't. Used to it, that's all. You'll be soon enough, cap."

A moment I reflected. Far away, above the ever present undertone of ceaseless cannonade that droned distantly like the humming of a vast swamp, there came a smothered punctuation of sound. "Pumph!" it rolled heavily to me, and at once I knew. I'd heard the same sound duck-hunting in the States—the roar of a shotgun half-blanketed by the silent mists of a morning in the tule. I cocked an eye at Bobby.

"That's it." He nodded gravely. "Our little friend who just passed overhead has done his work. Hope Fritzie's range was underdone."

He paused, then idly kicked back a seventy-five empty that had clattered down the pile when the vibrations of that distant bursting shell had reached us.

"Used to it, see?" he went on jerkily, half-coherently. "Same thing all the time. You dodge at first; finally you whistle for 'em. Then suddenly one drops near you, and when you wake up half your friends are gone—just disappeared. Then for a while the same thing over again—shells yellin' overhead, an' you hold your watch an' whistle at 'em, and cuss 'em because

they don't drop in for tea, you know. Then another of 'em does drop in; an' they send you more men to fill up. When that happens often enough, you begin to feel you're lucky, maybe. Kind of a special friend of Fate, see?"

I nodded. Lieutenant Galworth spat at the shell and kicked it again.

"Then maybe you take to thinkin' too much. This chap who's going to drive you, he does. Solemn as the mouth of a howitzer about it, too, but like our good friend, Bill Kaiser, thinks he's the special friend of God. He doesn't admit it; no, but one doesn't have to talk out here in order to tell things. Been worse since the shell that dropped in on his lieutenant gave him his jump from first sergeant."

"But," I cried, rather anxiously I fear, "can he drive, then?"

"Can he drive? Humph—used to race in the States. Indianapolis speedway, Florida beaches, an' all that. Oh, yes, he can drive. You're a lucky man, Cap'n Bill."

"But if he's queer—"

"Shucks, that don't muss his nerve a bit. You'll find that out soon enough, too, or I'll drop off my cigarettes. He an' his partner used to drive together the way you're headin'—but he's drivin' alone since a Teutonic visitation we had last Thursday. That made him queerer yet, and he's headin' in for the quiet places more'n ever. An' dreams. But he'll drive you there all night."

He seized my arm again and dragged me around the heaped-up shells. As we cleared it we almost bumped into the man of whom we had been speaking. In the distance, the low-hung Hardex was humming with eager power, and I could not help but admire again the armored strength of the wheels and hood, and in contrast, the gentle manner in which the camouflage of our artists had blended it all into the snowy landscape. My spirits, low enough already, I confess, rose a bit at the sight of it—for in this murky gray and white land of desolation, surely no boche artilleryman could spot our rapid flight in such a car. If this driver—A sudden pressure on my arm brought me to my senses.

"Dreamin' already yourself, man?" grinned my old college mate. "You stand staring like a bloomin' beggar of a Somali seein' his first gas-mask. Let me introduce you, fellows! Lieutenant Argill — Cap'n Reeves."

Lieutenant Argill acknowledged my salute gravely; but his handshake was a revelation. At once, again, at sight of the man, and with the tingle of his pressure still in my hand, I felt my confidence rise. This quiet strength bespoke reserve, and his manner held that coolness of nerve so necessary to successfully pilot a military despatch car to the place where we were bound. Queer? Humph, I thought, it wouldn't do a great deal of harm if the whole army were thus queer. I congratulated myself on the driver chance had allotted me. Then came a swift second thought—was it chance after all? Strange how this idea came then, but it goes to show the effect of Galworth's words. Chance—humph! And this man was queer!

"You fellows'll get along all right," Galworth ran on, stepping between us, a hand on either shoulder. A moment he expatiated on my virtues, while I blushed. Then he turned to me and burst out: "And you're in luck, too, man, to go with Lieutenant Argill." I found myself grinning as my driver-to-be slowly smiled.

"Lieutenant Galworth is very good," he said. Then the smile dissolved. "To-night, I think, we'll need something more than luck to fetch us through. At least—you will."

Galworth flashed a look at me. I nodded with my eyes that I understood. The lieutenant slapped our backs and chattered an appropriate tale at which Argill's slow smile dawned again. Then he consulted his wrist.

"Good night!" he cried. "It's five sharp. Better use the whip on the old boat, Argill, an' open her wide an' plenty. Tempus fidgits."

We climbed in.

Everything all right?" asked Argill of me quietly, as we pulled on the handy mittens and drew our sweaters up to our eyes.

I nodded. Argill reached out and seized Galworth's hand a moment and looked him steadily in the eyes. Then he snatched it

away, drew on his mitten and shot his gear home.

"Be good," cried Galworth. "Good luck!" He clapped Argill on the back. "An' remember, Cap'n Reeves has got to get there!" he added.

Argill nodded gravely. "He will," he said, then threw in his gears. We twisted our way out of the wreckage, showed our pass at the outskirts of the town and shot away down the newly patched-up highway.

Straightway I fell to admiring the calm ease of the big man by my side, and I must confess that my admiration was not unmixed with envy. His quick turns as we broke from the last ruins of the piled brick and timber, quick without the usual accompanying jerkiness, quick without seeming quick, had been performed with a smooth decision that showed me instantly that Galworth had been right. I was lucky! I did have a driver to drive me this night. Confidence once more assumed supremacy, and I felt growing a strange sympathy for the man at my side. This sympathy may or may not have been the result of his own personal magnetism, which, during the next hours, I discovered to be great. It may or may not have been the product of my own present comfort. It may or may not have been the impression of my old college chum's statement about the man's trustworthiness. I do not know. All that I can say is that my confidence in him had already in this short time grown so overwhelmingly that even when I recalled Galworth's other words about the man's queerness, no thought of a possible negative side to that queerness came to mind.

Utterly I relaxed. I found myself paying as little attention to the car I was in, or the man who drove it, as a confirmed traveler pays to the motion of his train, or to the personality of the engineer in his cab. The country about me was naturally of the greatest interest to me, new as I was to this front. A vast plain it was, and the furrowed scars and pits of former ravages of the war-sickness were yet uneffaced by the thin sheet of snow the so far kindly winter had laid gently upon it. The highway down which we boomed stretched, I dare say, the only straightway bit of that part of the face of earth that was not as disrupted from its virgin smoothness as a complexion ruined by smallpox. But as I looked upon it and was soothed to even deeper comfort by its seemingly interminable length, another roar, similar to that of the headquarter's yard, crashed overhead, and a moment later the terrific impact of the heavily detonating shell struck us with the force of a physical blow.

I turned to Lieutenant Argill. I found he had taken his eyes from the road and was regarding me with a placid intentness that was most disconcerting. And yet it seemed neither rude, nor even in the least out of place, that he should do this. Frankly I grinned, and his slow smile broke out again.

"Fritz again," he remarked. "He seems—"

A violent bump, as the front wheels flew heavenward, followed by a terrific twist of the car as Argill jerked at the wheel, sent my heart to my throat and the shivers down my spine. Then all went smooth again—and I dared look back. Then, indeed, I saw that my companion was a driver. His slow voice drifted to me as I stared back at the vast mound in the center of the road now fast disappearing in the gathering dusk behind us.

"Shell hole," the murmur came. "Couldn't see it in the distance; it blended in so with the general color of the road itself. Must have been a huge shell to dig that crater and raise the mountain about it. Fifty-seven likely—well placed."

I turned back to him and then, I confess, my own eyes glued themselves to the highway ahead.

"Close shave," I remarked as casually as a yet loosely beating heart would allow.

No answer. I kept my eyes upon the road, and when I sneaked a glance at my companion I saw that he also was intent upon his work. The road was growing even better than before though, and I felt the lulling murmur of the motor and the swish of the tires upon the pavement gently soothing my alarm again. And soon I found myself regarding the dimming landscape once more and examining, as we fled by, the queer details of it, without concern for

anything but the tortured beauty of its ruggedness and a feeling of sadness that such a wonderful land should be brought to so sad a state by the foolish, childish, quarreling of ephemeral man. Wilfully childish, I thought for the moment, when suddenly back again came those words I'd heard in confidence behind the heap of empty cartridges.

"Queer," had said Lieutenant Galworth. "Religious an' all that."

"Religious!" That was what he had said men here came to be. Then if they were really inspiredly religious, must I not change my last idea? Were they being wilfully childish in pursuing this vast slaughter? Wilfully so—or was something else behind it all? And these men whom war made queer, whom horror turned to religion, did they not perhaps view things with a really understanding eye? Did not Argill here, for instance, see and comprehend the truth of this other thing, whatever that other thing might be?

Specincally, was it superstition grown from out a series of fortunate escapes—or was it a true turning to another thing? A higher power say, a power which in days of ease men will forsake, and yet in times of stress rejoin? Another glance at Argill's face, set as it was upon the dimming road, gave the lie to superstition. His was not the face of a man who would wonder about his luck, and wear a rabbit's foot next his skin. On his face was stamped a belief, a positive faith, a knowledge.

He evidently felt my stare, and his eyes for an instant left the road as he waved a hand to the graying waste at our left. Then, as if reading my thoughts, he asked simply, "Is all this—this horror we are passing through, is it without purpose or reason?"

I saw an opportunity.

"We've got to win," I reminded him vaguely, and hoped for a better answer.

He nodded.

"Of course, of course." Then, after a moment's silence: "But I don't mean a man's reason. I mean—isn't there something behind it all, something that pushed us into this war for a purpose, something that controls the destinies of these nations, even as they struggle to-day, something that is not man, not human; something that —well," he shrugged his shoulders—"something else?"

"You mean," I answered, remembering another thing Lieutenant Galworth had said, "you mean something that might allow hundreds to die about a man and yet allow him always to go unharmed. Something, we will say, that sent that shell to kill your partner some days ago, and yet miraculously spared you?"

His glance flickered to me an instant again. Then he abruptly nodded.

"Call it anything you like," he muttered. "I do believe there is. For instance," he went on, "take this stretch of road ahead. I've crossed it fifty times and never a scratch; I've seen a thousand men—ugh." A moment he paused as if the thoughts that came allowed of no expression. Then he demanded abruptly: "What time is it?"

I brought my wrist up close to my eyes.

"Six ten," I answered.

"Six ten," he repeated. "Well, maybe you'll see what I mean about this road, and about this something else that has always pulled me through—this something that seems to have a purpose. About six fifteen, I think, if they're on time." He gave a queer grunt, half contempt, half chuckle. "As if they weren't *always* on time."

"Who are on time?" I asked, half bewildered, yet with a vague idea.

"If the light were better," explained Argill, "and this last fall of snow off the road, I might show you. But, anyway, you can feel it."

"You mean that queer vibration, like a flat tire?"

Argill nodded. I went on.

"I was going to say something, but didn't like—" He interrupted.

"That's it, yes. The road—but there, there! Hear that?"

A distant sound, clearly not the crash of a single shell, but a strange pounding composite of a multitude of less violent explosions, rose gradually to a violent roar somewhere in the distance to our left. Then suddenly ceased and was superseded by a tremblingly waiting silence.

"Your watch!" snapped Argill.

"Six fifteen," I promptly answered.

"I said they'd be on time. That's the first try. Next time it will be nearer. Maybe we can make it, though."

"Make it?" I questioned hintingly.

"Get over this stretch of road before they reach us," came the little illuminating answer. "You heard Lieutenant Galworth wish us good luck?"

"Of course. Just form, courtesy, wasn't it? The usual thing. We say it home."

"At home we don't mean it that way, though." My companion's voice was grave. "Your friend really meant 'good luck.'" Argill nodded ahead again, then waved his hand to the left whence had come the screaming shells before and this rising roar just now. "This stretch is bad, bad. I've always passed through, never a scratch. Others have had a different experience. Always Lieutenant Galworth says 'good luck' when I'm bound this way. I don't need it—I get through some way without it. Others may need it—the good luck! That vibration you feel, like the flat tire bumping, that's part of it."

"It's worse," I interrupted.

"It will be even more so a bit farther ahead," he said. "If we can get on before they reach us, though, you will be all right."

A second roar broke upon us at this juncture, a pounding, bellowing roar much closer than the first. I stared across the wasted land. Argill jerked out:

"Second try. Fritz is a wise one. Always chooses this time of night. But you needn't worry—we'll make it all right." He added the latter soothingly, as if to calm any rising qualms of fear I entertained. "I'll open her wide as your friend back there advised."

The car leaped forward like a plane when dipping for the earth, and a thrill ran through me delightfully. For this must be real experience, even if a bit confused in meaning.

A third roar suddenly crashed upon us so close at hand that from the corner of my eye I caught the flickering yellow of the bursting charges all along the line. Then for the first time I thought I really understood my companion's haste. Yet before I could speak he cried out of the side of his mouth above the hum of the speeding car.

"It's not myself I'm worrying about, I'm safe. It's you, though—lieutenant was wishing *you* good luck, because you may need it, not I. Something's watching out for me. Hope you'll excuse me a bit now. I'm speeding up, can't talk much. Sorry. Daren't run with lights, you know—give us away—suicidal. But I'll give her the gun anyway." Here he relapsed into the talk of his racing days. "I'll shoot the stuff into the brute, and we'll take our chances against more shell holes in the road. Hang the dark anyway; but at that it's the safest time for us to make the run. And you have to get to Croy to-night."

"By ten sharp," I said.

"Ten," he repeated. "Time now?"

I raised my wrist again. Luckily my watch has a radiolite dial.

"Six thirty," I answered.

"That makes a bit over three hours to do it in. And we will do it," he declared. "We'll get there. I've never failed to get my man through yet, and I won't fail now. You'll get there—sure! This boulevard stops six or eight miles ahead, and from there on the road's no road. It's an atrocity worse than anything Teutonic," he added with grim humor. "But we'll do it. This—this something always puts me through. So we'll get there. It's never failed. Three and a half hours—easy."

In the pause that followed the roar of another discharge burst close upon our left, and I imagined I saw the dry snow fly up in a long spattering line not so many meters away. It may have been more than fancy, however, for Argill's words were relevant.

"They'll get here the next try. It's a kind of barrage, you know. Fritz knows the dark is good cover, so he starts out every evening after six and spreads his shrapnel to remind us he's waiting there. Volleys it at range, so's the shot cover a long continuous line. About the fifth or sixth round of it parallels the road here—the bloody boche has the range perfectly—and the whole road is sprayed with shrapnel. In daytime, with snow off, it looks as if the surface had been harrowed crosswise. I've never been scratched; but I've seen others who tried this road at this time of night. Perfect shower of shrapnel balls—sounds like thunder right overhead, and

then hail on a dugout's tin roof. No one ought to risk it unless they've *got* to get out beyond—as you have to get to Croy on special orders to-night, for instance."

I nodded in silence and spared a moment from the way ahead to glance at the rushing gloom of the fields beside us. Then quickly back to the road again—and wondered at my companion's marvelous eyes. For, under that thin sheeting of snow and in the obscuring darkness of the night, to me the road and the fields to right and left were of the same toneless monotony of level gray, inseparable, indistinguishable one from the other. How Argill could find his way with the motor speeding at what would have been a risky pace even in the clear vision of a cloudless day, I could not understand, unless it were by the feel. And then, of course, too, he had been this way many times before.

"Closer and closer," Argill went on. "The next volley 'll sweep the road. Your friend back there was right in wishing you luck—don't want to frighten you, of course, but you may need all he wished you, and more. What time did you say it was?"

I told him.

"Time for the next try," he answered. "And a bit over three hours left to get you to Croy. Well, I really must quit talking now—bad road begins in a minute. Sorry—business before pleasure, you know," he added with a return of his grim humor. "I can't talk with the road that's coming—never could." He hitched forward over the wheel and his face was quite hidden from me as I cuddled beneath the heavy robe. "Well, I chatter again when we get to Croy. Sure thing. Three hours from now—good luck!"

He pressed my knee, then turned tensely to the road.

A sudden whirring filled the air overwhelmingly. And before I could half think the exact-ranged volley of shrapnel crashed at our very side and the whistling whine of its thousands of scattering bullets was upon us. Distinctly I heard the spattering of several against the armor of the car. And one struck the wind-shield frame ahead. Another tore away the vizor of my firm placed cap. I heard Argill at the wheel grunt as the storm burst upon us, and saw that he half turned his head toward me as if to speak. But swiftly he faced ahead again, and in silence we plunged on.

Thank Heaven, I thought, we've escaped the Teuton's remembrances at last. Then came a series of joint racking jolts, and I remembered that trouble still lay ahead. Had not this man at my side declared the road ahead so bad he dared not say a single word for fear it would take his attention from the wheel? As the bumps grew worse, and the twistings and turnings of the car more and more involved and strenuous, I well believed that Argill had been right. He did need every iota of his energy, his nerve, his attention for this road.

On we rushed, and I wondered that we did not slacken speed. Naked trees flew ghostly by. With twists and turns well-nigh miraculous, we avoided shell-shattered logs scattered in the road, mountains of torn-up concreted highway, Vesuvian craters blackly deep, and, as we careened on their very verges, as weirdly repellent as the pit itself.

On we plunged, and by split seconds and finger-breadths missed the death that a thousand times rushed out of the gloom to meet us. Time and again my hand would reach to grasp Argill's sleeve, to beseech him to slow down, or at least to risk the lights a while. But then I remembered that he had said he could not talk. And, too, as each new danger threatened sweepingly out of the blackness of the night, and without hesitation or mishap was passed safely by, my fears grew less and less. And the smaller they became the greater grew my wonder at the man at the wheel and the more I marveled at his skill.

"You're lucky," had said Lieutenant Galworth. "The man can drive."

The man *could* drive.

I found myself in wondering admiration of his coolness, and his superb nerve. And once it flashed across my mind: might not his very queerness have developed in him the confidence that pulled him through?

An hour passed. The war-racked forest thinned out, and the last lean, naked sentinel ghost of it passed silently at our left. Here a moment we stopped, and I showed

our passes to a half invisible sentry, then boomed on. Into the open we took our way, and twice made détours through torn vineyards to avoid looming obstructions in our path.

Another hour; my watch said nine forty when I finally held my wrist steady enough to read its dimly phosphorescent dial. Another stripped wood, another series of craters, and another section of convulsed concrete roadway. More détours through fields, smoother fields now, for we were reaching well behind the lines where only an occasional fifty-seven, twenty miles from its coughing gun, fell lonely upon the road and ruined its hundred meters of Cæsarian concrete and its couple hectares of food-bearing land.

Twice more we slowed, while I stared into the gloom ahead for cause. And each time rose up a sentry from the blackness by the road, and I gasped in wonder at the vision of my guide. And so we stopped—and each time I showed our passes in the coat-hid flash of the sentry's electric torch.

But these were the only stops we made.

Then at last we swept into a ribbon-like boulevard. Then through the outskirts of an unlit town with streets so twisted, crooked, overjointed, and underpaved that I firmly believe we must have crossed our trail a dozen times. Then finally one soul-racking turn about a high black wall, and before the stone steps of a massive edifice the car slowed down, coughed sullenly as if begrudging halt, then stopped with the squeak of brakes as two armed sentries crossed bayonets across the way.

A moment I was dazed at the strange peace of simply being still. Then, noting that Argill leaned as if exhausted against the wheel, I rubbed my cold, stiffened lips and cried huskily:

"Croy headquarters?"

The sentries made no sign. But one demanded: "Your pass?"

I stiffly dug it out. "From Carpentier," I said.

The man's quick smile assured me that we were at our destination. Remembering Argill's declaration before that last volley of shrapnel swept us. I looked at my watch. It was just ten o'clock. We were on time—Argill had been right — we had made Croy from that shrapnel-harrowed highway in less than three hours. He had been right—he had got me here on time, and safe to do my work.

I turned to Argill and clapped him on the back. He made no response—and I understood. That vile road, the lack of lights, the nervous tension of the last three hours would have their way—the man was utterly exhausted.

I motioned to the sentries.

"Sh!" I cautioned as I climbed stiffly out and swung my arms to restore the circulation. "Come carry him inside. But be easy; don't awaken him. Three hours of that driving"—I shook my head, and the men nodded understandingly. I turned to the steps, too frozen yet to assist, as they gently started to raise Lieutenant Argill. A sudden startled exclamation made me turn about. The men had drawn back—Argill still leaned against the wheel.

"What's the matter?" I whispered.

"Why—ah—" The men fidgeted a moment. "Why, sir, don't you know?"

The man's voice struck me as queer. He went on before I could find further voice.

"You—you don't know? An' him at the wheel?"

"Don't know what?" I snapped in a tense whisper—I was very tired. "I only know I'm half dead and he must be—"

The man interrupted in a voice muffled with unbelief.

"An' you say he druv you clean from Carpentier—all the way—to here?"

"Yes, yes, yes—how else would we be here, man? But carry him in. And quiet, for mercy's sake be quiet or you'll awaken him."

"Wake him! Good God, sir, there's nothin' 'll ever wake him up! He's dead!"

My temper rose.

"Fools!" I cried. "He is exhausted, sleeping against the wheel. Pick him up. Here, I'll help."

I clambered into the machine and put one arm beneath his knees and another at his back—then suddenly, too, drew quickly back.

"You see?" cried the man. "He's not asleep! We know!"

I felt myself violently atremble, and seized with a chill that was not of the weather's making. The men stared at me, white-eyed in the gloom, and clutched up their rifles hungrily and whispered together. Then together they approached the car again.

"You say he drove from Carpentier to—to here? All the way?"

I drew my sleeve across my forehead—the quick sweat had already beaded out. And I nodded dully.

"Yes, yes. He drove—"

One of the men snapped quickly:

"But he's dead, sir. Dead—not asleep. You felt him yourself, sir."

"But he drove—he drove—he—" The words jerked repeatingly from my stiffened lips. The man interrupted.

"But he's been dead for hours, sir. An'—"

Dully I recalled the horrible road, the gray impenetrability of the night, the lack of lights. Madly I burst out:

"But, my God, he drove me through all that—"

The man interrupted again; rather wild-eyed he appeared now, too.

"Four hours, sir. An' stiff as a board he be, sir. Three hours he be gone, sir, if I'm a judge at all. Three hours—an' his hands is froze to the wheel!"

"But he drove," I persisted in my struggle with unbelief. "The shell craters, the trees, the twists and turns. He drove—"

"As I bent to lift him, I seen the holes, sir. Two black holes smashed in his left temple, sir, the side away from you. Shrapnel, I judge, sir, and must have got him right off! Three hours he'd be gone, sir. Three hours at least."

I sat suddenly upon the cold stone steps. Feebly I repeated my bewildered protest.

"But all the way—all the way—even from where the shrapnel reached our road—all the way he drove." I raised my face to the staring men. "Here I am, here's the car, here's Argill at the wheel. He—he must have—"

The men started violently as if a new thought had struck them. Then they drew together as in deadly fear, and their faces paled out ghostlike against the blackness of the wall behind. Then all at once they seized each other and fled past me up the stairs into the house. Dully I heard outcries within, then a booming voice demanding silence, then a rush of footsteps, and I felt myself gently picked up and laid upon something that was a mighty comfort to my racked and aching body. I was all but asleep when the words of Lieutenant Galworth back in Carpentier flashed to me:

"He's queer," my old friend had said. "Religious, you know, an' all that."

Strangely enough, too, I recalled that Argill knew the importance of my errand—had promised I would be here on time. And as finally sleep fell upon me a question grew insistently, developed, took form, but found no answer. And this is what the question is—I still would like to know:

Who, or what, drove that car from the shrapneled road to Croy?

THE LOST AND FOUND COLUMN

BY CLARK HINMAN

HE lost the hair from off his knob,
  He lost his health;
Because of which he lost his job,
  And lost his wealth;
He lost at Reno his poor wife,
  He lost his "rep"—
He might have better lost his life—
  He lost his "pep"!

With hope near gone, he found his "pep,"
  He found new life;
He found a better, finer "rep,"
  A better wife;
He found again a greater wealth,
  A greater job;
He found a stronger state of health—
  Hair on his knob (*but that's a lie*).

The Pollards of West Gap

by Henry Payson Dowst

PROLOGUE

THE Little Girl walked up the steps of a respectable-looking dwelling-house on a reputable street and rattled the knob to make sure the door was not on the latch, then rang the bell. She was a pretty little girl, with hair almost black, and large, solemn blue eyes; a well-dressed little girl, with the proper number of hair ribbons, and a new pair of bronze boots that buttoned well above her slender ankles.

From behind the front door the Little Girl heard the rustle of a newspaper and a footstep or two. Then the door opened and the Little Girl stepped inside, familiarly.

"Hello, Lu!" said the Man. "You didn't get home very early."

"Oh," said the Little Girl, "we had the loveliest time! Ice-cream, and cocoa—"

"Never mind the ice-cream," cut in the Man sharply. "Ice-cream doesn't interest me. What did you get?"

The Little Girl tugged at her gloves and undid the broad ribbon which, tied beneath her rounded chin, held in place her wide velvet hat.

"This," she said. "Off Mrs. Green's bureau. I don't think it's very pretty; but it was all I could find."

The Man snatched avidly at the trinket, a woman's brooch, set with some sort of stones, and fell to examining it with a jeweler's magnifying glass. A smile played about the corners of his thin-lipped mouth, and his eyes returned the cold glitter of the stones in the bauble.

"I like the kind that has red and blue and green ones lots better," said the Little Girl. "But I wish't I didn't have to touch any of 'em. S'pose some of the other chil'run, or Mrs. Green's maid had catched me? I guess I'm pretty smart, don't you think? When will we have supper?"

"Here," said the Man; "here's something nice for you. You can buy yourself a dolly or lots of candy."

He was plainly pleased, and gave the Little Girl a coin.

"And let me tell you something, Lu," he said, menacingly; "don't you dare to lay your fingers on another thing in any house you go to—not for weeks and weeks; not until I tell you. Do you understand?"

"Goody, goody!" said the Little Girl. "Other little chil'run don't stea—I mean borrow things that don't belong to 'em. Why must I?"

"Because I say so," said the Man. "Because it's right! Rich people must help people who haven't much, whether they like to or not. Poor people can't have things any other way. Where'd you get your bronze boots?"

"You bought 'em!"

"You wouldn't have had 'em if you hadn't taken the envelope out of that gentleman's pocket in the crowded subway car last Friday."

"But maybe his little girl needed a pair of bronze boots much as me."

"Well, if she did she got 'em. That was

old Jonas Meldon, of the Superb National Bank. He's got it to burn."

"Got what to burn, Uncle Fred?"

"Money; coin; envelopes like the one you frisked him for. He was a fool to ride in the subway anyhow, instead of in his own limousine."

"I'm hungry," repeated the Little Girl. "When is supper? Mildred Blair's going to give a party two weeks from to-day, and I'm 'vited. Can I go?"

"Blair?" said the Man. "Blair. Cotton-mill Blairs, I guess. I hear Mrs. Blair's got more jewelry than any other woman in town. Yes, you can go; but don't you lay your finger on a thing, or I'll whip you within an inch of your life."

"First you say you'll whip me if I do, and then you'll whip me if I don't," said the Little Girl pertly. "If it's right one place, why not somewhere else? I hate it."

"Mind your own business," said the Man. "Go and tell Mrs. Curran to give you some supper. I'm going out."

Between the closing of the office of the Clifton Unified Railways Corporation at five o'clock on a certain day, and their opening the following morning, the Man, who was employed as an assistant cashier, left Clifton with as much of the Corporation's money as he could stuff into a Russia leather kit-bag. It appears that he tired of depending on the Little Girl for extra money. She was a light-fingered expert, thanks to his teaching, and now, after five years, her feats of thievery far surpassed the simple operation which had brought him Mrs. Green's diamond brooch.

The Little Girl's mother, long an inmate of a hospital for incurables, was now dead. And when the Man disappeared from the New York suburban town with the railway corporation's currency, Mrs. Curran, the Man's housekeeper, disappeared too. She had dressed the Little Girl prettily, and fed her, and put her to bed, and slapped her once or twice a day for five years—ever since her mother had gone to the hospital. The Little Girl couldn't remember her own father, and she had always hated the Man, who made her "borrow" jewelry and rewarded her with more candy than was good for her. She thought the Man had married her mother about the time she, the Little Girl, was six years old.

Now, it appeared, the Man had taken or used up all the money her father had left her mother, principally life insurance. He had absolutely stripped every penny from his wife, and made the Little Girl a pickpocket and sneak-thief, without any very sharply defined idea that what she did was wrong, or, if it was wrong, why it wasn't right. And now she was twelve years old and going to live in the minister's family. The Little Girl, who was now a pretty big girl, thought she was disgraced enough by the misdemeanors of her stepfather without confessing her own thefts. She had never been caught. Life in a minister's family is not very exciting. But she had had enough excitement. She had long since come to understand the sophistries of her stepfather without being able to disobey him.

So, when her environment changed, her habits changed. She wanted to be good. She loathed the old life, the risks, the constant likelihood of detection, the unceasing vigilance and nerve-racking anxiety lest she make the slip which should spell disaster.

Now, in the placid atmosphere of the clergyman's home, where she was the only child, she began to blossom; to forget those five terrible years; to love things that were good because they were good. Away back in a remote pigeonhole of her brain were "filed for reference" the indices of her predatory dexterity. She did not refer to them; she wished they might be destroyed. But, anyway, they stayed in the pigeonhole and the dust of years came and settled on them.

CHAPTER I.

HUMAN AND RASH.

"SURE," said Joinder, "we made 'em move out. What else could we do? We're not running a charity, you know."

"Oh, I understand all that," replied Clarke Pollard impatiently. "But what

was your personal inclination? Didn't it make you want to change your job; to tell the boss to go chase himself, job and all?"

Joinder lit one cigarette from the burned down butt of another, flipped the discard into the fireplace, expelled a lungful of smoke, and said, with a certain indifference:

"Oh, well, there are disagreeable things in every business. I'm not utterly callous, Clarke. But business is—"

"Business," said Pollard. "I get you. Business is business. I wish it wasn't!"

"You're young yet, m' boy."

"But why the dickens can't a man obey his better impulses? Why should this world be so arranged that the charitable societies monopolize all the good impulse jobs? And they run their affairs on a strictly business basis. We conduct the ordinary matters of life on a diamond-cut-diamond, survival of the fittest plan that makes poor people poorer, the unfortunate more miserable, the starving hungrier—and then, when the business-is-business game has removed a man's last dollar—by no painless method, either—he is taken care of by the bounty of others. Looks like lost motion to me. Why doesn't some one devise a plan that would give him his share as he went along and leave him his self-respect, too?"

Clarke Pollard was always arguing that way. His friends suspected him of socialism.

"You don't talk much like a banker," said Joinder. "That better-impulse thing will get you into trouble, young fellow. And let me tell you this: the guy who is always giving way to his better impulses, as you call 'em, is one of that big and growing fraternity whose members sixty are said to be born every hour. Better stick to good old business principles. Even on the eye for an eye basis I never could figure any profit. An eye and a half or, better, a pair of 'em, would show a pretty fair percentage."

He got up and strolled into the billiard-room, while Clarke Pollard looked after him with a certain resentment. Everybody said Joinder was making money. Cynical bounder!

"So a man is a sucker to give way to his impulses, is he?" thought Pollard.

"You see, it's like this," condescended Joinder, coming back to his big leather chair by the fire. "The world is full of people who'll take advantage of you. They'll borrow your money, accept all sorts of favors, abuse your generosity, in fact, put you down for the original Mr. Easy Mark. And you never get any satisfaction."

"If that is so," said Clarke Pollard with heat, "this is a rotten world!"

"It is, for the suckers," returned Joinder dryly.

"I don't believe it. I believe that every good and generous act you do, if done in sincerity, and from the right motives, will return a profit! I don't believe any one ever experienced any suffering by a really generous act."

"It's sad to see a good brain crumble," laughed Joinder. "That's the most absurd theory I ever did hear. Think how often tramps who are befriended turn around and steal from their benefactors! Why, didn't you ever read 'Les Miserables'? How poor old *Jean Valjean* got it in the neck in his turn, after stealing the spoons from the good bishop who took him in out of the cold?"

"Fiction," said Pollard. "Invention. Exceptional cases may happen, of course, in real life. Still, I see so much of the cold-bloodedness of business; I wish it was more human. For goodness' sake, if happiness is the common goal of each member of the human race, why must we get our happiness at each other's expense?"

"Boston's going to have a grand team next year," said Joinder. "If they'd only kept Tris Speaker, Chicago wouldn't have—"

"Rats!" said Pollard grumpily. "You think I'm talking like a child. I wish I knew—"

He got up and went to the coat-room and, presently, Joinder saw him leave the club.

"Nice kid," mused Joinder; "but visionary; too darned visionary. He'll never have a dollar if that better-impulse bug bites him."

Clarke Pollard was a paying-teller in old Jonas Meldon's bank, the Superb National. All day he stood behind that wicket of bronze and estimated with a keen blue eye the shuffling line of those who presented checks in return for currency. It was a big bank, with a multitude of depositors and customers, all of whom must be known to the paying-tellers by sight. Then there was the matter of accuracy. Pollard worked with amazing speed, sloughing off the green and yellow bills, and sliding across the glass sill of his window vast fortunes every twenty-four hours. There was so much of it—money, money, money! It went through Clarke Pollard's hands as cornmeal sifts through the fingers of a grocer. A huge contempt for money in bulk grew in the soul of the paying-teller, a contempt matched only by his respect for a ten-cent piece if his balance were that much off at closing time.

A big customer of the bank shoved a blue slip through the wicket.

"Good morning, Mr. Elkin," said Clarke Pollard, who glanced at the check and asked lightly, "how'll you have it?"

"Thousands, my boy; only break the last one into tens."

With fingers as lightning swift as the shuttle of a sewing-machine, Clarke riffled through a stack of thousand-dollar bills, then counted out ten packages of tens, ran through the whole collection a second time, and flipped the pile of currency through the wicket.

"Twenty-five thousand," he said. "Nice day!"

"Peach!" remarked Mr. Elkin, carefully depositing his money in an inner pocket.

A thin-faced youth was next in line.

"You'll have to be identified," said Clarke coldly. "Know any depositors? Can't you get the drawer of that check to indorse it?"

"Aw, gwan," said the youth, "what's the matter wit' you? Only t'ree dol—"

"Next," called Clarke coolly, and the thin-faced youth found himself promptly elbowed out of the way by a hustling merchant in a hurry to make up his pay-roll. Grumbling, he slouched off, vowing inwardly that some day he would have the president of that bank coming on bended knee to ask for his deposit account.

A girl stepped up to the wicket and slid a check along the glass. It was drawn on an out-of-town bank, for forty-seven dollars. It looked all right, and was made payable to Lucy Gale. On the back Lucy Gale had written her name.

"I'm afraid, madam," began Clarke, reaching for the handy formula applicable to all such cases, "you'll have to be iden—"

He looked squarely into a pair of the most appealing, dark blue eyes he had ever seen in his life. The girl was lovelier than a summer night, lovelier than the cool dawn of an August day. The blue of her eyes had in it the velvet of pansies and the depths of them were like the shadows in the pools of a mountain brook.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, I'm so sorry."

"Yes," said Clarke Pollard lamely. "It's too bad. Don't you know some of our depositors who could identify you?"

She shook her head, doubtfully, and with a sad wistfulness.

"I wouldn't know which way to turn," she said. "It's so seldom I ever have a check, I haven't the slightest idea what to do."

"Leave it here for collection," suggested the teller.

"But I've got to have the money now, to-day. It's most important; it means—"

She stopped, and what she did not say was ten times more eloquent than anything she might have added.

The good impulse which, according to the cynical Mr. Joinder at the club the night before, qualifies so many for the sixty-per-hour class, seized upon Clarke Pollard. For five years he had worked in the Superb National Bank, and never before had a personal impulse swayed him in his dealing with the bank's customers.

"Put your address on this slip," he said suddenly. Miss Gale wrote something in pencil on the slip, and Pollard counted out forty-seven dollars and passed it through the wicket to the blue eyes—that is, to the owner of the blue eyes.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," said Miss Lucy Gale, and hurried away. Clarke

Pollard looked after her as she went swiftly across the marble floor toward the exit. She was wretchedly dressed. He guessed he had been a chump—but the blue eyes haunted him.

"Fifty, please, all fives," said a voice.

"Sure, Mr. Kent," said Pollard. "Nice day, Mr. Kent."

That afternoon, when making up his balance and sorting over the checks for the clearing-house, Pollard came across the one he had cashed for the blue eyes. He turned it over and over in his hands. Pinned to it was the address of the payee. The blue eyes floated across his vision.

Clarke Pollard slipped a thumb and finger inside his vest-pocket, drew out a roll of bills, and counted the money. There was forty-six dollars. From another pocket he produced some loose change, one dollar and fifteen cents, to be exact. He tucked the check in his pocket, and replaced it with his own money in the bank's funds.

"Say, Pollard," spoke up Griffin, who shared his cage, "that's a funny one."

"Huh?" returned Clarke. "My own business, isn't it?"

"I noticed when you cashed that young lady's check—wondered how you proposed to handle it. Rather irregular, don't you think?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" growled Pollard. He despised Griffin. Privately he regarded Griffin as a sneak.

"Well, I shouldn't think it in line with the policy of the bank to cash checks for strangers."

"I cash checks for whom I like." A cold anger took hold of Pollard. The silky tones of the officious Griffin always irritated him; and now he knew Griffin was, in theory, perfectly right. "I cashed it out of my own pocket, didn't I? You mind your own business, Griffin!"

"The bank's business is my business," replied his cage mate precisely. "I am inclined to think I ought to—er—ask Mr. Meldon for a—er—ruling."

"Ask him anything you want to," snapped Clarke. "Go as far as you like!"

It did not really occur to him that Griffin would take so trivial a matter to Meldon. But Griffin had a trivial soul. Half an hour after closing time, when the teller was just cleaning up his balance sheet, one of the page boys said:

"Mr. Meldon would like to see you, Mr. Pollard."

Clarke trotted obediently around to the old man's desk.

"What's this I hear about your cashing a check for a total stranger?" demanded the bank president.

"It was my money," said the teller, a little sullenly. He thought how pleasant it would be to punch Griffin's face.

"Do you call that good banking?"

"I don't call it banking," replied Pollard. "It was a personal matter."

"Oh, I see. You know the young lady—er, well?"

"Hardly. I never saw her before."

"Just so, just so. Are you aware, Mr. Pollard, that a man who allows his impulses to sway him is hardly a safe man to entrust with the bank's money?"

"I guess you've had five years to find out whether I'm trustworthy."

"True. And it has taken five years to find out a weakness of which no member of our staff must be guilty."

"You mean the weakness of having a heart?"

"Let us not discuss the matter, Mr. Pollard. Your procedure to-day has been most irregular, and very bad banking, very bad. I trust I shall hear of no further occurrences of the sort."

"You won't! I'm through."

"You mean, that because I object to a very irregular act on your part, you take offense and leave?"

"I mean, that if being a banker means stifling my good impulses, ruling my life by a cut-and-dried code, I don't want to be a banker. I'm sick of handling millions of dollars and seeing money in bales, day after day, when the world is full of suffering. It seems as if business and finance are the cold, heartless machine that makes money out of people's misery, and a bank is the most impersonal device in the world. I don't want to be a machine, I want to be a human being!"

Meldon smiled, much as Joinder had smiled the night before.

"You are young," he said. "Banking is a business which cannot be conducted on the basis of impulse, no matter how praiseworthy from a purely sentimental point of view."

"Well, I've stuck in that cage as long as I'm going to," went on Pollard. "If I've got to stifle every generous impulse in order to make a good banker, *good night!*"

"Think it over, Pollard," advised the banker. "You're rather resentful. Don't be rash."

"Rash!" cried Pollard. "Rash! That's exactly what I want to be! Rash! Think of it, the freedom, the joy of being rash! I've pinned myself down like a moth on a collector's board until I've dried up into a stiff, dusty shell. Now I'm going to get out. I'm going to be rash if I want to. Thank you for all you've done for me, Mr. Meldon; but not any more, just now! Give my job to Griffin—he'll never endanger the bank's funds by any gushing generosity! He's safe, that boy! Good-by, Mr. Meldon; I'm going to quit to-night, and be rash!"

CHAPTER II.

SHIFTING THE GEARS.

IT was with the consciousness of economic independence that Clarke Pollard thus flippantly made his exit from the Superb National Bank. Old Meldon had called him down, and Clarke was sore. But if he had not been the owner of a block of street-railway bonds he could not have afforded to take offense. Had he been absolutely dependent upon his salary of forty-five dollars a week, he would have seen very quickly that a bank cannot afford to employ young philanthropists to cash checks for appealing blue eyes. His common sense would have told him that although making good any possible loss to the bank, he was nevertheless a transgressor against the institution's rule regarding identifications. Old Meldon was right, it was bad banking.

However, Clarke felt good. He had obeyed that good impulse. Promptly upon the heels of his action had come a blow to his complacence. Was Joinder right, then? Not by a jugful! Clarke had left the bank of his own accord, hadn't he? Good *would* come from that kind action of his.

So he dropped into the club and played billiards and cashed a check on his own bank-account—which was not in the Superb National—for fifty dollars. He was at this point reminded, in entering the check on its stub, that his resources were for the moment practically nothing. This gave him no concern, because his street-railway bond-coupons were due the next day, and he would be in funds again. In his pocket, besides the fifty dollars, he had the one day's pay which had been due him from the Superb National. As this was Monday, that was all he had coming to him. With the salary of the preceding Saturday he had paid some bills, gone to a theater, bought dinner for himself, and—oh, you know how it is. Bachelor young men with reasonably good incomes hardly ever know where the money goes.

Clarke dined at the club, and had a good, care-free evening; and every once in a while it came over him very soothingly that he wouldn't have to get up next morning until he felt like it. Of course he'd begin rustling for a job right away; that is, in a day or two. He remembered what he had told old Meldon—he was going to be rash. Logically, the face of the girl with the blue eyes popped up in his mental movies, and the impulse to be rash took definite form. It might be quite accurate to say that he felt himself breaking out with the idea.

He went off in a corner by himself and sat down in a big leather chair under the glow of a shaded lamp. From his pocket he fished the check for forty-seven dollars, payable to and indorsed by Lucy Gale, with the little address-slip attached. Next morning he would deposit the check in his own bank for collection, and in the meanwhile he would look up Lucy Gale.

It occurred to him that he had absolutely no excuse for any such proceeding, and Lucy Gale would certainly see no reason why the ex-bank-teller should expect to develop an acquaintanceship based on a purely business transaction. But that was what made it interesting. It was part of

the rashness upon which he had determined; it was an adventure.

That was for to-morrow. Now the young man finished his cigar, said good night to the rest of the bunch, and stepped out into the street. He thought he might take in a show—alone? And then, oddly, came the blue eyes of Lucy Gale and looked appealingly at him and said, quite plainly:

"I haven't been to a theater for ever so long; and I just love plays, and music and laughter—but I never get any nowadays."

So, suddenly, Clarke Pollard felt that nothing on earth could be so nice as to take Lucy Gale to a show and see the blue eyes lose their pathos and light up with excitement, or suspense, or grow moist with tears at the plight of the heroine, or with laughter at the miseries of the comedian. And to go to a play by himself now became so distasteful that he turned his footsteps rather discontentedly in the direction of his lodgings.

The impulse to be rash died down and flickered out for the time being. Clarke was blue. The idea of going back into the bank in the morning and receiving the customary good-natured greetings from his fellow workers, the consciousness of being connected with a big and honorable institution—all that was worth something. He had given it up.

Probably Lucy Gale would think a lot more of the paying-teller in a bank than she would of a chap with no job, and only a rather limited income from a few railway bonds in an obscure Western city.

So, with the taste of his newly gained freedom already cloying on his tongue, Pollard crept grumpily into bed. He decided he would start job hunting the very first thing next morning. Perhaps, after all, he'd better go and make his peace with Meldon and step back into his accustomed place in the teller's cage.

Pollard hopped out of bed at seven o'clock sharp, started the cold water smashing into his tub, and—by George! He didn't have to get up. He was sleepy, and the morning was pretty cold. Things didn't look quite the same as they had looked the night before. After all, he wasn't going to kotow to old Meldon. He didn't want to go back to the bank, but he did want to go back to bed, and back to bed he went.

At nine o'clock that morning, prompt to the dot, Mr. Griffin, heretofore assistant to Mr. Clarke Pollard in the paying-teller's cage, stepped into the latter's place, job and pay. Having followed the impulse of a stiff-necked prig, prompted by a sneaking covetousness, Mr. Griffin had profited by Pollard's defection.

It would appear that Mr. Joinder had all the best of the argument so far.

The ex-teller, having finished his sleep, arose at nine thirty, bathed, shaved, arrayed himself in the habiliments of fashion, a neat bamboo walking-stick and a smile of contentment, and issued forth in search of breakfast. Although Mr. Pollard had no job, he still had the income from his bonds, amounting to—oh, by the way!

Clarke had found a couple of letters on the hat-rack of his lodging-house. One was from the tailor to whose skill the young man owed his modish appearance at this moment. The letter suggested mildly that if Mr. Pollard could find it convenient to make a remittance in set— Mr. Pollard tore the bill into a great number of fine scraps and gave it to the four or forty winds of heaven. Then he tore off the end of the second envelope, in the corner of which appeared the return card of the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway Company of—

The complacent morning countenance of Clarke Pollard underwent an instantaneous and radical change. He stared with popping eyes at the communication from the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway Company. The missive was short, but expressed with perfect clearness. There was no room for misunderstanding. Pollard turned, made a quick survey of his surroundings, located a store whereupon was displayed a small, blue-enamel bell, and made a bee-line for that store.

"Hi, Bill!" he cried, breathlessly, "give us a couple of nickels for this dime, will you? Want to phone. Thanks!"

He crowded into the booth and pulled the door shut, but if you had been stand-

ing within a couple of feet of the door you would have heard something like this:

"Margin, 4196—

"Hello, Margin, 4196? That you, Miss Fergussen? This is Mr. Pollard. Pollard. yes. Mr. Meldon in? Can I speak---

"Meeting? Directors' room? Well, this is important. Put him on the wire, that's a good girl. Hello—

"Hello? Mr. Meldon? This is Pollard. Pollard. I'm on my way down to the bank. I've reconsidered. I'm not going to leave—that is, if you'll—

"But, I say, Mr. Meldon, isn't that rather— What, so soon? Oh, no, I never considered myself indispensable, but I thought— But isn't there a chance? Five years ought to count for—

"Well, if you're busy, I'm sorry to have interrupted you. Good-by!"

Thus in a short five minutes was swept away all that jauntiness with which Clarke Pollard had faced the world that morning. The letter from the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway had notified him that the bonds of that corporation would default their interest, due and payable on the fifteenth of the month, and that a meeting of the bondholders had been called for the twenty-fifth, at which a protective committee would be formed—and all the rest of it.

Pollard emerged from the telephone booth haggard, and looking five years older. For the moment, all his props were knocked from under him. The coupons he had intended to deposit in his bank this morning were without any present value. He had in his pocket what was left of the fifty he had obtained at the club the night before, the greater part, it is true, and one day's pay, and a check drawn by an unknown person, in favor of an unknown young woman, on a remote out-of-town bank. The check might be worth forty-seven dollars, but Clarke now doubted it.

And it seemed to him that ill-luck had come and perched upon his shoulder at the very moment he had met the pathetic look in those blue eyes and allowed an impulse of cheap sentimentality to unseat his banking judgment.

"I am a darned fool!" he muttered. "No wonder old Meldon doesn't want me around."

And the blue eyes — Lucy Gale! He hoped he'd never encounter her again.

Having, for the time being, nothing definite to do, Clarke turned his steps clubward, ate an unpalatable breakfast, and then went off into a corner to think a bit.

And then, because he was built of the stuff that good sports, if not heroes, are made of, he arrived at the conclusion that he was in danger of being a piker. He had drawn cards in a game with antagonists that were unseen, it was true, antagonists who were bound by no set of rules to play square with him.

Still, the fact remained that he had drawn cards. It seemed he had lost a couple of tricks. Now was he going to throw down his hand and cry quits before he had tested his own mettle?

It took Clarke Pollard about half an hour to make a decision. He rather thought, after all, that the result of his good impulse lay within himself. He pulled Lucy Gale's check out of his pocket and consulted the slip; then he left the club. It might have been noticed that something of his jauntiness had returned. Presently he boarded a surface-car. He paid his fare, and in five minutes, when the conductor came around again, Pollard dropped a second nickel into his hand. The conductor looked a little surprised and carefully refrained from ringing up this second fare. This was a mistake, for Clarke Pollard was not alone. The absent-mindedly paid nickel bought transportation for a girl with appealing blue eyes, and shiny dark hair, who really looked as if she could hardly pay her own face. That is, she looked that way to Clarke, who was the only one who could see her at all.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER "GOOD IMPULSE."

MISS LUCY GALE confronted in dismay the irate glare of S. Gumpel, proprietor of S. Gumpel's Ladies and Gents' Pure Food Restaurant and Cafeteria.

"Eighteen seventy-five," said S. Gumpel. He was a small, fat man, who somehow reminded Lucy of one of his own fried pork chops. In the establishment of S. Gumpel the table-cloths were thin, and the slices of bread not much thicker. It occupied about the same space as the average small store. At the back the diners heard, behind a dingily painted board partition, the sounds of S. Gumpel's chef and assistants abusing the chinaware. When you ordered a small steak, medium, the waitress confirmed it by repeating it so that your fellow diners obtained an accurate idea of your gastronomic leanings. And you heard your order come echoing back from the depths of that kitchen through a hole in the board partition.

"Sma-aw-wull steak, meedy-um; a side o' French fried; cawffee in the dark."

It was about ten thirty, and business was light. In another hour the noon trade would begin to drift in, and Mr. Gumpel used this slack portion of the day to fix up his books, audit his bills, and make up his market orders. Lucy Gale was cashier, assistant bookkeeper, and general assistant, and earned—that is, she got—eleven dollars a week.

"Eighteen seventy-five, I say," repeated S. Gumpel. "Last night I counted the cash and carefully checked up before I left for home; and now already at half past ten is eighteen seventy-five missing. So!"

He shot the monosyllable at the girl with an accusing emphasis.

"I'm sure I don't know," began Lucy. "I can't understand how—"

"Understand or not, it is eighteen seventy-five missing, just the same. I don't know who would understand it if you don't. You have full charge of the coin here. Looks funny to me!"

"Haven't you paid any bills or anything this morning?"

"Not a cent. Not a red cent of bills. The cash-box I put last night in the safe with my own hands, almost ninety dollars we had. Now seventy-one and something, a few pennies. Am I in business for my health, I ask you? Is it carelessness, you should let eighteen seventy-five get away like spilt milk through the fingers? Was you giving some one change for a twenty which they only gave you a two? Or what? If I thought—"

Mr. Gumpel paused and glared at his cashier balefully.

"Oh, Mr. Gumpel! You don't think—"

"Think? What is the difference what I think? What I think, I don't know; what I know, that is something sure. You can pay into the cash drawer the eighteen dollars ninety cents—"

"You said eighteen seventy-five," said Lucy.

"It's all the same, whatever is the amount, you pay it."

"But I haven't got it, Mr. Gumpel; and besides—"

"Four days' pay you got coming to you; let's see."

He made some rapid figures on a slip of paper.

"Seven thirty-three—"

"Thirty-four," corrected Lucy.

"And the difference you pay out of your pocket; and then you can have your hat and I be my own cashier yet. Strange girls asking for jobs is too risky. I ain't even bothered I should look up your reference, and look what I get. Come, pay up, eleven forty-one you owe me, for—we'll say carelessness."

"But, Mr. Gumpel—"

"Buts I care nothing for. Pay up now, and we say it's carelessness. Otherwise, maybe another name would sound different, especially if I called in an officer."

Lucy Gale cried out at the idea.

"You wouldn't do that, Mr. Gumpel!"

"Ha! You see. Come, was it carelessness, or—"

He picked up the telephone and laid a tentative hand on the receiver.

"I tell you, I haven't any money, Mr. Gumpel. You took the cash-box out of the safe yourself this morning, and I didn't do anything but put the money in the cash-register, and add what came in at breakfast time—"

"Oh, I make account of that. I know. Eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents is missing, and I stand for no foolishness. I'm liberal when I allow you those four

days. Now you got to act quick, because mistakes from carelessness is one thing, but if it ain't carelessness—"

"I would like to speak with Miss Lucy Gale, if you please," said a polite voice just back of S. Gumpel's ear. The restaurant proprietor turned and confronted a well set up young fellow, rather fastidiously dressed, who looked at him out of a pair of cool blue eyes.

"Oh!" said Mr. Gumpel. "You are the paying-teller over by the Superb National Bank, ain't you?"

"Yes; I have seen you before, Mr. Gumpel, I believe."

"Sure; I used to keep my account there, but I changed. The Farmers and Fishermen's Trust allows me two per cent on daily balance. You want to speak to Miss Gale?"

"If I'm not interrupting," said Clarke Pollard.

"Maybe, if you are a banker," said Gumpel with a sneer, "you would loan Miss Gale eleven dollars and forty-one cents, eh?"

"With pleasure," said Pollard.

"Oh," cried Lucy, "this is awful!"

"It ain't half so awful as if it wasn't carelessness," said Gumpel pointedly. He extended a hand toward Pollard, who laid across his palm a ten-dollar bill and a two.

"No, no, you mustn't," the girl objected, almost in tears, "you really mustn't."

"Maybe you would prefer to pay it yourself, eh?" demanded Gumpel, maintaining his hold on Clarke's twelve dollars. "No? Makes no difference to me."

He counted fifty-nine cents into the young man's hand.

"Now, Miss Gale, if it's all the same to you, I got plenty work to do. Being my own cashier ain't such a cinch."

Lucy turned away and got her hat and coat down from a hook back of the cashier's desk. Clarke Pollard waited, an odd bewilderment concealed behind a studied imperturbability. This was a funnny situation, he thought. He was a nice one, passing out eleven dollars and forty-one cents in this princely fashion, as if he were wealthy. Another "good impulse." Wouldn't Joinder laugh? Yes, he, Clarke Pollard, was surely a member of the One-a-Minute Club.

Miss Gale came from behind the counter and walked down the narrow aisle between the tables to the street door, the young man at her heels. Out on the street she turned and went briskly along for a block, turned up a cross street and stopped. Pollard was close at her side. She looked up at him with an odd expression of puzzlement.

Pollard grinned in friendly fashion.

"Well," he said, "what was I to do?"

"Did you hear what that—that man said to me?"

"Part of it. I gathered you were in some sort of trouble."

"But—you were not called upon—you don't know me. You had no right to do what you did, any more than I would have a right to ask it."

Her look was plainly one of growing suspicion.

"Oh, say, now," began Pollard lamely, "it was all so sudden. I had no intention of—"

"But how did you happen in Gumpel's, anyway? I don't understand. You asked for me—was it something about the check? It's all right, I assure you. It was a great favor to me—"

"No, I didn't go to see you about the check," replied the young man. "I just wanted to—to get acquainted."

The look of suspicion did not lessen.

"It's very embarrassing," said Lucy. "Quite without intending it, I'm suddenly obliged to borrow money from you, a total stranger, and the dreadful thing is, I can't pay it back—not just now. I simply haven't it. And I really can't encourage you to try to make friends with me. I guess I'm dreadfully ungracious, but—men who work in banks don't usually lend strange ladies money like that—"

"But what was I to do?" asked Pollard lamely. "I couldn't let you—"

"Yes, you could," rejoined the girl impatiently. "What are my troubles to you? I was foolish enough to confess at the bank yesterday that I needed the money very badly, and then to-day you happened to find me in—in an embarrassing position.

You have tried to force your acquaintance on me because you thought I couldn't help myself."

"Oh, Miss Gale, that isn't so. I—I only wanted to—to be of assistance to you, if I could."

"Well," said Lucy, defiantly, "you can't. Good morning!"

She turned and walked rapidly away, leaving Pollard to stand and gaze sheepishly after her.

Clarke Pollard was a young man of little experience with women. He had managed to sidestep the various affairs of the heart which beset the path of most young men from the age of ten years to ninety. He believed himself a confirmed bachelor, knew but few girls, and cared to know no more — until he had the opportunity of meeting Lucy Gale.

Having in the present case acted upon impulse, he now saw wherein lay the difficulty. It dawned upon him that he had tried to do rather an absurd thing, in the doing of which he had not highly complimented the object of his interest. The episode in S. Gumpel's restaurant had only muddled the issue. His first inclination to call Miss Gale ungrateful and ill-natured gave way to a genuine appreciation of her situation, and he understood just why she was suspicious. Any masher would have done much as he had done.

All this passed through his mind in the space of a few seconds. Nevertheless it was with a sigh of regret that he acknowledged his own stupidity and undoubted defeat. It was all off, of course.

Just then there came a scream of distress from up the block. He turned quickly. Miss Gale was struggling with an ill-favored youth who, evidently diving out of a side alley, had endeavored to snatch her pocketbook, a fairly capacious affair that dangled from her wrist. A woman, you know, will call anything in which she carries carfare, a powder-puff, two cake recipes, a newspaper portrait of Maurice Costello, and a latch-key, a pocketbook. It may be so small that she can conceal it in the palm of her hand, or as big as a postman's sack—it's a pocketbook to her, just the same.

Lucy Gale had been taken by surprise, but the thief had miscalculated the strength of her hold on her property. Now she was hanging to it like a soldier, and the malefactor tugged in vain to loosen her grip.

The street was lined with residences of a middle-class kind, and passers-by were not numerous. A few children, playing on the walk, looked up with startled curiosity. One or two windows went up and heads bobbed out to learn the excitement.

Lucy looked about for possible assistance, and screamed a second time. The pocketbook, which closed by means of a jawlike contraption of metal, flew open, and some of the contents spilled into the street.

Mr. Clarke Pollard had not waited for the second scream. By the time it was well uttered he was on top of the would-be purloiner of the pocketbook, planting a stiff blow on the side of the man's head. Mr. Sneak-thief let go the pocketbook, spun around toward his assailant, and drove his fist against the second button of Mr. Pollard's sack coat. The button serving as an accurate marker for the location of Clarke's diaphragm, a device furnished him to regulate his breathing, the sneak-thief's point of attack seemed to have been well chosen. The thief did not follow up his advantage, however, as several people were now seen to be approaching rapidly, but picked up his feet and made him a rarity in that vicinity. He disappeared as if by magic.

Lucy Gale swooped down upon the various articles which had fallen from her pocketbook, gathered them hastily together, stuffed them inside, and departed. Clarke Pollard caught hold of an iron paling forming part of a near-by fence and waited dizzily for his outraged diaphragm to resume its functions. Street and houses and people wheeled solemnly around and around before him; he felt like a cross-eyed man at a three-ring circus suffering from sea-sickness. He was completely upset.

This lasted only a moment, however, and he came to himself to confront a barrier of inquiring faces.

"What's the matter, bo?" demanded a grocer's boy. "Did he get anything? What was he, a pickpocket?"

"Poor feller!" said a sympathetic elderly woman. "You look awful pale and worried-looking."

"That's all right," said Clarke, with a doleful attempt to appear jaunty. "He was annoying the young lady. I punched his head."

"Haw, haw," remarked another bystander; "you punched his head! He give you a left hook to the pantry, sport, that's what. Punched his head not'n'!"

"Well," said Pollard, "where were you? Do you let hold-up men attack young ladies in broad daylight?"

"Aw, he wasn't no hold-up," returned the sarcastic one. "Him an' her was mixin' it over de ol' pay-env'lup. She's prob'ly his wiff."

It occurred to Pollard that he was distinctly at a disadvantage in this environment, so he elbowed his way through the score of curious ones who had gathered about him and started off.

"Here, boss!" cried an urchin. "Dat yours?"

He offered Pollard a small, rather dingy envelope rescued from beneath the feet of the crowd. Clarke took it, realized that it had undoubtedly fallen from Miss Gate's pocketbook, and handed the boy a dime. Then he made his way hastily from the neighborhood.

Miss Gale was nowhere in sight. Presumably she lived not far away, and had dodged into her own doorway like a frightened prairie-dog into his burrow. Pollard didn't blame her much for avoiding as promptly as possible the unpleasant publicity of the episode.

He rubbed his sore midriff reflectively, and waited on a corner for an up-town car. He felt that he had not made himself conspicuously a hero, although he had done his best to act the part. There is nothing heroic about allowing the villain from whom you save the heroine to jolt your solar plexus neatly and then escape. Pollard's knuckles were skinned in evidence of the force of his blow on the thug's bony headpiece; but the crowd had given him no credit for that, and he supposed Miss Gale was equally unconscious of his attempt to administer a knock-out.

CHAPTER IV.

A DINNER AND A DECISION.

POLLARD hunted up his sheltered corner in the club, refrained from lunch out of respect for his violated midsection, and pondered. But pondering led him nowhere. He meant to go to his bank and deposit Miss Gale's check, but didn't feel well enough. In the early afternoon he betook himself to his lodgings and, as he was in considerable pain, crawled disconsolately into bed.

After a while he dropped off to sleep and dreamed of a pair of very beautiful blue eyes looking at him through the bars of the teller's wicket at the Superb National Bank. He was about to thrust one million dollars in large bills through the opening when the eyes filled with the withering scorn of a perfectly nice girl repelling a masher, and then Pollard realized that these were not Lucy Gale's eyes at all, but Griffin's, his successor. They regarded him with a supercilious triumph. Pollard was not on the inside, looking out, but on the outside looking in, and Griffin began to pound lustily on the counter and shout at him.

"Get up!" roared Griffin. "Get up, Mr. Pollard. There's a young lady down in the parlor to see you. Get up. Whatever are you doing, sleeping at home in the middle of the afternoon? You ain't sick nor nothing, are you?"

Clarke turned over painfully in his bed, answered the solicitude of Mrs. Burch, his landlady, with a grumpy, "Right," and sat up. By George, he was sore! That thief had carried the kick of a mule around with him. Clarke reflected irritatedly that never hero had braved sudden death with greater hazard.

"Young lady?" he thought. "Now what young lady do I know? Who the devil? Why can't I be let alone?"

"Tell her I'll be down directly!" he cried to Mrs. Burch, and proceeded to dress. He

felt rather better when he had pulled himself together, and trotted down-stairs with a little of his customary jauntiness.

Miss Lucy Gale was awaiting him in Mrs. Burch's dim parlor. She advanced and held out a hand, not boldly, but with a shy awkwardness.

"Mr. Pollard," she said, "I'm so ashamed."

"Of what?"

"I ran away and left you. It was cowardly. I didn't think of anything but myself, and the embarrassment of collecting a crowd. And you behaved so—so splendidly."

"God forgive you!" said Pollard. "Did you see that punch that chap handed me?"

"No!" cried Lucy. "Did he really strike you? I thought it was you who did the hitting."

"I only started it," replied Pollard grimly. "He finished it—and me."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

The blue eyes were as full of sympathy now as they had been of scorn in the morning.

"I've been thinking things over," went on Lucy, "and I've concluded that I behaved very shabbily. I don't know yet why you — you came to Gumpel's to see me. But you were generous, and then you saved me from that awful creature—"

"Awful creature is right," said Pollard fervently. "He missed his calling. He should have been a pugilist."

"I called up the bank," went on Lucy, "and they referred me to a Mr. Griffin."

"H-m!" remarked Pollard.

"He said you weren't—weren't employed there any more. He said you'd been dis—discharged."

"Liar!" snarled Clarke. "Oh, I *beg* your pardon! I meant Griffin, of course."

"I asked him why," said Lucy. "It was a perfectly beastly thing to do. It was none of my business, and he had no business telling me."

"Great Scott!"

"He said it was cashing a check for an unidentified person."

"The sneak!"

"So I knew—I thought I knew—I believed you did it just to be kind, Mr. Pollard. And then, there was the eleven dollars and forty-one cents this morning."

She fumbled in her pocketbook—yes, the same pocketbook—and produced some bills and change."

"Oh my, that's all right!" said Pollard lightly.

"No, it isn't. Here."

He accepted the refund sheepishly.

"Did—did the man hurt you—much?" she asked. There was a lot of sympathy in the blue eyes now. "I'm so awfully grateful to you."

"Nothing at all, nothing at all," Pollard assured her. "Only it made me look like a boob when I should have liked to appear something quite different. Please sit down, Miss Gale. I'm rather upset by seeing you. You'll forgive me, I hope."

"No, I must go."

"I thought perhaps you'd have some dinner," said Pollard desperately. "I would like to talk things over with you."

"Oh, no!"

"Well, heavens alive! You seem to be terribly grateful for the little things I've done for you, though, of course, there's not the slightest obligation; but I don't think I'm asking much of a return, if you really feel that way. Just an hour or so of your time. You're the most interesting person I've ever met."

"We-ell—"

"Wait 'll I get my hat!" cried Pollard with a boy's excitement. He ran up-stairs and got hat, coat, and stick, and—from his bureau he picked up the manila envelope rescued that morning by the urchin at the scene of his encounter with the purse-snatcher. Something prompted him to glance at the contents, the flap being ungummed. The envelope contained only a number of unmounted, small photographs. There was a motherly-looking young woman, a child, female, probably four years old; a good-natured-looking young man who vaguely suggested Lucy Gale, and another man. At this last Pollard stared long and hard.

"Now, who the devil is that bird?" he wondered. "By George, I've seen him somewhere! Well, it's rather caddish for me to look at these things, I suppose."

He thrust the prints back into the envelope and ran down-stairs.

"I guess this is yours, isn't it?" he asked.

Lucy took the packet eagerly.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she said. "It's my father and mother and some—er—relatives. I'm so grateful to you—"

"Forget it," said Pollard. "Where shall we eat?"

"Now," said Clarke Pollard one hour and a half later, stirring sugar into his demi-tasse, "that's all there was to it. I'd never have told you unless you'd dug a part of the truth out for yourself. I'm a soldier of fortune now, a free-lance. Know what I'm going to do?"

"Hunt for a new position, I suppose."

"No! I'm going out to West Gap, where I used to live. I've got twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of bum bonds in that traction company, and I'm going to find out what's doing."

"Bum bonds? You mean—"

"No good; defaulted their interest. Bondholders going to foreclose. I've got a voice, I should judge, even if it is a small one. And I've an idea."

The blue eyes looked at him across the table, and, strange to say, there was admiration in them. Pollard remembered how lonely he had been last night, and how he had wished he might take this girl to a show. Now another impulse seized him. He'd told old Meldon he was going to be rash, but that he would ever in his life think of anything as rash as this had not crossed his mind.

"Listen," he said. "You say you're an orphan, all alone, dependent on other folks, lost your job. How good a sport are you?"

"I—I'm afraid I'm not a very good—good sport," said Lucy.

"Don't believe you!" cried Pollard. "I like you. You've kind of—er—got me. I never had many girl acquaintances, don't know much about 'em. Don't think I ever wanted to. Somehow, you're different. Listen. Come along out to West Gap with me! Will you?"

Lucy drew back, startled.

"Mr. Pollard!" she said.

"Name's Clarke," he assured her. "Call me Clarke. I'm simply crazy about you. Let's go out to West Gap and—you know, I was born there. Have a heap of friends in that little town, or used to. Home's a sort of attractive word, somehow. I—I may have to do a little bluffing—"

"I really must be going home," said Lucy. "I've stayed much longer than I intended. I appreciate your courtesies, Mr. Pollard, but really, I thought—I'm sorry I was mistaken, after all, about your kindness and what prompted it. Of course West Gap may not see through your 'bluff,' as you call—"

"Silly," he said. "I meant bluff 'em about my abilities as a business man, a coming young Napoleon of rapid transit, and all that. But a wife is a tremendous inspiration to a chap; something to work and fight for, you know. You mustn't think that *every* time I get into a scrap, the other fellow's going to get the last punch. And West Gap will fall in love with you, Miss Ga—Lucy."

The girl had half-risen, and now stood gazing across the table at her host. He was very good looking, and there was something sure and confident about him, something honest and sincere. All her suspicions of his good intent suddenly departed forever. She sank into her chair, and leaned her chin on her hands. Then, for a moment, she pressed her fingers on her eyes, and it seemed to Clarke Pollard that she was consulting some inner mentor.

Presently she looked up, clear-eyed and smiling, if a little tremulous.

"Where is West Gap?" she asked.

Pollard named a midwestern State.

"All right," said Lucy, with decision. "I'm a good sport—only, please remember, you may find you'll have to be a better one yourself than—than you think now. Marrying a girl you never saw until yesterday is—rash, to say the least."

"Rash? What do you mean, rash? Well, it's no rasher for me than it is for you!"

Pollard beamed at the blue eyes opposite him, and, although he was a man without a job, planning so serious an undertaking as the taking of a wife, he suddenly felt curiously optimistic.

"Lucy, girl," he said, "I've certainly got that 'good-impulse jinx' licked to a finish."

"Better knock wood," suggested Lucy. "By the way, when do we start? And what are you going to use for money to pay our fares? And what minister will you get to marry us?"

CHAPTER V.

MR. AND MRS. CLARKE POLLARD.

FROM the afternoon train from the East there descended at West Gap one bride, one groom, four traveling salesmen, and two local merchants returning from their fall trip to New York. Drawn up beside the station-platform were three Ford touring-cars whose eager drivers would take you to any part of the city for a quarter, and the bus from the Millett House. Toward the latter Mr. and Mrs. Clarke Pollard and the four traveling salesmen made their way.

"Hello, Clarke!" said the driver of the hotel conveyance. "You're a big stranger; ain't seen you fer a doost of a while."

"Hello, Sam! Five years it's been. How's the boy? How's the old burg?"

"Don't change none. Goin' up t'the house?"

"Sure am; this is Mrs. Pollard, Sam."

"Pleestermeecher, Mis' Pollard," said Sam. "Git right in."

At the hotel desk a handsome young man, whose main reason for living was the prospect that he would some day make Carlyle Blackwell jealous, thrust out an affable hand across the register.

"Hello, Clarke!" he said. "*You're* a big stranger. Ain't seen *you* for a *doost* of a while."

"Hello, Willie! 'Bout five years. How's the boy? How's the old burg?"

"Don't change any. Goin' to stop a while?"

"Sure am. This is Mrs. Pollard. Willie, Mrs. Pollard, meet Mr. Hypers."

"Pleestermeecher, Mis' Pollard," said Willie. "You can go right up. Front! Show Mr. and Mis' Pollard to one forty-two."

The Millett House was an example of the frequent anomaly in small midwestern cities, a first-rate hotel. The board of trade always believes a good hotel helps a town, so they get together and pass resolutions, and after a while a bunch of public-spirited citizens chip in—that is, they buy stock in the hotel company—and the hotel is built and started. It may make money, it may not. But the result is that almost anywhere you go in the midwestern States you find good, comfortable inns, with baths attached to the rooms, regular food, and head waiters in evening-clothes. They have waitresses in neat white aprons who carry astonishing loads on wide trays, take pains to see that you have all the butter you want, agree that it has been an awfully hot summer, but, thank goodness, it's getting quite nice now, and October is always a pleasant month, don't you think?

When Mr. and Mrs. Pollard sat down in the Millett House dining-room that night, the pretty girl who arranged the knives and forks at the places of the guests and upset the neat napkin cornucopias in order to fill the goblets with ice-water, looked at the bridegroom with smiling recognition.

"Why hello, Millie!" said he.

"Hello, Clarke!" said Millie, dimpling. "You're a big stranger; haven't seen *you* for a terrible while."

"Oh, about five years. How've you been? How's the old burg?"

"Doesn't change any. Want a regular dinner, or alley cart?"

"Dinner. This is Mrs. Pollard, Millie. Mrs. Pollard, Miss Jones."

"Pleestermeecher, Mis' Pollard," said Millie. "I'll get you some soup. And do you want your coffee with your dinner, or with your dessert?" She hurried away toward the kitchen.

"My gracious, Clarke, you know every one, don't you?" said Lucy. "It's home here."

"I went to school with Millie Jones," said her husband. "Her father keeps the grocery where mother traded for years. Wait till to-morrow."

On the following day they read in the *Morning Review:*

Mr. and Mrs. Clarke Pollard, of New York, N. Y., are now registered at the Millett House. Mr. Pollard was formerly a resident of this city, and now occupies a responsible office with the

Superior Trust Company, one of the leading financial institutions of the East. Mr. Pollard has many friends here, who are glad to see him in our midst again. It is understood his visit has to do with the affairs of the W. G. and R. B. Railway Company.

"But you aren't employed by the Superior Trust Company, and never were," said Lucy.

"Sample of journalistic accuracy," replied Clarke. "I guess they got their dope from Willie Hypers, down at the desk. I told him I was here to look into the railway situation; that's part of my plan."

"I wonder if it is part of your plan to pay this hotel for our lodging and food," suggested Lucy. "How much money have you?"

"Let's see." Clarke fished in his pockets. "Two dollars and sixty-five cents."

"I have exactly ninety-four cents," said Lucy.

"Over three dollars between us," rejoined her husband. "That's not bad, for a few days. Meanwhile we'll go easy. I haven't got another blessed thing to hock. Come along, I'm going to drop in at the railway company's office and see what's going to be done."

About half a block from the hotel a middle-aged gentleman with a close-cropped fringe of beard encircling his face from ear to ear, a clean-shaven upper lip, and a keen gray eye, stopped the couple.

"Hello, Clarke!" he said. "You're a big stranger. Haven't seen you for a mighty long time."

"Hello, Mr. Burgess! About five years, it's been. How've you been, and how's Mrs. Burgess? How's the old town?"

"Doesn't change much. Going to drop in at the bank for a chat?"

"Sure am. This is Mrs. Pollard, Mr. Burgess. Mr. Burgess is president of the West Gap National Bank, Lucy."

"Pleestermeecher," said Mr. Burgess. "Saw your name in the morning paper. Hope you can help us straighten out this railway tangle, Clarke."

He passed on.

"There," said Clarke, smiling. "See how I stand? Talk about a prophet not getting any honor—"

"A prophet with three dollars and fifty-nine cents," said Lucy sagely, "isn't going to get much honor, if they find out how nearly broke he is."

"Credit, my dear Lucy," said Clarke; "credit! That's the basis of all business."

"Yes," replied his wife mischievously, "it's also the basis of all failure."

"In the bright lexicon of Pollard, honey of my heart, there ain't no such word."

"Quick, Clarke," cried his wife; "knock wood! You frighten me."

Just then a woman walked straight up to the young man and held out a shapely, gloved hand. She was a matronly, prosperous lady, and she said:

"Why, Clarke Pollard! What a big stranger you are! We haven't seen you for the *longest* time!"

"Hello, Mrs. Regent! Yes, it's been about five years. Mighty glad to get back. How've you been, and how's Mr. Regent? How's the old town?"

"Oh, not much change, I'm afraid. You'll come and see us?"

"Sure. This is Mrs. Pollard, Mrs. Regent."

"So pleased to meet you," said Mrs. Regent. "How delightful! Where are you staying? At the Millett? I'll call, if you'll let me, Mrs. Pollard. I want to get acquainted."

The lady passed on with bows and smiles.

"She's lovely," said Lucy. "What a duck of a town! No wonder you wanted to come back!"

Mrs. Regent was not the only one of the many old friends and neighbors who greeted Clarke Pollard that morning, and the formula was hardly varied. It made a great impression on Lucy, this old-home-week stuff, as Pollard called it. After a while she said she felt as if she'd been introduced to the whole town.

It looked as if the newly married couple were in for a round of social gaiety, so many ladies said they wanted them to come in for tea, or dinner, or bridge.

"And how we're going to get by on three dollars and fifty-nine cents is more than I can see," said Lucy dubiously. "Can you get anything at the bank on your block of railway bonds?"

"Doubtful," said Pollard. "No one knows better than old Burgess how wabbly they are. He wouldn't lend anything on 'em. And besides, I don't want these folks to know I'm out of a job. I can't afford to let 'em think I'm broke. I've got to do a little bluffing. If we can squeeze by two or three weeks, things will come out all right."

They came in sight of the offices of the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway Company. Already they had remarked upon the shabbiness of the cars, the humpy contours of the track, and the general seediness of the enterprise.

"They think they have to have a good hotel to advertise the city," said Clarke, "but the traction outfit is sure some disgrace. Wonder what's the answer? This town's the center of a rich district, growing richer. The road has twelve miles of trackage, and there's no reason why it shouldn't pay. Darned if I can see—"

Lucy didn't come forward with an offhand opinion. Instead she said Pollard was undoubtedly right, and she guessed if he'd had the running of that duplex streak of rust with a lot of battle-scarred Noah's arks bumping over it, it would be a big earner. Then she thought, as her husband had business at the railway-office, she'd stroll back to the hotel by herself.

Pollard went up the steps of the small, square building next the car-barns, where were maintained the headquarters of the W. G. and R. B. Railway. Hardly had he opened the door when a clerk looked up from a desk and sang out:

"Hello, Clarke Pollard! Great Scott, but you're a big stranger!"

"I know it," said Pollard. "I've been told that about seventy-five times this morning. How're you, Ben? Say, who's boss around here?"

"William D. Wilton. Want to see him? Say, Clarke, I was reading in the paper you're some banker. Got those New York financial guys eating out of your hand, I suppose."

"Is Mr. Wilton around?"

"Due any minute. He's never in a hurry about getting to business early. Some guy!"

"Wilton?"

"Betcher! They don't make 'em any slicker. He's got this town roped, hog-tied, and branded."

"Never heard of him. Must have come here after I left."

"Three years ago. Convinced all the old shell-backs we needed a traction system. Guess he was right, too; but the joke of it is, we still need it!"

"So I judge. Pretty punk-looking outfit. Who built it?"

"Wilton Construction Company. See the idea? William D. is a bird. He got the thing organized, sold tons of stock, and floated a quarter-million of bonds. Lots of guys got stuck. Say, didn't your father have some?"

"Left me a few," said Clarke. "Poor old dad! He worked hard for that money, and it was all he had. He thought he was doing a big, public-spirited thing to put his entire little fortune into those bonds. I'm glad the crash didn't come while he was alive; he'd have been heart-broken."

"Well, Clarke, there's a lot of 'em left that are heart-broken. And the stockholders! Gee!"

"Who are they, mostly?"

"Small folks, farmers and working people. Wilton had a crew of salesmen out for months, going over three counties like a fine-tooth comb. Got out some flossy literature, too. Oh, believe me, he's some promoter. And then, when he'd sold the bonds and stock, he organized a construction company, he and some New York guys, and paid themselves the money for building the road. And such a job of railroad building!"

"Wonder the State commissioners would pass it."

"Ha! That's one of the funny things about it. He could get by the securities commission all right, because they're a bunch of dubs. But old Fishley, the chairman of the railroad board, is a wise owl. You betcher he knew what kind of a job it was. And listen, Clarke! You're a New York banker. You know where there's money—probably could put your hand right on it!"

"Oh, sure!" agreed Clarke. In his pocket his fingers touched the few coins that stood

between him and absolute pennilessness. "I've handled millions in the last few years."

"Well," said Ben, "that's what's needed. This guy Wilton and his friends have milked the proposition. They've robbed it and starved it and stunted it. It never did have a chance to get started. The poor construction has made operation and maintenance three times as costly as it should be; and the money that was raised, instead of being used to buy plenty of good rolling-stock and for other necessary things, was chewed up by Wilton in dozens of different ways. I believe he's a boss crook, but—"

"Then why the devil don't the stockholders kick him out? Are the bondholders going to foreclose right off?"

"Don't know. Looks a little that way—but you don't know how slick Wilton is. He can talk a bird off a tree. He'll get up in a meeting and make people cry, actually; I've seen him do it. He's got this neck of the woods hypnotized so the folks around here actually pity him! Fact!"

"I've heard of his kind. Hard folks to deal with—slippery."

"You said it. Still, he treats us fellows fine. Gosh, I feel kind of disloyal knocking him, at that. Only, I got a couple hundred dollars' worth of that stock myself, and if the bondholders foreclose, good night!"

"Wilton running the road?"

"Sure. He's chief cook and bottle-washer. And what he *doesn't* know about railroading would make you a James J. Hill if you *did* know it. Maybe you do know railroading; you bankers have to be posted, handling so many big deals and all."

Clarke Pollard shrugged his shoulders significantly and said nothing. He was so well dressed, so prosperous-looking, so thoroughly sophisticated, you could readily believe him a young Napoleon of Wall Street, if you wanted to. And Ben Tinkham, who had known Clarke from childhood, wanted to.

"I hope you take hold of this thing and help straighten it out," he said. "I heard quite a lot of folks say they seen in the paper you was here, and they guessed maybe you represented some big interests. I see you got married, too. Some swell New York dame, I s'pose? Say, here's the boss now."

Clarke Pollard turned and glanced toward the door, which swung inward to admit a tall, rather impressive gentleman, with hair and mustache almost white, a keen gray eye, and a manner of tremendous assurance. He nodded curtly to Ben and a couple of stenographers who made up the office force, and passed on into an inner room.

"Some class to the old man, eh?" observed Ben. "Want to meet him?"

"That's what I'm here for."

"Wait a minute, then."

Ben disappeared through the door of Wilton's private office, returning in a moment and beckoning to the visitor.

"Mr. Wilton," said Ben, "this is Mr. Pollard, one of our bondholders. He's connected with one of the big New York banks, and he's in town to see if there's any financial assistance he can lend the road to get us out of the hole."

"Gee!" thought Pollard. "Ben's piling it on thick."

Wilton was exceedingly polite. Immediately Clarke Pollard recognized a personality of considerable force, a man who would dominate through plausibility, who could be glib, persuasive, a master salesman, not overscrupulous, certainly not sincere, genial, and warm in his approach, but within as cold and heartless as a stone.

All at once it occurred to Pollard that if he was in West Gap to play a game of bluff, he'd got to play a far bigger game than he had at first estimated it. He instinctively felt himself alined in opposition to Wilton. Maybe it was the prejudice Ben Tinkham had implanted in his mind. He realized that he would make no headway if Wilton could help it.

He thought of that twenty-five thousand dollars his father had worked for so hard up to the last few months preceding his death, and the high confidence the old man had felt in the plan for the new traction company. Then he thought of those other bondholders and the hundreds of small stockholders, most of whom could ill afford to lose the amount of their investments. It made him boil to observe the easy com-

placence of this man who had robbed them so debonairly, and still had the nerve to think he could go on fooling every one in West Gap and its vicinity.

He stayed only a few minutes. He asked a few questions which Wilton answered or parried skilfully; and he answered or parried a few questions asked by the railroad man. On the surface there was nothing but smiling affability. But after Pollard had gone, Wilton went and asked Ben Tinkham:

"Just who is that young man, Tinkham?"

"Why, don't you know?" replied Ben. "That's Pollard, the famous New York banker. Some guy! Used to live here in West Gap, but the town got too small for him. New York's the place for a fellow to grow in—if he's got it in him to grow. Ain't that right?"

"Huh!" said Wilton, and afterward Ben told Clarke:

"Funny; I got a notion the old man sort of took a dislike to you, Clarke."

"Think so? He hasn't anything on me," replied Pollard.

But, after returning to the hotel and having luncheon with Lucy, the "famous New York banker" spent the balance of the day at the little desk in their room. He covered so many sheets of paper with writing and figures that he had to ring for more stationery three times before supper.

"What are you doing, honey?" asked Lucy sweetly.

"I'm figuring out how to refinance the W. G. and R. B."

"Goodness! On three dollars and fifty-nine cents?"

Clarke paid no attention to this delicate bit of repartee. He looked at his young wife with a kind of vague question.

"Lucy girl," he asked, "will you do something for me?"

"Why, of course."

"Let me see the pictures in that little manila envelope that fell on the sidewalk the day the pickpocket bothered you."

Lucy fished the envelope out of her pocketbook—the same pocketbook. Clarke tipped the prints out in his palm, looked them over thoughtfully, and put them back.

"What about them, dear?" asked his wife.

"Oh, nothing."

He wanted to ask a question—but something made him dread doing so. After all, what did he know about Lucy Gale?

CHAPTER VI.

DOUBTS AND DEBTS.

MR. MOREHOUSE F. BURGESS, president of the West Gap National Bank, acted as chairman of the meeting of the bondholders, some fifteen in number, who were foregathered to consider the affairs of the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway. Mr. Clarke Pollard was among those present, as was Mr. William D. Wilton.

It was the purpose of Wilton to prevent a receivership. He said he very seriously questioned the wisdom of a receivership at just this time. He said the road had only been running twenty months, and he didn't feel that he had been given quite a fair chance to demonstrate that all the predictions he had made concerning it were true. The default of interest on the bonds would be made up, he was sure, out of the current year's earnings. It would be a calamity, he said, and work great hardship on the stockholders if the bondholders took over the property. It would make the stock practically worthless.

"I am not a bondholder," said Wilton. "I am, however, a large stockholder. I feel that I represent other stockholders, many of them people who cannot afford to lose the amount they have put into this enterprise. I have put my time and money in it, and have looked forward to its success as the crowning achievement of my life. Gentlemen, this is a serious matter for us, the stockholders."

Thus adroitly Wilton alined the stockholders and the bondholders as opponents. He put the bondholders on the defensive. He admitted, certainly, that they had legal right to foreclose. But, he argued, wouldn't they be in a much better position a year later, even though the interest were still in default, as the property would be older and

more valuable? Of course, he said, the bondholders were fully protected by the company's property, on which the bonds represented a first mortgage.

"You bought the bonds," he said, "in a spirit of public service. At this time you won't gain anything by foreclosure; you will lose. If you wait, you will probably find foreclosure unnecessary, and you will be able to say that by being patient you showed the right spirit of local pride."

And then, suddenly taking them into his confidence, Mr. William D. Wilton produced and laid before that assembly the prospectus of a plan so promising, so glittering with profits, so marvelously comprehensive, that nearly every man in the room was quite swept off his feet. The plan involved the expansion of the little twelve-mile W. G. and R. B. into a hundred-mile trunk-line connecting two important industrial centers. He demonstrated how, because this new line would cut off twenty miles of haul, a tremendous volume of through business would be diverted from certain roads.

"Now, gentlemen," he said earnestly, "this is told you in the most sacred confidence. There's politics in it, diplomacy, finesse. I have had to work carefully; but I can say to you that within a few days now I expect that certain influences, which I am at present forbidden to reveal, will see the W. G. and R. B. in possession of one of the broadest railroad charters ever granted in this State."

When the papers next day reported the meeting of the W. G. and R. B. bondholders, they said simply that further action had been indefinitely postponed; that new and comprehensive plans were under consideration and being worked out under the masterly direction of President and General Manager Wilton; and that the stockholders as well as the bondholders were to have every assurance against full protection from ultimate loss. And, oddly enough, the name of the famous New York banker, Mr. Clarke Pollard, formerly of this city, was mentioned only as among those present.

"Honey," said Lucy, a little banteringly, "this doesn't say you took charge of the meeting and showed them how to straighten out all their troubles. Didn't you think three dollars and nine cents was enough to swing it on? I'm sorry I spent that fifty cents for laundry—maybe it would have made a difference."

"Never you mind, kid," said Pollard; but he looked at her oddly.

Mrs. Timothy Regent, wife of the proprietor of Regent's Dry-Goods Emporium, lost her diamond brooch. She gave a big party in honor of Clarke Pollard and Lucy. There was a dinner and a dance afterward in a big barn on the Regents' fancy fruit farm, just outside the town, and President Wilton, of the W. G. and R. B., furnished a couple of private cars, starting from in front of the Millett House at six o'clock.

The *Review* alleged that an enjoyable time was had by all present, but the *Review* couldn't know everything. Mrs. Regent thought she was having a good time until, very late in the evening, she discovered the loss of her brooch. Clarke Pollard, whom everybody greeted with cordial familiarity by his first name, and congratulated upon having such a love of a wife, had a good time until—

But just a moment. Everything in order. There were several other people supposed to have had a good time, subsequent events proving quite the contrary.

The Regents' barn was full of hay, the odor of which mingled delicately with the perfumes used by the ladies of West Gap. Later it was pleasantly complicated with the smell of coffee. At one end of the great floor-space McTish's orchestra jazzed with all the abandon of a Broadway cabaret. Mooney & Son, caterers, served the dinner, which was delicious, take it from the *Review*, and the "collation" around midnight was equally acceptable to the hungry dancers. Decorations by Moss & Primrose, florists, 237 Main Street.

It was a disappointment to most of the young men that Clarke Pollard and his wife didn't know how to do the newer dances. They thought it odd that New Yorkers should be shy in that respect. Mrs. Pollard, however, proved an apt pupil, which went a long way toward assuaging the grief of the lucky three or four who

were privileged to show her how simple the steps were. Presumably Mrs. Pollard was having a delightful evening.

Clarke was taken in hand successively by Gertie Dole, Edith Trask, and Miriam Hopkins, who found him, so they insisted, a natural-born dancer. By eleven thirty Clarke decided that he had missed a good deal by never having learned to dance. New York certainly hadn't anything on this intimate small-town life, where one knew everybody. It was gratifying to be a twelve-o'clock fellow in a nine-o'clock town. He felt the pleasing glamour that surrounded him in the eyes of his old neighbors by reason of his being a New Yorker. It tickled him to have every one approve so heartily of Lucy. She looked lovely in a simple evening-frock that had been bought with the proceeds of Clarke's stick-pin and watch along with other necessaries. He had had to scratch gravel to finance their trip West, and now congratulated himself that he had had sense enough not to let his dress-suit go along with the greater part of his wardrobe.

Clarke was staking a great deal on this trip. The little block of bonds left him by his father were certainly worth saving, and from what he had learned of conditions he could see it was going to be no easy matter. Wilton had, as Ben Tinkham said, a hypnotic strangle hold on the people of West Gap. But all that Pollard could see in the railroad man was a wily promoter of the get-rich-quick type, and he had not the least faith in Wilton's glibly explained plan for further expansion.

It was eleven thirty before Pollard realized that the strenuous labors of the evening made certain demands upon muscles unaccustomed to exercise. He was tired. So he slid unobtrusively through a side door, and out into the stubble-field that lay adjacent to the great barn. The strumming of the orchestra filtered out thinly, accompanied by a sort of dull vibration due to the impact of many rhythmic feet upon the barn floor.

Pollard wandered perhaps twenty yards from the building. Although it was autumn, the night was almost as warm as summer, and the stars shone clearly in a sky of dark-blue velvet. It was very soothing, and he thought if he could just sit down there in the transparent darkness and think a little, it would be restful and helpful. A cigarette would taste good.

The match which he had been about to strike on a stone remained cold in his fingers. He was standing by a low stone wall, beyond which lay the great, orderly orchard. And there was a white blotch, there in the shadow under the trees, and near it a black figure hardly visible in the darkness.

"Couple of spoons," thought Clarke, and turned to walk away. A voice said:

"If I thought you'd followed me here—" The heavy tones were those of Wilton.

"No, no," said the other. "I—I have tried to think I should never see you again."

"Great Scott! Lucy!"

"You've grown pretty," said Wilton. "You could have done better than to marry that upstart. Famous New York banker! Bah! Plain four-flusher!"

"That sounds funny, coming from you!"

"Oh, it does? Well, I've got those yaps eating out of my hand, believe me! You used to be a clever kid. You'd have done well if you had played your cards right. I can't see any future for you now, married to that poor fish!"

"Don't say such things," said Lucy. "He's splendid! He's honest and clean and square; he'd never do the things you've done, he couldn't. Some day he'll be a big success. He's got the nerve and he thinks straight. You have nerve and think crooked."

"Haw!" said Wilton contemptuously. "Say, you'd have a fat chance with him if he got wise to some of your especial talents, eh?"

"Don't you dare say such things!"

"He'll find out some day; when he does, come and see me. I can think of a thousand ways a clever, pretty girl like you could be useful. Ever pull off any light-fingered tricks since the old days?"

"I won't listen!" cried Lucy. "You miserable hound! I hope these people turn around and put you where you belong. I'm going."

She turned and walked toward the wall.

Pollard, unable to get away without being seen, crouched in the shadow of an overhanging tree, his heart beating like a riveter.

Wilton assisted Lucy politely to mount the wall and hop down on the side nearer the barn. He was saying:

"If they do, be careful, young lady. I don't want to trace anything to you. I'm aces in this neck of the woods just now, and there is good money here for me for three months yet. Then the next fellow can have the leavings. Give me a Chinaman's chance and I'll clean up half a million cool. So you see, I can't afford to be interfered with. You stick to your own graft, whatever it is, and let me alone. Say, have you noticed that big diamond brooch of Mrs. Regent's? Right in your line, kid!"

"You evil-minded pig," said Lucy, and that was the last Pollard heard of the disturbing colloquy.

For him the soft night air was no longer soothing. The stars in the blue velvet sky mocked at him. The music, filtering out from the barn, sounded harsh and discordant. He suddenly hated West Gap and everything appertaining to it. The kindly and hospitable friends of his earlier days who sought to make his home-coming a pleasure for him, he suddenly despised. A lot of yaps! They'd let an unspeakable crook put it all over them, and Pollard didn't care! The world, like an apple, had suddenly gone rotten from skin to core.

Fool! To marry a pair of blue eyes, and with them a past he had been too fatuous to investigate! All he knew was that Lucy had been living with an aged and invalided clergyman and his wife. Probably a couple of old frauds!

Bitterly he pondered the wise words of his friend Joinder concerning the frequency of the birth of suckers. He'd run the good impulse thing into the ground!

He concealed his misgivings from his wife, however. He thanked God he was sport enough to swallow his medicine. He set his teeth and knit his brows, thinking hard about the W. G. and R. B. So Wilton was going to clean up a half-million, eh? Like hell!

And then, next afternoon, Lucy asked him to mail for her a package to Mrs. Gilbert, the old minister's wife. It was a small package, neatly done up, about as big as the palm of his hand. By this time, in spite of rigid economy, the family exchequer had dwindled to a dollar ten. Lucy said she hated him to spend money for postage, but she felt it was absolutely necessary. And would he please register the package?

Clarke went to the post-office and performed the errand. Coming out, he met Ben Tinkham.

"Hello, Clarke," said Ben. "Have a good time at the party last night? I guess everybody did, 'xcept Mrs. Regent. What do you know? She lost a diamond pin or locket or something worth three thousand dollars!"

"Holy cats!" said Clarke feelingly. "You don't say so, Ben. Isn't that fierce!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNFORESEEN BACKER.

"DID you hear the dreadful thing that happened to Mrs. Regent?" asked Lucy Pollard that afternoon. "How unfortunate, after all her kindness to people, especially to us! Do you suppose any one could have stolen it?"

"How do I know?" rejoined Clarke grumpily. "People think so."

"I don't believe it."

"Don't you?" asked her husband.

"Of course you never can tell," she returned. "Sometimes I suppose a thief gets in under false colors. It is easy to be fooled."

"Very; for instance, there are Mr. and Mrs. Clarke Pollard. This town takes us for the real thing; I'm a banker, and you're a New York society woman, 'one of the younger set.' Lord, I thought I wanted to be rash! I thought I could come here and bluff my way—"

"We've done splendidly," said Lucy. "We only had about three dollars and a half to start, and we have still nearly a dollar; and we've been here two weeks. Honey, I'll help you all I can, truly I will!"

Suddenly Lucy threw her arms about her husband and tucked her adorable nose into

the hollow of his neck. From this point she could be heard saying something which Clarke took to be an assurance of love and loyalty. It was very touching, and Lucy was the most seductive and lovable creature in the world. Clarke felt mean and guilty, and, to make up for it, caressed his wife fondly and assured her that just by being in the same town with him she was giving him wonderful assistance.

"But that isn't real, tangible help," protested Lucy. "I want to do something definite. It must be so difficult for you not to have a little ready money. You can't buy the other men cigars, or—why, I was thinking you ought to give the rest of the bondholders a dinner and then place your plan before them. Men are always so much more receptive after a good dinner. And you need some new gloves. Then there are all those stockholders, out in the country around West Gap, and up through Rocky Bottom Valley. You ought to have an automobile and call on every one of them personally."

"Can't help it," said the glum Pollard. "No use crying for the moon."

"I don't know," said Lucy. "Perhaps I'm not so useless."

Clarke Pollard was a busy man—and as for finance, he learned the real meaning of the frenzied kind. The popular idea of frenzied finance visualizes millions running amuck, crazy, irresponsible millions dashing around among the herd and stampeding a lot of perfectly respectable, placid, grazing millions into a riot of tramping hoofs and tossing horns—you know that old cattle range metaphor. Poor Clarke Pollard couldn't stampede eight cents. And his anxious maneuvers to cling to every tricky, slippery dime of his fast dwindling resources would have made Wall Street weep.

Had it not been for his credit at the hotel, where it was taken for granted he was good for any amount, the game would have been up before the bride and groom had ornamented West Gap thirty-six hours.

Clarke vibrated between the bank and the office of the W. G. and R. B. He was careful to time his visits so as not to run across Wilton. But when he could have a couple of hours with Ben Tinkham, he made good use of such interviews. Ben was thoroughly posted regarding the traction company. He knew where to put his hands on valuable facts and figures relating to earnings and expenses, and was a mine of information.

"Of course," he said, "I don't know much about Wilton's construction company. That was a deal he pulled off pretty slick, and the books are kept in a safety-box up at the bank. Believe me, old Si Fishley, chairman of the State railroad commissioners, he knows a lot, though. But shucks! Those guys always keep under cover."

"Fishley is a rich man, I suppose."

"That's the doost of it," said Ben. "He's poor—he's worse'n poor. He owes more money'n any man in this State, so they tell me. He'd a gone bankrupted long ago if it hadn't been for his friends. His job's a political one, too. And they do say he paid up quite a lot of bills a couple of years back, but I hear he's poorer'n ever, now. Course the State pays his expenses ridin' around inspectin' railroads; but he's quite a poker player, and some say he's lost money in them Wall Street stocks."

"Well, Ben, if you can get me that list of the W. G. and R. B. stockholders, it would certainly help a heap."

"Sure, Clarke; take me a couple days to copy 'em off, working odd times. Don't want Wilton should catch me!"

At the bank Pollard spent quite a lot of time with Mr. Burgess, president of the bank.

"Any one would think," said Lucy, "Mr. Burgess would let you have a couple of hundred dollars."

"Do you suppose I'd ask him? Not much. That would be a confession I was broke. And yet I want to make a trip East within a few days."

"On eighty-eight cents?"

"I want to go to Schenectady and see the Universal Electric folks. The road is underpowered. It needs a lot of new equipment, and the refinancing is going to depend largely on what arrangements can be made for credit with the Universal for a couple of hundred thousand dollars worth of—"

"Honey," said Lucy, reverently, "the way you speak of large sums of money fills me with awe."

"Machinery and stuff," went on Pollard. "And then I have an errand in New York."

"You can go," said Lucy. "Here!"

She opened that famous pocketbook of hers, the one the thief had endeavored to take by force on the morning of Clarke's visit to S. Gumpel's Restaurant and Cafeteria. It was the same pocketbook from which had fluttered the manila envelope containing some small photographic prints.

Now she extracted a neat roll of yellow-backed bills.

"Would a hundred dollars be enough?" she asked.

"Holy smoke!" remarked Clarke Pollard; and something clutched him in the pit of his stomach. He looked at his wife, and gasped.

"I don't wonder you're surprised," said she. "Here, boy, take it."

"I—I—can't," stammered Clarke. "I can't!"

"I don't see why not: goodness gracious, it was hard enough to—to—to get it. Now I want it to do you—us—some good. Here!"

She thrust a roll of bills into his pocket.

"Where—where—" began Clarke.

"Did I get it? Oh, I sha'n't tell you—not now. Some day, when you've made a barrel of money, you can pay me back, but now—oh, I don't want to say anything!"

"Then I can't use it," said her husband, with an attempt at sternness.

"All right, then," said Lucy, calmly. "Give it back to me. I can. I can pay our hotel bill, and buy you some handkerchiefs, and me a shirt-waist and lots of things."

Lucy was a little piqued, and Clarke was on the defensive at once.

"Well," he said, lamely, "if I knew that you didn't—hadn't—weren't putting yourself to some hardship—"

Lucy became apparently angry.

"Clarke Pollard, what are you talking about? Aren't you my husband? For goodness' sake, haven't I a right to do my share? Didn't you pawn almost all your clothes and your watch and everything else you could turn into money to buy me what I needed, and get us out here? Can't I have the privilege of doing *something?*"

"But I thought—"

"No, you didn't; you only thought you thought. You imagined yourself in the act of thinking; but you didn't really think. Otherwise you'd have—oh, Clarke Pollard, you make me so *mad!*"

At this point the bride began to cry, and had to be soothed a little; but she stubbornly declined to say where she got the money.

"I was just going to tell you," she said; "only for your being so — so stupid I would have. Now you'll have to wait."

And Clarke waited. While he waited, he went to Schenectady, and New York City, and came back to West Gap; and all the time he kept wondering and wondering about many things.

But Mrs. Regent, wife of the proprietor of Regent's Dry-goods Emporium and leader of fashion in West Gap still grieved for the lost three-thousand-dollar brooch.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOBILIZATION ON ALL FRONTS.

IT now became known suddenly that Mr. Clarke Pollard, the "famous New York banker and Wall Street financier," as the *Review* called him, was taking an active hand in the plans for the rehabilitation of the W. G. and R. B. Railway Company. And following the transpiration of this intelligence, William D. Wilton, president of that organization, sought the assistance of printers' ink to spread the news of his plans for the expansion of the "system," as he called it.

The idea of extending the W. G. and R. B. through to Garrickdale, eighty-eight miles beyond the present terminus of the road, caught hold like wild-fire. It was a project that had hardly been thought of, but the genius of William D. Wilton had perceived its possibilities, and everybody wondered why it remained so long nothing more than an undiscovered potentiality.

Wilton insisted that the *Review* furnish him a proof of his interview before he would allow it printed, and when it appeared, it had the Wiltonian approval from initial to final period. He even dictated the opening sentence, which read as follows:

A *Review* reporter called on Mr. William D. Wilton Tuesday afternoon, at the offices of the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway Company, and after some persuasion induced him to make public the following brief outline of his plans for the future of the property, and, in fact, for West Gap, Bottom Valley, Lords', Montgilder, and Superine Counties.

Wilton had the article clipped from several hundred copies of the *Review* which he bought for the purpose, and mailed them to all stockholders and bondholders of the company.

Then he started out in an automobile and toured the entire territory served by the road, calling personally on every stockholder, and on every farmer of consequence who might become a stockholder or who might ship his produce or his cattle or his family over it.

But whenever he mentioned the bondholders, he never failed to emphasize the conflict of interest between them and the stockholders. The bondholders were in a position to foreclose, he said. He was working tooth and nail to prevent it. If they took over the property, he said, the stockholders would lose every dollar. It was up to the stockholders to use every ounce of influence on the bondholders to refrain from foreclosure.

That meant some influence, too. For instance, there was old Bill Glauson. Bill was worth thirty-five or forty thousand dollars, including the value of his farm, and he was growing better off all the time. The poorer farmers in the valley looked up to Bill. Many of the more prosperous ones did so, too. Wilton had Bill lined up early in the game.

Glauson rode into West Gap in a Ford car with one of those attachments—you know, the kind that takes the fore legs of the Ford and the hind legs of a freight-car and gets a ten-ton truck — or maybe it is only a ton—out of it. Glauson sold the contents of the truck and dropped into the bank to deposit the proceeds of the sale he had made.

"Burgess around?" he asked.

Mr. Burgess was around, and greeted so important a customer with politeness and smiles.

"You fellers goin' to foreclose on the Rocky Bottom Railway?" he asked, bluntly.

"You mean the bondholders, Bill? Well, as to that, I don't think a decis—"

"Well, lemme tell you, Burgess. If the bondholders forecloses, I take my account away from this here bank, and I hear quite some others up my way says the same."

He grinned, allowing Mr. Burgess to infer what "quite some" might indicate.

"Moreover," went on the farmer, "the's lots of trade from up our way goin' to Sadler Brothers. They're bondholders. If the's any foreclosin' did, Sadlers loses my trade and some others' I could mention."

"But don't you think the bondholders have some rights—"

"Not so much's the stockholders. The bondholders can wait. When Mr. Wilton's plans is carried out, we fellers is goin' to make a b'ilin' o' money out of our stock. You bondholders thinks you'll have to be contented with five per cent, no matter how much the road earns. So you're cal'latin' to grab the property. Us stockholders ain't goin' to stand it."

"But you realize the bondholders are now losing their interest."

"It 'll be paid," said Bill, reassuringly. "Wilton says so, an' he'd ought to know. Smartest railroad man in this State, lemme tell ye. Us stockholders is with him, and if the bondholders thinks they can afford to antagonize pretty nigh a thousand of us, let 'em try it. You s'pose Lishe Gordon 'd ever go back to State legislater if he got us down on 'im? He's a bondholder. We know it. If him and the rest starts to skin us stockholders out of our investment, he wouldn't have no more chance 'n a smokeless powder dog chasin' a cast iron cat through—"

"Don't you consider that the bondholders would act for the best interests of

all concerned? Suppose they should come forward with a feasible plan to save the road from bankruptcy, put it on its feet, and protect the stockholders as well—"

"Rats! Wouldn't trust ye. Mr. Wilton says you fellers'll grab the prop'ty an' take it away f'm us, an' then when you got your clutches onto it an' we're friz out, you'll develop into a money-maker f'r y'rselves, 'nstead of us! He's foxy; you can't fool that feller none. He's a reg'lar railroader, too, and us stockholders is right behind him. So you bondholders better not start nothin'."

Mr. Burgess felt that Glauson was a spokesman for a great many people, and that his warning was not one to be lightly disregarded.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, then," said Clarke Pollard. "Let the committee of bondholders send out notices and call a big mass-meeting, open to every one. Get the farmers and their friends to come to town on a certain day to attend the meeting. Make it a special holiday, and hold the meeting in the opera-house. The merchants will be tickled to death to have the streets crowded with visitors. The *Review* will boost the plan. And then we'll have Wilton get up and tell his story and we'll tell ours and we'll let the people judge who's acting for the best interests of all concerned, not only the bondholders and stockholders but for the whole of West Gap County."

The conservative Burgess had to think that over and call a meeting about it, and this he did, at which the thing was thoroughly threshed out. Burgess reported his tilt with Bill Glauson, and estimated its significance. And then young Clarke Pollard got to his feet and spoke words as follows and to wit:

"You men remember me as a little shaver running around town with the other kids; and then as a skinny young upstart with a swelled head who thought West Gap wasn't big enough for me. Well, let me tell you, I'm strong for West Gap. And let me tell you something else. I'm no more a New Yorker than the rest of you. I brought my wife here to settle and be a West Gapper if you'd accept us.

"Now, I'm not a banker, either. I was employed by a bank, and I got fired for a small error in banking judgment. I cashed a check for an unidentified person. Mr. Burgess is a banker, and he knows that's a serious matter. I made up the amount out of my own pocket and I still have the check I cashed—well, that's another story. When I left the bank I thought I was well fixed, because I owned the bonds father left me—these bonds of the W. G. and R. B. Right then I was notified that the interest was defaulted. So I came out here to see if I could save my fortune—the little my good old dad left me. You knew what kind of a man he was."

"Salt of the earth," said Dorsey Regent, husband of the society leader with the missing brooch.

"The paper has been playing me up as a big gun. I let it go at that, but I'm not a four-flusher, gentlemen; I don't want to be. I want to be a West Gapper, and help make the town better because I came here and brought my wife—"

"Now you're talkin'," remarked Olaf Erickson, proprietor of Erickson's drug-store and inventor of the famous liniment that bears his name. "My wife says she's yust sweetest t'ing ever ban come to Wes' Gop."

"Now here's the plan I have in mind," went on Clarke. "President Burgess has helped me, and I've been to New York, and—"

He spoke for a solid hour. His plan was sane, well advised, feasible. If only the stockholders would listen to reason.

"The trouble's Wilton," said Pollard. "He's lined 'em up as opposition. They think we're out to rob them. He's filled them full of rosy dreams of untold millions—old promotion stuff. It seems never to lose its potency. A boob will always put his money into something gauzy, and never learns anything by being stung once. He'll go and do it right over again."

Then, as if fearful that some eavesdropper might hear, Pollard said in a low tone:

"I happen to know he's boasted he'll clean up half a million in the next three months. Gentlemen, we've got to head him some way."

The news of the coming mass meeting spread rapidly. Clarke's name was mentioned as the leading speaker for the bondholders. The *Review* was quite sure the young Napoleon of finance would have something to say worth listening to, and hazarded the opinion that a debate between him and President Wilton of the W. G. and R. B. would be well worth traveling miles to hear.

And then, one day, Mr. William D. Wilton sent a note to the Millett House, asking the pleasure of a short visit from Mr. Clarke Pollard.

Clarke went to see the railroad man at the latter's office.

"Now, Pollard," said Wilton, abruptly, "I want to know what you fellows are up to."

"That will be disclosed at the meeting, Mr. Wilton."

"There won't be any meeting. I decline to be present."

"Then we'll have to hold it without you. I supposed you'd want to be there to present your case."

"My case is already presented. I am in perfect harmony with the stockholders. The road is going through to Garrickdale. I am arranging for the financing; in fact, as you doubtless know, hundreds of stockholders have promised me they would back the project. Their bondholders will not dare to—"

"The bondholders are not threatening anything, Mr. Wilton. They simply want a hearing, an opportunity to put the plan up to all the stockholders in a public manner. This is a matter that concerns the welfare of the entire region. The bonders only want to do what is best for the pub—"

"Listen, Pollard," said Wilton. "I know all that line of talk. Why, young man, I was handing out that kind of bunk before you were out of knickerbockers. But you do it well, I admit. That's why I've asked you to come down here. You own twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of the bonds. Suppose we make a deal, whereby you are paid your money?"

"I don't get you."

"I mean, if you'll go along with me, instead of with that bunch of yaps, I'll gladly pay you twenty-five thousand dollars for a year's work, and at the end of a year I'll give you a chance to make ten times as much, if you're as smart as I think you are."

"Nothing doing, Wilton," said Clarke. "In the first place, I don't trust you, and in the second place, I wouldn't turn my back on the bondholders. I take it that's what you want me to do, double-cross my crowd."

"If you want to call it that, yes. But if you don't, what do you expect?"

"I expect, with a fair show, we'll beat you, Wilton, and save the road. You're a professional promotor. The way you make your money is out of promotion, not out of legitimate earnings of a property. This road can't afford to pay the prices you get for your services, valuable as they are."

"Can't it?" sneered Wilton. "Well, it's going to. And you're not going to butt in and upset my game. I warn you!"

"Then you won't come to the meeting?"

"There will be none. You are going to use your influence with your bondholding friends to call it off."

"Don't make me laugh, Wilton."

"If I am forced," said Wilton, scowling, "to get up there on the opera-house platform and talk to the population of this half-baked burg, somebody'll have to pay!"

"Them's harsh words, Nell," said Pollard smiling.

"They're true words. And you'll pay more than any one. I'll put the people wise to the kind of four-flusher you are. Wall Street Napoleon and all the rest of the lies you've told about yourself! I'll make you the laughing stock of this whole valley, just so sure as you step your foot on that platform."

"Very good," said Pollard, calmly, "if you want to get personal, *we'll open up that little matter of the Clifton Unified Railways Corporation back in—*"

"Good God!" cried Wilton. Pollard grinned.

The railroad man glared at his young opponent from eyes that began to burn with the cold fires of hate, not unmixed with fear. Then a threatening leer curled his mouth.

"If you pull anything like that," he

snarled, "you'll never get over it. If this thing's to be for blood, the man with the strongest weapon wins. And I win."

"I'm not afraid of ridicule," returned Pollard. "I was born and brought up in this town. Folks know me. They'll stand for a little newspaper fluff about me; but suppose I give 'em a little hint concerning your record—"

"Not on your life," roared Wilton. "You don't dare! The minute you spring anything like that, you're dead in this town, where you were born and everybody knows you! Dead and buried! Know why? Well, then, I'll tell you! Who got away with Mrs. Regent's brooch?"

Pollard shook his head.

"How the devil would I know?" he demanded; but he was bluffing desperately, and behind his defiant exterior he was sinking, sinking—

"Your wife!" screamed Wilton. "And I know it!"

CHAPTER IX.

GHOSTS.

CLARKE POLLARD stared at President Wilton of the W. G. and R. B. Railway from a kind of helpless daze. All his suspicions, accumulating with increasing force during the last few days, surged upon his mind with a choking flood.

"What do you think of that?" demanded Wilton, triumphantly. "Mrs. Regent entertains you people and then you turn and pay her in that kind of coin. I've no doubt you knew all about it; the thing that surprises you is that I know it myself. It's pretty valuable information to use against a blackmailer."

"Look here, Wilton, what the devil—"

"Am I driving at? You threaten to spread a story here to hurt me, regardless of its truth. You speak of the Clifton Unified Railways Corporation. That is an old matter which was dropped long ago by the authorities."

"Then why did you change your name?" demanded Pollard. "And when you landed in this town, where did you get twenty-five thousand dollars to start promoting the West Gap and Rocky Bottom scheme?"

"Listen, Pollard," soothed Wilton, returning to his former conciliatory tone; "you're a clever young chap; you know a lot about finance and you have friends in the banking business. I don't doubt you might spin a thread in New York, and you stand in well with old Burgess and his gang here in West Gap. You have influence with those people.

"Now I've got enough stuff on you—that is, on your wife—to have you run out of town. I'll do it, too, if you start anything. On the other hand, you have one thing a promotor needs more than anything in the world, and that's nerve. Where would I be if I hadn't nerve? Why not hop into the game with me? We'll clean up a nice thing here, all perfectly legitimate, too. There's a couple of hundred thousand in it for you. I've got the whole county, yes, the State, stirred up about the extension plan, and we can sell a million dollars' worth of stock in the next sixty days. I'll keep my mouth shut, you do the same. You know old Burgess's weaknesses. He's just spoiling to be trimmed, I can see that. You can sell a big block of stock to every one of those bondholders—lot of sheep. Then, when this thing is cleaned up, we take our profit and move on to some other Yapville. I'll soon have the new charter and incorporation papers for a ten million dollar railroad company, and if I can't rig up a contract with you as fiscal agent (with me as a silent partner) that will give you three dollars out of every four you take in, I'll quit the promotion game and go to driving a grocer's cart."

Pollard looked interested. His eyes shone; his breath came and went quickly.

"Would you honestly let me into as good a thing as that?" he asked. "Suppose I could go to New York and place a big bunch of bonds?"

"Sure, sure!" cried Wilton. "And we'll form a construction company among our friends to take the contract to build twenty or thirty miles of road just as soon as the new bonds are placed. We can make ten thousand dollars a mile profit."

Pollard's eyes glittered. Wilton judged that avarice was eating the young man's heart out,

"Was that how you built the first twelve miles?" asked Clarke. "That would be a hundred and twenty thousand—"

"Hold on," said Wilton. "I didn't say that. But you don't think I handled all that money without some of it sticking to my fingers, do you?"

"I don't see how we could get our road approved by the State commissioners," said Pollard. "Don't they make a pretty strict inspection?"

Wilton laughed.

"Ever know Fishley, the chairman?" he asked. "He and I are very good friends, very good friends. Don't worry about the commission, my boy. Well, what do you say? Will you keep your mouth shut and come in with me?"

"I'll talk it over with my wife," said Clarke.

"All right," said Wilton. "And tell her I said I knew all about the Regent brooch. That 'll fetch her—"

Pollard was on his feet. He had stood as much as he could. He leaned over Wilton's desk and shouted:

"You dirty thief! Talk about blackmail! Why, before I'd touch a penny of your money I'd see you choke! I'd starve! Furthermore, what you say about Lucy is the biggest lie you ever told in your life and the meanest. That's going some! The Regent brooch, eh? You were at the party when it disappeared! You probably took it yourself, you poor unhung jailbird! I wouldn't bet it isn't in your safe, now."

Wilton, livid with rage, arose.

"Maybe I'd better tell you a few more little things about your wife! She's a lady with a choice past, believe me—"

Wilton got no further, vocally speaking. Pollard's fist shot out and Pollard's knuckles jolted him so hard just south of the nose that he sat down violently, and as his chair tipped over from the sudden impact of his weight, he landed on the back of his head with a thump.

"Ben," said Pollard, stepping out of the president's private office, "I smashed your boss. When he comes to tell him I hope he'll have me arrested. Tell him if he wants some more of the same medicine to call up the hotel and I'll be right over. Good-by, Ben. Hope I see you at the stockholders meeting next week."

Ben Tinkham found Wilton sitting on the floor in a half-stunned condition, rubbing the back of his head with one hand, his bruised upper lip with the other.

"I tripped over my rug," he said. "Had a bad fall. Asked young Pollard to step out and tell you to call a doctor."

"I guess you don't need any doctor, do you?" asked Ben.

"Well, I don't know; maybe not just yet," replied the president. He got to his feet, and Ben Tinkham couldn't make up his mind whether the boss really did know exactly what had happened.

Clarke went back to the Millett House and found Lucy sitting in their room, mending a pair of his socks. She looked up with her amazing blue eyes and that wonderful smile of hers.

"Hello, Clarkey-boy," she said. "Any tidings of great joy? Your new hat's really very becoming and goodness knows you needed it."

"I hear they know who took Mrs. Regent's brooch," said her husband, abruptly.

"Really?" Lucy dimpled with interest. "Who was it? How was it managed? Did they put him in jail?"

"It wasn't a him," said Clarke. "I hear it was—a woman."

"Poor thing!" rejoined his wife. "How terrible! Think of the temptation it must have taken to make her do such a thing? Tell me, who was it? You know I'm not very familiar with people here."

"I was told, but I can't tell—not just now."

He watched her keenly. The even pink and white color of her face did not change a shade. She looked disappointed.

"Oh, I suppose it's somebody quite well known," she hazarded. "But I think you might tell me, even if they are trying to hush it up."

Clarke Pollard shook his head gloomily and went out. Lord! She was a corking actress, if what Wilton said was true. Of course, he insisted to himself, it wasn't true.

Wilton was a blackleg. Clarke was sure

of that. But Lucy knew Wilton, as the interview in the Regent orchard the night of the party proved. Back in his head Clarke had that cankering knowledge. He was fairly sure that Wilton was the long-since-absconded cashier of the Clifton Unified Railways Corporation back in the suburb of New York where Clarke had boarded during his early days in the East. It had been on the tip of his tongue to tell the bondholders this; but to accuse a man of crime is no light offense. He had believed that, with the plan he had worked out, and as a result of his trip to Schenectady and New York, he could beat Wilton in a fair fight without resorting to such accusation.

But Lucy, his Lucy—the girl he had loved from the first moment he saw her blue eyes through the wicket of his teller's window! He'd believe in her in spite of all the lying Wiltons in creation! He'd married her and he'd stick by her. He thought of Joinder's sneers at "the better impulse" theory, and the Sixty-An-Hour Club.

"By George!" he grumbled. "Those blue eyes of hers never lied to me! And I'm not so sure I've been fair with her!"

He took from a pocket the check for forty-seven dollars he had cashed for Lucy, the check which had lost him his job in the Superb National Bank. It looked all right. Why had he not cashed it long ago? He admitted that, although protesting to himself that it was certainly good, he hadn't cashed it at his own bank before leaving New York because he wasn't sure and he hadn't cashed it here in West Gap for the same reason.

Certainly it wasn't because he didn't need the forty-seven dollars. It was just that he had, well, say only ninety-seven and a half per cent confidence in the check, and he felt unjust and guilty toward his wife for the lack of that two and one-half per cent.

Now he marched straight up to the teller's window at the West Gap Bank. Of course the teller knew Clarke Pollard; they'd gone to school together.

"Cash that for me, will you, Fred?" said Clarke.

God knew, he thought, if the thing went "blooey" he'd be in pretty bad, and so would Lucy.

"Stick your name on the back," said the teller. "Kind of late to cash this, isn't it? It's dated three week ago. Guess you didn't need money very bad."

"Fred," said Clarke, "if you ever need money as bad as I've needed it sometimes, you'll starve to death."

"Gee!" said Fred, thrusting four tens, and five and a two through the wicket. "I guess you had some experiences before you made good, eh? You haven't always been as flush as you are now!"

"You bet I haven't," returned Pollard. He went around to Mr. Burgess's office and spent two hours discussing plans for the mass-meeting.

CHAPTER X.

LUCY TAKES THE PLATFORM.

THE streets of West Gap were thronged with visitors. All the morning they came pouring in from the surrounding country. Every W. G. and R. B. car was packed to the guards. The roads leading into town swarmed with runabouts and small touring-cars loaded with the rural population of the three counties served by the road.

The mass-meeting was to start at 10.30. If necessary to run it into the afternoon, there would be a recess for lunch. The bondholders' committee and the Main Street Association, composed of the retail merchants of the city, had got their heads together to make this a big day. The Governor was coming down from the State capital to preside at the meeting. This was a concession to the stockholders, because the Governor was expecting to stand for reelection and he couldn't afford to antagonize them.

The band played in front of the opera-house an hour before the meeting, and long before half past ten the building was filled as full of humanity as a tire is of wind. It seemed as if the walls must bulge. Truly, the railway issue was a live one.

There were a large majority of the stock-

holders in the audience, with a good many of their wives, daughters, relatives and friends. The *Review* next morning called it a large and representative audience of the *crème de la crème* of the citizenry of the State.

William D. Wilton, president of the W. G. and R. B. was on the platform early. Clarke Pollard had a note from him twenty-four hours before the meeting. Here it is:

DEAR POLLARD:

I have changed my mind about the meeting tomorrow. I have you fellows licked, anyhow. The stockholders know what is good for them. In reference to our conversation the other day, let me say that I have no intention of becoming personal unless— You know what the result will be if you start anything. I will be present and, with the permission of the bondholders, address the gathering. I have called a stockholders' meeting for the evening, so the whole business will be cleaned up, and we will know who is boss. I want the thing decided on its merits. Your mass-meeting idea is a good one, better than I thought. I don't know what your plan is, but we will leave the decision in the hands of the people.

Yours, very truly,
WILLIAM D. WILTON.

"Son of a gun!" said Clarke to himself. "I wish I thought he'd keep his word. But he's a slippery one. He's certainly got a nerve!"

He could see there was only one thing for Wilton to do—bluff it out! So far as Wilton knew, Clarke and Lucy were the only persons in town who were aware of his past, and they would be pretty sure to keep quiet.

Clarke Pollard was in the unenviable position of choosing to save the road from a defaulter, crooked promoter and all around blackleg at the expense of his wife's reputation or keeping still for Lucy's sake and seeing Wilton walk off with the victory.

If he only could believe that Wilton meant what he said when he proposed to have the people decide the case on its merits without dragging in any personalities! One thing was sure, Wilton would follow that course so long as things went his way; but if they didn't—could he be trusted? Wilton was a nervy and desperate operator, it was plain. Pollard was worried.

The band stopped playing on the sidewalk and filed into the opera-house, where it took up a position at the back of the stage and played "Hail to the Chief" when the Governor came in, and followed it with "The Star Spangled Banner" and "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-Night."

Then the Governor opened the meeting, and the minute he began speaking it was plain he regarded this as an affair of stockholders and their friends who had gathered together to lend an unwilling ear to some filmy plan suggested to enable the bondholders to get control of the W. G. and R. B. Railway, which, he said, was the people's railway, built and financed and operated by the people and for the people, omitting to apologize to the late Mr. A. Lincoln for the apparent borrowing of a very good idea in speechmaking.

After the applause had subsided, the Governor called on President Burgess of the West Gap Bank. President Burgess, with his fence of white whiskers and keen gray eye, represented the vested interests too thoroughly to get any overwhelmingly cordial greeting. He was the money power in a white waistcoat and a dicky collar; so his remarks, which were incisive and direct, were received with a chill silence.

Clarke Pollard could see that the Governor was giving all the best of the situation to Wilton, saving for the railway president the last punch. And just as he was waking up to the fact that the bondholders had been outgeneraled in this respect, he heard his name called. The Governor spoke fluidly of "our young friend from that far-away city of gold and glory," and predicted with thinly veiled sarcasm that "we will now be enlightened concerning the Wall Street method of handling such problems."

So Clarke was pretty mad when he got up to speak. Never having addressed a large audience before, he forgot to talk loud enough, and he was embarrassed when voices from various parts of the house kept adjuring him to "speak up." But after a while he got into his stride and this is what he told the people:

That he had been to New York and ob-

tained the financial backing of the Superb National Bank, subject only to verification by properly accredited engineers and appraisers as to the value of the property. He had been assured by the Universal Electric Company that the necessary new equipment for the road would be furnished on sufficiently long credit, in view of the said banking support. In return for this support, the bondholders proposed to assign their bonds to the Superb National Bank, so as to secure the bank; and they, the bondholders, would in turn ask the stockholders to pool their stock under a voting trust agreement for five years. That would give the bondholders and the Superb National Bank virtual control of the road for the five year period, during which, by good management, it would undoubtedly be put on a healthy earning basis; its physical condition would be greatly improved; its rolling stock, power plants and other equipment brought up to date; and its traffic developed by scientific and suitable methods.

That was all there was to it. Pollard stated the case simply and fairly, without flourish or bombast; and when he sat down he got a good round of applause, and could see a lot of heads bobbing in approval of his proposition. Of course he had very carefully refrained from stating that one of the first acts of the management, as soon as the bondholders and the big New York bank got control of the road, would be to fire Mr. William D. Wilton.

But William D. Wilton didn't have to be told that under the arrangement proposed by Mr. Pollard his own days would be numbered.

The Governor, in introducing the president of the W. G. and R. B. Railway, pronounced just the kind of eulogy that the admirers of Mr. Wilton were there to hear. It is unnecessary to repeat it. Just think of all the superlatively laudatory adjectives you know and look up in the dictionary the ones you don't think of, and you'll get an idea of what the Governor said he thought of William D. Wilton.

So when Wilton arose to speak the roof of the opera-house strained at its moorings and threatened to float away on the volume of cheering that went up. It is just as unnecessary to quote Wilton's speech as it was to repeat the gubernatorial eulogy of Wilton. In brief, he tore the linings all out of Mr. Pollard's plan and hung the poor, denuded thing upon the belt of his eloquence as a savage handles his enemy's scalp. He pointed out the folly of letting any bank get a hook into the affairs of the W. G. and R. B. As soon as a bank gained a foothold, he said, the stockholders were as good as wiped out. Compared to a bank, an ordinary highwayman began to look like one of the twelve apostles. The practical, possible plan of the bondholders for making a profitable little local enterprise of the road was puerile, picayune and petty, he said. He saw that bankers and bondholders lacked the vision which alone could accomplish great things. He ended up by painting a picture of waving grainfields, plethoric barns and plump pocketbooks which made the farmers' mouths water, and, not forgetting the children and their children's children even unto the seventh generation or so, he lifted his eyes to heaven and swore that with the celestial cooperation he was there to dedicate himself anew to the cause of the people of West Gap, Rocky Bottom and way-stations if it cost him his last breath, his last drop of blood and his last cent.

Then he sat down, and while the populace was renewing its attempt to dislocate the roof with applause, glanced triumphantly around at Messrs. Pollard, Burgess and the other malefactors who had dared advance money to the W. G. and R. B. at five per cent and then presumed to expect some assurance that they would get their interest.

The Governor arose and congratulated the people of West Gap, and its contiguous territory on having a man of such enterprise and inspiring leadership to play the Moses who should lead it out of the Egyptian darkness and he, in turn, perceiving the psychological value of the moment, took a wallop at the banks, the money power and the vested interests (apparently, to the minds of his hearers, referring to Mr. Morehouse F. Burgess's piqué waistcoat, which Mrs. Burgess had very pains-

takingly laundered for him the night before).

Then the Governor asked if there was any further business, and if not, he would declare the meeting adj—

"Mr. Chairman!" remarked a voice from the back of the auditorium. "Afore we adjourn, kin I ast Mr. Wilton a question?"

Mr. Chairman turned toward Mr. Wilton, who bowed in complacent assent. Things had surely gone his way.

"Wal," said the voice, "I was jest a goin' to ast how much Mr. Wilton paid ol' Si Fishley, cha'rman o' the State railroad commission, f'r approvin' the road?"

"Nothing," shouted Wilton, hotly. "Absolutely nothing! That's a most absurd question. Mr. Fishley is above reproach."

"That's good," said the voice, which by now was observed to issue from a little old chap named Loomis, who lived out East Gap way. "I'm glad he's above reproach, even if he ain't above takin' a check for five thousand dollars, dated July 10, 1914, an' another one dated September 15, same year. They was signed by the treasurer of the Wilton Construction Company."

The president of the W. G. and R. B. turned a sickly, pale green.

"It's a lie," he shouted.

"No 'tain't," said old Loomis. "I seen 'em."

"Where?"

"I ain't a sayin'. I reckon they could be produced at the proper time if necessary."

The Governor, who had been responsible for Fishley's appointment, fidgeted.

"If there is no further business," he began, "I declare this meeting adjourned."

"No, it ain't," howled Loomis, "I ain't no bondholder; I'm a stockholder. I cal'late Mr. Wilton's got most ever'body hypnotized but me. He did me 'til to-day. Now he's told us o lot o' hokus-pokus about buildin' eighty-odd mild of new road and a makin' of us all rich. I'm as ready to git rich as the next feller. But if the Wilton Construction Company's goin' to have the contract to build it an' clean up half a million dollars profit on a skin job an' then bribe a public of'cer to give it a clean bill o' health, dumbed if I wouldn't ruther trust myself to them money kings o' Wall Street."

Pandemonium broke loose. Old Loomis had thrown a monkey wrench into the machinery. It took half an hour and six policemen to restore order. At the end of that time Loomis was still bleating stubbornly, if hoarsely.

"Somebody put that old fool out," suggested Wilton.

"One moment, please," said a cool, clear voice at the railway president's elbow; and turning, he confronted Lucy Pollard.

"Now look here," he began, "what the devil are you doing—"

But Lucy was not listening to Wilton. She had managed to find her way unnoticed to the stage, and now, no less to the horror of her husband than that of Wilton, was pushing her way through the disturbed dignitaries of the committees of the Main Street Association and the bondholders to a place close to the footlights.

"Lucy!" cried her husband. "Lucy!"

But she paid as little attention to Clarke as she had to Wilton. Now she held up a hand and suddenly silence fell upon the excited throng. She was so slender, so young, so apparently out of place. The Governor, perplexed, collected his wits enough to arise and bow, stiffly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Lucy Pollard, "I should like to speak a word to you before the meeting is adjourned.

"It was I who showed Mr. Loomis the canceled checks for five thousand dollars each, paid to Mr. Silas Fishley by the Wilton Construction Company as a bribe for approving the twelve miles of road built under contract for the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway."

A murmur of disbelief rippled through the audience. Only old Loomis piped.

"That's the truth; she done it."

"Yesterday afternoon," went on Lucy, "I got this letter:

"MRS. CLARKE POLLARD,

"Millett House, West Gap.

"DEAR MADAM: As it is known that you are the person who robbed Mrs. Dorsey Regent of her diamond brooch, you are hereby warned that

should anything unfavorable happen to the plans of Mr. Wilton for the further promotion of the W. G. and R. B. Railway, you will be in danger of immediate exposure.

"The letter was typewritten and unsigned; but I know from whom it came."

Lucy turned, dramatically, and pointed to William D. Wilton.

"It's a lie," he shrieked. "It's a damnable—"

"That 'll be about all from you," said Clarke Pollard in Wilton's ear, and the promotor subsided.

"So," went on Lucy, "I telephoned Mrs. Regent, and she said she has her brooch, which was found by a workman in a crack in the barn floor on Tuesday. I want to tell you why Mr. Wilton sent me the letter, however.

"In the first place, my husband came here to West Gap to help straighten out the affairs of the railway, because his entire fortune, left him by his father, was tied up in the bonds of the road. We were married just before we left New York. Mr. Pollard discovered, with the help of Mr. Burgess and some of the other bondholders, that the condition of the road was due to mismanagement and graft on the part of William D. Wilton and certain others, who make up a group of professional railroad builders and wreckers.

"The two checks paid to Silas Fishley are evidence of the way they work. I got the checks from Mr. Wilton on the evening of Mrs. Regent's party by picking his pocket."

"Great God!" cried Wilton, "I'll—"

"Forget it," said Pollard, in Wilton's ear; and Wilton forgot it.

Lucy proceeded:

"When Mr. Wilton learned that my husband's activities were pretty sure to result in his losing his influence and his opportunity to make a half million or more out of the further exploitation of the people of this section, he attempted to blackmail my husband by threatening to tell what he knew about me. And my husband, to shield me and save my reputation, confined himself strictly to setting forth his plan for refinancing the road, but refrained from attacking Mr. Wilton. It was unselfish of my husband, but mistaken. So quite unknown to him I have been doing a little work, and Mr. Loomis's remarks a short time ago were made as a result of information furnished him by me for the purpose.

"Now Wilton is not the right name of the president of the West Gap and Rocky Bottom Railway, but Grinder and he stole twenty-five thousand dollars from a traction company in the East and escaped, and the authorities have been looking for him for the last seven years. In some way or other, they failed to identify him as William D. Wilton."

The interior of the West Gap Opera-House was as still as a mouse. The intensity of the attention paid Mrs. Clarke Pollard, slender, refined, blue-eyed and timidly frank, was painful. Wilton squirmed in his chair, but there were hands upon his arms so that his scope was limited.

"I know all this," said Lucy, "because he is my stepfather. He married my mother when I was five years old; squandered her money; taught me to steal and pick pockets; and finally ran away with the funds of his employers and deserted me to the charity of our neighbors when I was twelve years old. If there is a contemptible, low, miserable sneak and thief in this opera-house, you can see him sitting between my husband and Mr. Burgess.

"The lessons of dishonesty which he taught me as a child I unlearned when he deserted me. The people with whom I lived moved into New York City a short time before Mr. Pollard and I were married. They were extremely poor. I have one uncle who occasionally sends me a check on account of a debt he owed my mother. To help my benefactors I went to work as cashier in a restaurant, where I was employed when I met my husband, so you see, I am not a 'society girl.'

"Mr. Pollard and I came here almost penniless, and I knew he was working hard to save the railway company, because the bonds were all he had in the world. I sent a piece of jewelry that my mother left me, the last memento I had of her, to my friends in New York to be pawned, and in that way helped Mr. Pollard finance his

trip to Schenectady and New York in the interests of the plan he has told you of to-day.

"I am sure my husband has been told that I stole Mrs. Regent's brooch, but he did not believe it. Yet I did not tell him where I got the money I furnished him to use for his trip East. He has trusted me, has been loyal to me through all this trouble, sacrificing his interests, and risking the success of his plan rather than suffer any smirch upon my good name. So you see I could not sit idle and allow an unscrupulous promotor to bludgeon us and the people of this vicinity out of thousands or even millions.

"I have not acted in this way or said what I have said in a spirit of revenge toward John Grinder. His evil deeds have brought their own revenge. He made me a thief as a little girl, and it was my skill as a pickpocket, taught me by him, which was turned against him to bring about his downfall.

"My object in making this confession is to help my husband first of all. If I have sacrificed my standing here in West Gap, I cannot help it. But in helping Mr. Pollard I am helping every bondholder and stockholder of the railway company, and I am serving the community where I have been received with courtesy, hospitality and kindness, where my husband was born, and where I am sure he desires to live a life of usefulness. I hope I shall be a help to him always; and I thank you very much for listening to such a long speech."

Lucy turned abruptly and went swiftly to Clarke Pollard, who kissed her before all the big, cheering audience. They howled with delight and approval; they didn't pay enough attention to John Grinder, alias William D. Wilton, to prevent his sneaking out the stage door and escaping in his big Pazzarro car; but as he was caught in a couple of days in another State and subsequently sent to serve a ten years' penitentiary sentence, it didn't matter so very much.

At the stockholders' meeting that evening Lucy Pollard was elected, along with Clarke, to the board of directors of the W. G. and R. B. Railway; and Clarke was made president by the new board.

Of course he hasn't had time as yet to prove himself the young Napoleon of transportation; but he draws his salary regularly and conducts the affairs of the road honestly—Morehouse F. Burgess contends that he does it brilliantly. But he qualifies the commendation by saying that of course he mightn't do so well if, in general-managing the W. G. and R. B., he didn't have Lucy to general-manage him. This may be true—any married lady will tell you.

Clarke, on the other hand, will deny being managed at all, but believes himself governed by his better impulses. He was explaining this at one time to his old friend Meldon, of the Superb National Bank.

"Your impulses are all right, Clarke," says the old banker, "but maybe they work better in railroading than they would in banking. Anyhow, you are mistaken, unless you give that better impulse another name. I'd call it Lucy."

So Clarke just grins cheerfully and says he doesn't care, it's probably the same thing in the long run.

(The end.)

GOLD

BY ROSS HAMILTON

GOLDEN dawn and golden dusk,
And the golden scent of musk,
And the gold bee at repose
In the golden-hearted rose!
And the thrush's golden voice—
All of these for charm and choice;
But for me, impassioned wise,
Just one maiden's golden eyes!

The Labyrinth

by Francis Stevens

Author of "The Nightmare," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

I'M Hildreth Wyndham. I'm rich, but not so rich as the reporters make me out to be. Also I'm lazy, and it was horribly early when Rex Tolliver came charging into my bedroom with the news that Ronny had disappeared.

Now, Veronica Wyndham and I may be only first cousins, but we might be twins the way we love each other. So I jumped into action like a shot.

Ronny needn't have worked; she could have had her pick of all the nicest boys in our set by crooking a finger. But she was independent, and so she got a job with Carpenter & Charles, real estate, and became so efficient that Carpenter was heart-broken when his partner, Charles, borrowed her to act as his private secretary. For Charles, you see, Clinton Charles, was Governor of the State.

This was a little while before, of course. Ronny had secretaried for the Governor for a year or so, and then had quit, and next I knew she was engaged to Rex Tolliver. And now she had vanished into thin air. Her proper companion and chaperon, Mrs. Sandry, was sick with it all and I couldn't see her, and nobody else knew a thing. Rex had taken her home a couple of evenings before, and they'd had a spat, and that was all *he* knew.

Well, I got a sort of fool hunch, and went to see the Governor. He was nice to me, but when I blurted out my subconscious thought:

"Do you know where she is?"—he naturally just stared at me and said: "Mr.—Wyndham!"

Well, that was all I could have expected—until I found a half-destroyed letter in Ronny's writing addressed to "My dear Clinton," and declining with thanks an invitation to visit his new estate, Asgard Heights! Then and there I determined to go to Asgard Heights myself and interview "dear Clinton."

As luck would have it, who should I run into on the road but Rex! And Rex suspected that I knew something, and when I made up a suspicion that Ronny'd been kidnaped by politicians and was being held at Asgard, why he bit, and insisted on going along. In fact, he led the way, through a sort of back door to the estate, which he knew of as a boy when old Mason, the late and deceased owner of the Heights, was in power.

And finally we found Ronny—and the Governor—and she was demanding that he let her go!

"Not yet—never, if I can hold you so long," the Governor told her steadily.

"Now!" whispered Rex in my ear, and the two of us burst through the screening curtain of vines.

CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT.

WHEN Rex insisted on invading Asgard Heights, I had dreaded some startling dénouement. I had accompanied him in such misery of mind as I had never before experienced. The tale he had swallowed seemed to me so absurd that I called him a fool for believing.

Yet his very credulity had prepared him for a fact more amazing than my fabrication. Having accepted the idea of Governor Charles as a kidnaper for political reasons, to find him in the same guilt for a more romantic cause only stimulated Tolliver's indignation.

A psychologist might have read in Charles's visionary eyes and determined chin the capacity for some such enormous folly as that conversation had revealed, but to me the discovery came as a shock.

It was in a hysterical mood between laughter and relief that I followed Tolliver from the grotto, no longer fearing anything. In the bare fact of discovery, Charles was lost, and at that moment I almost pitied him.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 27.

But Tolliver, seeing not the victim of a gigantic folly, but an unscrupulous and dangerous enemy, ran truer to form.

When the grotto disgorged its rescue-party, Veronica cried out, and, instinctively, I think, for he could not have recognized us at first glance, Charles sprang between us and the girl.

His hand dropped toward a coat-pocket, but Rex caught his wrist, at the same moment jamming the muzzle of his own pistol against the Governor's vest.

"One struggle or shout for help, and you're a dead man, Charles!"

"Hildreth!" cried Ronny. "You've come at last!"

And running past the other two she threw her arms around my neck and frankly hugged me.

That was all right, and I was glad enough to return the embrace. It didn't strike me until later that Tolliver might not like her greeting me with enthusiasm and ignoring him.

"Yes," I said, "and it's time, eh? Why, Ronny, everybody in Marshall City has been hunting for you. This last week has been—"

"Hil," broke in Tolliver, in a somewhat strained voice, "will you kindly take this scoundrel's pistol from his pocket? Both my hands are occupied."

At the words, Charles, who had stood perfectly motionless, very rigid and white of face, came unexpectedly to life.

There was a swift flurry of action, too quick for my eyes to accurately follow. I think that Charles tried to knock aside the automatic with his left hand and wrench himself free. Had Rex remembered his safety catch, that attempt would have finished the Governor. But the catch was on, the trigger of course resisted all pressure, and what might have been prompt tragedy ended in a rough-and-tumble fight.

They went to the turf with Rex uppermost, rolled over a couple of times, and, still locked in an energetic tangle of legs and arms, slid off the bank and splashed resoundingly down among the lotus blossoms of the pool.

Then Veronica, for the first time in her life, so far as I know, really screamed. I had forgotten the voices we had heard earlier from the pagoda, but as her shrill woman's cry cut the night, two men came flying out of the pagoda and across the bridge toward us.

Seeing Rex's pistol where he had dropped it, I snatched up the weapon and went to meet them. Rex was an A-1 swimmer and his plunge into that fancy pool didn't alarm me, but I thought the arrival of those Celestial gardeners superfluous.

They seemed to agree. Having faced for one second the pistol's threatening muzzle, they beat an agitated retreat back over the bridge. I let them go. In fact, I couldn't have stopped them. I tried to fire a shot in the air after them, found the catch down, and by the time it was released they were out of sight in the pagoda, whence their shrill voices rose to heaven in frantic yells, addressed, I assumed, to such of their fellows as might be within hearing distance.

It seemed a good idea to leave before any saffron-skinned horde should rush to their master's succor.

I ran back toward where I had left Ronny, and found her down at the pool-edge, tugging at somebody's collar.

"Leggo!" came Rex's voice, half-strangled. "Y're ch-choking me!"

"Let him alone!" I dropped on my knees beside Ronny and caught her well-intentioned hands away. Released, Rex's head and shoulders subsided under water, but promptly reappeared in a complicated swirl of lotus stems. Another head came up close by. Rex dived for it and they both went under.

"Oh, they'll kill each other—they'll be drowned!" sobbed Veronica.

Knowing Rex's pertinacity, I thought it possible myself. Though a poor swimmer, I was kicking off my shoes preparatory to joining the submarine struggle, when the two rose together within arm's reach. They continued to rise until they were no more than chest-deep, and I perceived that Rex, at least, was standing.

"Lend me a hand, can't you?" he said crossly. A minute later I was helping Rex to scramble out on the bank, dragging with him a very limp Governor.

"It's shallow; all mud below—and these

confounded weeds!" Rex disgustedly removed a pink lotus-bloom, draped coquettishly over his ear, and flung it from him. "I ought to have let him down in the mud, if he wanted to."

Though conscious, Charles lay gasping helplessly on the turf, while Ronny still sobbed and the pagoda-hid Celestials continued to split the night with vociferous appeals for aid. The whole affair could not have consumed more than four minutes' time.

Stooping, Tolliver half jerked, half lifted his unscrupulous rival to his feet. With a beautiful continuity of purpose, he plunged a hand into one of Charles's dripping pockets and removed the automatic which reposed there. That the Governor should carry one was not surprising, under the circumstances.

"Let's get out of this, Tolliver," I said. "All the Chinks on the place will be down on us in a minute."

"They'll do anything *he* says." Ronny nodded at Charles. "They'll never let us out unless he orders them to."

"He'll give the order all right," I said with conviction.

"He tried to drown us both in the mud there." Rex seemed to be still indignant. "He's desperate. We'll go out as we came in, and it won't be necessary to trust him."

"Have your own way," I yielded hastily, "but let's move! Come, Ronny!"

The ululations from the pagoda were being answered by shrill shouts from the houseward direction. A distant slap and patter of flat-shod feet announced the approach of reenforcements.

With two pistols and the Governor for hostage we might have stood them off, but heroics come easier in theory than practise. There is something curiously alarming in the swift approach of many inimical feet through the night.

I won't speak for Rex. His actions may have been the result of sober judgment without a trace of panic. But the instant I took Ronny's arm and started to run I felt like a scared rabbit. All the stories I had ever heard of Chinese knives and Chinese disregard for life lent me energy, and, as panic is contagious, Ronny caught it. She flew along beside me at a pace to discount all claims that skirts are a hindrance to speed. I am recording an unheroic retreat without apology.

In five seconds we were out of the sunken garden and scampering lightly across a wide expanse of open lawn. There were too many lights. Our shadows fled about us in every direction, expanding and contracting, flat-black monsters on the dew-glinting grass.

Ahead some kind of high level barrier loomed darkly. It proved to be an unusually high hedge of clipped yew. Running beside it a few paces we came to a break, like a gateway, dodged through and—another similar wall faced us with no gateway.

It was dark in the shadow of those parallel hedges, and we came to an uncertain halt. The night was warm, and fragrant with the scent of flowers. Somewhere men were running and shouting, but the sounds were far away. We had fled like two frightened children, and a sense of acute shame overtook me.

"Where is Rex?" Veronica's question brought home my guilt. Conscience smote me yet more sharply when I found that Tolliver's pistol was still in my hand. Then I remembered having seen him commandeer the Governor's, so that was all right, but why had I run at all—and from a pack of cowardly Chinamen?

"I supposed he was following us," I muttered. "I'll go back."

"Where are you, Hil?"

Tolliver was calling, low-voiced, from outside.

"Thought I'd lost you," he complained as we both appeared in the hedge-gate. "We can't afford to get separated."

"My fault," I admitted. "But is it necessary to drag *him* with us?"

Rex was not alone. At pistol-point, evidently, he had brought his rival along, and I suppose that Charles, his fighting impulse cooled by the underwater struggle, and realizing that his world was tottering to a fall, had not cared enough to resist.

"I presume," said Rex sarcastically, "that you would have left him behind to direct his servants in pursuit."

Charles spoke, for the first time since our emergence from the grotto.

"You have no need to fear my servants," he said in a low voice. "Come back to the house and I'll send you home in my car. I'm—finished, of course."

"Don't trust him!" warned Ronny, with what I recognized as a deliberately retaliatory note. He was down and I was a bit sorry for him, but my cousin seemed not inclined to mercy. "Governor Charles believes in the right of force and considers himself above the law."

"I don't mean to trust him," responded Rex matter-of-factly. "We'll go home in my car, not his. Quick! Out of sight! They're coming!"

Several figures had burst into view on the open lawn's far side, but I doubt if they even glimpsed us. We bolted into the dark alley between the hedges, Ronny and I again leading, and Rex still dragging his unresistant captive.

CHAPTER XII.

AN IMPEDED RESCUE.

THE path between was not of gravel, but carpeted with grass, in which our feet made little sound. For light we had only starshine and what faint trickles of radiance pierced the thick wall of yew from the bright lit lawn beyond. However, within ten yards I sensed a blacker blackness to the left, which proved to be another opening, this time through the inner hedge.

The other two close at our heels, Ronny and I turned the corner and went straight ahead, walking now, for it was too dark to run.

The shrill, excited yelps of our pursuers sounded more distant every moment. It occurred to me that those Chinamen might be none too anxious to run to earth a quarry armed and desperado-like, as the ones I had driven back at the bridge no doubt reported us.

Walking straight on in the dark, we violently encountered another hedge at right angles to the path. Ronny and I retired as gracefully as might be from the collision and, yielding to the hedge's compulsory guidance, we again proceeded, though in a new direction. When the same incident was twice repeated, with variations of angle, I began to weary of the eccentricities of our journey.

"What is this place anyway?" I inquired at large, rubbing a twig-scratched face. "There's more hedge than path."

"We're in the maze," volunteered Charles, and added gloomily: "We'll spend the night here if you go much further."

Then I recalled my guide-book informant and his reference to "the pleasing revival by Mr. Mason of that old-fashioned fancy, a bewildering series of paths and lanes shut in by hedges, called a maze, and once so popular on the more pretentious estates."

"Know the way through, Tolliver?" I asked hopefully. Heretofore he had gone as one carrying an accurate brain map of the Asgard Heights grounds.

But he failed us now. "These hedges weren't here a dozen years ago," he explained.

"Go back," advised Veronica sensibly. "We might wander here for hours."

In perfect accord for once, the four of us volte-faced and executed another retreat, but the tangled alleys in which we had entrapped ourselves proved less easy to escape than one would have supposed.

In entering we had turned four times, twice to the left and twice to the right. I was sure of that, but to my disgust the others disagreed. They followed my lead without argument till the second turning, which Ronny insisted came too soon, and Rex said was in the wrong direction. Charles ventured no opinion, having relapsed into melancholy and indifferent silence.

Rex got his way at last by sheer persistence. He may have been right, for all I know, and the next may have been the fatal turning that lost us. After that, however, we turned and turned, wound back and forth, found ourselves in unexpected culs-de-sac, and generally enjoyed the "pleasing fancy" of the diabolically clever person who had planned those hedges.

By this time, as if by conspiracy, the sky had clouded over, and the many electric lights, of which I had once foolishly com-

plained, seemed to have been obliterated with the stars. No least gleam of them now penetrated the mad tangle of leafy walls in which we were involved. I had a few matches, but they were soon exhausted. Of course, it was no use for Charles and Tolliver to search their drenched pockets.

Sounds from without, even the most blood-curdling yells, would have been welcome now, for we had reached that point of confusion where we were no longer sure that even in a general way we were moving toward the circumference of the maze. Save, however, for the occasional cry of a bird, or chirp of insects, the silence and darkness were equally complete.

Charles, I am sure, was free to have departed our company a dozen times over, for even Rex had lost interest in everything but a passionate distaste for overgrown yew hedges. But, perhaps in the love of misery for companionship, he seemed more inclined to cling to us than leave us.

Recalling his existence at last, Rex demanded information as to exactly how many square miles the maze covered.

"About a quarter mile across, I believe," replied its owner. "I've never been in here before."

"Any one who came here intentionally would be— Why didn't you warn us what we were getting into?"

"That's unfair," broke in Veronica unexpectedly. "He did warn you, Rex."

Her fiancé muttered something undistinguishable, then added aloud: "We'll have to break through these hedges in a straight line till we're out, if it's a quarter of a mile or ten miles. Come on, Hil, get to work."

We tried it.

Did you ever attempt to break through a hedge of healthy, well-cared-for yew? With a machete, or even an ax, that mode of progress may be possible, if not expeditious. We had no machete and no ax—and very little temper by the time we made up our minds to desist.

By another inspiration I climbed on Tolliver's shoulders and peered across the tops of the hedges. The lights of the house were not visible, nor were any lights visible anywhere.

The discovery gave me a queer sensation —like returning into a room one has left brightly lighted a moment before, and finding it in pitch darkness. There was a flashing suspicion that I had gone suddenly blind without knowing it. But that was absurd. Climbing down I reported.

"This is some of your doing!" snarled Rex. I assumed that he was addressing the Governor, and it was Charles who answered out of the darkness.

"I wish it were," he said with a sort of depressed humor. "If I could turn off the lights from here, I could certainly turn them on again, and we might get somewhere. Do you suppose that I am enjoying this—this prolonged agony?"

"Please let's not waste time quarreling," put in Ronny's sweet contralto. "Li Ching may have turned off the lights."

"Who or which is Li Ching?" I asked.

"The butler. He's the funniest old Chinaman. He does almost everything backward, and it would be just like him to think that throwing off the lights would keep us from getting away."

"Well, it is keeping us, isn't it?" Rex seemed to be in an extraordinary irritable mood, quite different to his temper just before the rescue.

"So it appears." The contralto was now a bit more cool than sweet. "Hildreth, won't you take my hand again? I'm afraid of being separated from you."

"Wow!" I thought. "There's a hint to moderate your tone, friend Tolliver!"

Since the alternative to playing blind man's buff with those hedges was standing still, the game proceeded. There was not even the slope of ground which one might reasonably expect on a mountainside to guide us. Asgard Heights itself was built on an outstanding shoulder of Kennett Mountain. The surrounding lawns and gardens were by no means level, but the maze was an exception. Its turfed ground throughout was as flat as a tennis-court.

At least it seemed so until my trustful foot descended into vacancy, and I saved myself from pitching headlong only by a quick reverse which made me sit down with violence, dragging Ronny along.

"Look out!" I ejaculated. "Here's a precipice or something!"

On investigation the precipice proved to be a short flight of descending stone steps.

"We've reached the center," Charles observed. His voice sounded oddly tremulous. Both he and Tolliver were dripping wet, and Charles, at least, had reached the shivering stage. "There is some kind of pavilion or rest-house here," he added shakily. "You go—go d-down these steps to it."

"Thought you'd never been here," growled Tolliver the suspicious.

"I d-did not say I had never seen the gr-ground plans."

"No, but we don't put much value on what you say, one way or the other."

"Oh, let up, Tolliver," I broke in. For the last half-hour he had been flinging similar remarks at the unhappy Governor, and I was sick of hearing them. Too much like nagging at a condemned man. "If this is the center, let's cross it and start fresh on the other side. Where are you, Ronny?"

"Here." Her firm, slim hand met mine. As we went cautiously down the steps I thought what a good, satisfactory little pal she was. Not a word of complaint from her yet, though as rescuers Tolliver and I had made rather a mess of it.

To our eyes, inured to the blackness of the hedges, this central space was almost visible. I could make out Ronny's white figure and face moving beside me, and ahead something dim, big and solid, which must be the pavilion. An idea struck me.

If this building, I said, were wired for lights—as it probably was—and if we could find the switch, and if it were on a separate circuit from the rest of the grounds—why couldn't we light up the pavilion and gain a point of direction?

A lot of "ifs" as Tolliver unkindly remarked, but Ronny supported my suggestion. Still hand in hand, we felt our way up some more stone steps into the pavilion.

I heard Rex and his inseparable antagonist following just behind.

Exactly what form of structure the place had, darkness forbade our knowing. It seemed to be built of marble, or some other smoothly polished stone, and in entering we passed between round, thick pillars. Within, the blackness was impenetrable.

Ardently I wished for those wasted matches now. Still, there was a hit-or-miss chance that we might find a switch-box by feeling along the walls.

In ten minutes we had determined that the pavilion was round, the walls formed of polished stone panels set between pilasters, and that it had no windows nor entrances save the one we had come in by. This not particularly helpful knowledge was our sole reward.

We met at last in a discouraged group near the center. There was a thing there shaped like a sun-dial—or a very thick broken-off column. It rose from the floor to about the height of my chest. The top seemed carved in deep relief, and, leaning wearily against it as we talked, my fingers strayed over the carving.

"If you would sh-shout for help," shivered Charles, "or allow me to, we might be heard. W-won't you take my assurance that I've given up all hope of—of—have given up all hope? What can you fear? That I would have you m-murdered—in c-cold blood?"

"How do we know?" came Tolliver's inevitable retort. "It's no great step from kidnaping to throat-cutting."

I heard a sound suspiciously like a hysterical giggle, but the voice that followed from that direction was sweetly dignified.

"Governor Charles can hope to deceive none of us as to his true character, but—I think perhaps it would be best to shout. You see, Rex, even though *he* may deserve to perish of pneumonia, you're both equally drenched. I think we've been lost long enough. Governor Charles has a chill now, and you'll have one soon, unless you get dry clothes."

"Anticlimax for hero and villain," I thought with an inward chuckle.

My fingers, which had been half unconsciously tracing the raised carving of the pillar-top, closed on a piece that was loose. Being very human fingers, they tried to loosen it some more. It wouldn't lift, but it slid along smoothly for about an inch, as if in a groove.

"I'm hard as nails," Rex was saying impatiently. "Thanks for—"

I don't know what he was going to thank

her for, because just then something happened.

It was sudden as lightning, and as disconcerting as an earthquake.

With a horrible, shuddering vibration and a sound like the groan of a cracked iron bell, the solid stone beneath us tipped, sank away, was gone. In one sliding, struggling heap, the four of us were unceremoniously dropped through the treacherously yawning floor of the pavilion.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE PROCEEDS UNDERGROUND.

THE unguessed abyss into which we had been precipitated wasn't very much of an abyss, and its bottom had been considerately padded. My sprawling and astonished self landed unhurt on a soft, feather-cushiony surface some eight feet below.

Overhead there came a recurrence of that metallic groaning, followed by a sharp click.

Almost more amazing than the fall itself was the fact that we had dropped out of midnight darkness into a place filled with light. I realized it dazedly, though, of course, till my eyes had time to get adjusted, I couldn't see a thing.

"Ronny!" I called, scrambling up anyhow. "Ronny! Are you there? Are you hurt?"

"Oh!" said a small voice close by, and "Oh!" again, as if that covered the situation.

"Yes, oh! But are you hurt?"

I staggered forward, my feet sinking deep in the cushiony floor, collided heavily with another bedazzled staggerer, and then a pair of steely hands closed on my throat.

"You devil!" hissed Tolliver's voice between set teeth. "You sprang that trap—but you'll pay for it!"

I'm not so big as Rex, but the footing was uncertain and I easily tripped him. We went to the mat together, his hold was broken by the fall and I wriggled away.

"What the *deuce* are you trying to do?" I gasped angrily.

"Hi! I thought—thought you were that scoundrel, Charles!"

"Well, I'm not. Look who you're choking next time. Ronny, where are you, anyway?"

But even as I spoke my vision cleared, and I saw my companions and the place we had been tumbled into.

It was a white-walled chamber, round like the pavilion, and some twelve feet in diameter. The floor was covered by a tufted padding, upholstered in forest-green, very thick and soft. As I had already surmised, the ceiling, which was, of course, the floor of the pavilion, had closed again after letting us through. Its under-side was covered with a layer of elaborately embossed metal, painted in brilliant colors, and so designed that it would be almost impossible to say where the piece or pieces which opened were joined.

Four narrow archways led out of the circular room, and over each of these was an electric globe and some kind of motto painted in black on the white wall.

As for my fellow victims, Rex still crouched, blinking at me, while a little way off Charles, for whom I had just suffered as proxy, was helping Veronica to her feet.

My cousin's pale-gold hair was tumbled about her shoulders. She was staring up into Charles's face, her lips quivering like a child's about to cry.

Tolliver and I reached them at the same moment. After glaring at us as if he intended to dispute our right to take her away from him, the Governor turned his back and moved off. Veronica looked after him with an expression which we interpreted as amazement that he had dared touch her.

While Rex scowled threatfully at the Governor's back, I cooed over my poor little frightened cousin like a sentimental maiden aunt till she began to laugh at herself and me.

"I'm not a bit hurt," she protested, twisting up her fallen hair. "But where—what is this place?"

"Ask the owner!" Tolliver still glowered. "He dropped us down here—this is a regular trap."

"He fell into it himself then," objected Ronny.

I had a startling recollection.

"If you want to see the real villain," I modestly observed, "look at little Hildreth. No, I mean it." I related how my fingers had closed over that loose carving on the sawed-off column. "It slid along, and this is the result. Plain as a pikestaff. That carving controlled the mechanism of a trap-door."

"Maybe," Rex skeptically admitted, "but I still think it was his doing and that he only came down with us by a slip."

Charles had been standing hands on hips, head thrown back, staring as if reproachfully at that treacherous ceiling. Now he turned again and came toward us across the yielding floor.

Recalling my interview with him that morning, I thought what a vast difference a few hours and emotions can work in a man. That he should be white, even haggard was not surprising; but more than that, Charles looked as if he had been sick—sick a long time with some devastating fever. Yet he had regained control of himself. For all the misery his eyes reported, he was managing to face us and smile, which must have required some moral courage, of whatever quality.

"Old M-Mason," he said, "seems to have b-been a pr-practical joker."

"You'll have to check that chill in some way," announced Ronny irrelevantly. "Whisky would do. Doesn't any one of you carry a flask?"

It appeared that Rex did, but obviously he objected to Ronny's concern for his fallen rival, and it was equally obvious that carbolic acid would have been as welcome to Charles as a drink of whisky which he had to accept from Tolliver.

I admired Ronny's calm indifference to the sentiments of either. The drink was given and taken under her inflexible direction, Rex had one himself, I did not refuse my share, and then consideration of Mr. Mason's "practical joke" could be resumed.

By Charles's story, in the plans of Asgard Heights there was shown at the center of the maze a small, round building, of more or less Grecian architecture. As for a trick opening in the floor operated or controlled by a movable bit of carving, there was no indication of it on the plans or in the written descriptions, and he swore he had never heard any hint of such a place existing beneath the pavilion. Personally he had never explored the grounds to any extent—he had no leisure to waste in that manner. No, he had never heard a word of it from any servant or employee. Every one knew what an eccentric old fellow Mason had been. This must be some device of his, built secretly and designed for a purpose as unknown to him, Charles, as to us.

Certainly the place was an elaborate and intentional trap, but the wherefore of it remained to be discovered.

Tolliver was inclined to sneer at the Governor's claim of ignorance, but those four archways were beckoning to my curiosity. I proposed exploration as more profitable than holding impromptu court to try Charles's veracity.

As I have said, over every arch there was a light, which we surmised might have been turned on by the same mechanism that sprang the trap. This assumed Charles's story to be true. They certainly couldn't have been burning ever since Mason died, nearly a year previous.

Beyond the archways four flights of stairs curved downward out of our view, and we could tell by the reflection on the curving, white-painted walls that there were other lights. All the stairs turned in the same direction—to the right as one faced them.

Hoping to find some clue, we read the mottoes painted in old English characters just below the electric globes. They left us more puzzled than before. The four inscriptions had been culled from the Old Testament, and not only did they offer no guidance, but the selections had been made from the more vengeful utterances of the Prophets, and every one of them read depressingly like a threat.

"'Rejoice not against me, mine enemy,'" Veronica read aloud thoughtfully; "'when I fall I shall arise.' That's not quite so—so unfriendly as the others. Let's try this 'Rejoice not' one first."

She set foot boldly on the first step of her preferred stair. Tolliver and I started after her, but to my surprise Charles caught at my sleeve detainingly.

"Wyndham," he said earnestly, "she ought to wait here and let us explore. We don't know what those stairs lead to. It may be something—unpleasant."

For a moment I hesitated, wondering if he might not be right. Or was he trying to split our party?

"We'll stick together," I said, "and, if you don't mind, I'll bring up the rear."

I stood aside for him to pass me. He looked at me, opened his lips, then compressed them firmly and went ahead without argument.

We had fallen into this peculiar situation because of one almost incredible act on the part of our esteemed Governor. Tolliver's suspicions since the rescue might be exaggerated, but I myself had no mind to let Charles be tempted to any further novel extensions of the gubernatorial power.

He shouldn't leave us, and he would bear watching while with us. Ronny was an inspiration to care which I didn't intend to forget.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALARMING DISCOVERIES.

THE stairs led to a straight, narrow passage ending in a blind wall. Three other passages, similar to the first, branched off from it at varying angles.

Our first impression of these underground corridors was an extraordinary one. They were decorated with half-inch stripes of black on a white ground. The stripes ran up from a dead-black floor to the ceiling, across, and down the opposite wall. It gave an effect like the bars of a cage, and a perspective that was bewilderingly tiresome to the eyes.

The small electric bulbs placed at intervals were unfrosted and without globes. This so increased the dazzling effect that we only discovered the branch passages as we reached them. Adventuring a few paces along one of these branch ways, we came on yet another zebra-striped corridor opening from it.

"I believe," declared Ronny, suddenly inspired, "that we are in an underground duplicate of the privet maze—and we'd best be careful. This is precisely the way we lost ourselves up there."

"It looks so, but read that." I pointed out another inscription, set in a lozenge of white on the end wall of the passage we stood in. "'Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest.' Invitation to proceed. There must be something down here besides these futurist corridors."

Tolliver got out a pencil.

"If this is a second maze, we don't have to get lost." He made a cross on one of the white stripes of the wall. The pencil was soft and the mark stood out well against the painted cement. "We'll blaze a trail, and in that way can always return to the center. The hedges were a different proposition."

"Hello!" I said. "Some former victim had your bright idea, Rex. See his mark?"

It was a small, lop-sided cross that looked as if it had been smeared on the wall by a finger dipped in thin, reddish-brown paint. A few yards further along Veronica pointed to another white stripe.

"There's a red mark, too. But it's a circle instead of a cross."

With an impatient shake of the head, Rex made his own symbol, bold and black, just under the circle.

"Silly game for a man like Mason to waste money on," he commented. "The old fellow must have reached his second childhood."

Still hoping for something more interesting than empty passages, we followed the new angle, passed a couple of corridors, turned into a third, chose another intersection, another—and brought up at a blind wall, which announced the inevitable inscription:

That Which Is Crooked Cannot Be Made Straight; and That Which Is Wanting Cannot be Numbered.

"Oh—rot!" exclaimed Tolliver irreverently. "What a *fool* game!"

Retracing our steps, we felt ready to cease exploring and try what could be done toward reopening the pavilion trap from below. A child-minded person with time on his hands, well-fed and dryly clothed against the damp chill of the corridors,

might have enjoyed losing himself here. As for us, we had had enough.

Following Tolliver's black crosses we—reached another blind wall. Yet there was the pencil mark, five feet from the end and directly beneath a light.

"That's queer," I said. "That can't be your cross, Tolliver. It's an old one that somebody else marked up."

"It's mine. See how each line ends in a hook? I did that purposely to identify my own mark—and besides, I remember putting it there."

His insistence gave one a sickish, unnatural feeling—like meeting a blank impossibility and being forced to believe in it. One does that sometimes in a dream.

The end wall announced unconsolingly:

He Hath Hedged Me About That I Cannot Get Out; He Hath Made My Chain Heavy.

Our eyes sought each other's faces.

"That's not my mark," Rex contradicted himself suddenly. He hastily scribbled his initials, "R. T.," beside the hooked cross. "There. I shouldn't have used a cross, of course. Everybody makes crosses—or circles. We've passed a dozen red ones, and there are probably plenty of pencil crosses scattered about. Luckily we haven't come far."

Had we retained any faith in Tolliver's hooked crosses as guidance, we should have been quickly disillusioned. It seemed best to follow back along what must be a false trail to the point where it diverged from the true one. But instead of success in this, we met only another cul-de-sac, ominously inscribed:

I Also Will Laugh at Your Calamity; I Will Mock when Your Fear Cometh.

At that we laughed a little ourselves. These sententious quotations were so plainly meant to inspire terror that they overshot the mark. Yet they angered one, too. They had begun to take on an air of vicious and personal attack.

"You—you *mean* old man!" Ronny shook her head at the painted taunt, as if it directly represented Mr. Daniel Mason. "Your joke is so ill-natured that it isn't the least bit funny!"

Nobody thought of even hinting that it was funny when a line of "R. T.'s" *plus* hooked crosses brought us straight to a blocked passage and the mocking statement that:

As the Fishes That Are Taken in an Evil Net, so Are the Sons of Men Snared in an Evil Time.

"Were we here before?" demanded the owner of the initials dazedly. "I don't remember—"

"There's been *nothing* said about fishes in any place we've gone!" Ronny declared positively. "We aren't alone down here. I've been certain for some minutes that I heard footfalls and a kind of rushing noise in the corridors we had just passed through, but I thought the sounds might be echoes. They weren't. Some one is following us about and writing up copies of your mark, Rex. Listen!"

We did listen, with the strained alertness of people who have agreed to spend the night in a haunted house—"Such a lark if one really should meet a ghost, you know!"—and are suddenly very much afraid that the ghost has audibly materialized.

Not that we were superstitious. If any one but ourselves were present, the person was a flesh-and-blood human, to be hunted out, captured, and forced to explain himself. But why—well, what malevolent sort of a human would it be who dwelt mysteriously in a secret labyrinth, and trailed us to forge our blaze-marks?

We listened. There was no sound but our own breathing, and very little of that.

Yet Ronny had not been alone in hearing "echoes." They had been troubling me for ten minutes past, and I had seen both Tolliver and Charles cast an occasional startled glance backward as we passed from one corridor to another.

Suddenly the Governor, who had been straining his ears with the rest of us, gave a muttered exclamation.

"What's that?" Tolliver turned on him with quick suspicion. "*You* know all about this!" he accused.

"I think I do." The Governor's smile was half-bored, half-amused. "The explanation is staring us in the face. A small

boy of average intelligence might have guessed it earlier."

Still smiling, he walked to the dead-wall that ended the passage. Raising one hand he struck it a sharp blow with the heel of his palm. The "wall" gave out a hollow, metallic clang and rattled slightly in its place.

"That's a door," said Charles. "We did pass here before, only then the door was open, and subsequent to our passing it closed."

"But," cried Ronny, "that's worse than having our mark copied! Who closed it?"

"You possibly, or any of us." He laughed outright. "Please don't be indignant with me. It's amusing that four supposedly intelligent people should have been so easily deceived."

"Suppose," said Rex with ponderous sarcasm, "that in the majesty of your intellect you condescend to explain."

Ronny cast him an annoyed glance. Such persistent discourtesy seemed needless.

"You mean," she said, addressing Charles, "that they are trick doors? They close themselves by a spring?"

"By springs or weights. Very likely pressure on some part of the floor in another corridor released this door so that it either slid across or dropped from a slot in the ceiling. The former, I'm inclined to think. If it slides horizontally, it might be opened again by similar means from another point. The sounds which reached us were the rattle of these doors, the faint thud of dropping weights, or the swish of ropes within the walls. Now we have only to slide the door back in its groove and pass on."

Probably he was right. That was all we had to do. But unluckily we couldn't do it. There was no means of getting a grip on the thing. At every side its edges entered floor, walls, and ceiling, and, of course, there was no handle or knob to grasp. Had the barrier been of wood we might have cut into it with a pocket-knife and secured finger-hold; but it was of thin iron or steel, and impregnable to any attack in our command.

Giving up at last we went back, investigated two or three other corridors, and soon found another of the trick doors which stood open.

A new meaning was given to the striped walls and black floor by our discovery. To the eye there was no difference between a half-inch black stripe and a half-inch hollow slot, while across the jet-colored floor the slot was equally indistinguishable.

There was no sign of a door-edge, the slot running all the way around, and having a depth past probing by the longest pencil in our possession. We, however, had cause to assume that door there was, no matter how deeply hidden.

"Our problem," said Charles, who seemed to have temporarily assumed command, "is to prevent this and any other such barriers which we may encounter from entirely closing."

Removing his wet coat he ruthlessly tore it into halves, wadded one half into a rough ball and laid it against the wall across the slot. From whatever direction the door might appear, it would become involved with the wad of wet cloth, which, acting as a buffer, would prevent the journey being completed. Given a grip on the edge, doubtless we might push it back without trouble, while, with the three coats among us, we could, if necessary, stop six doors.

The scheme seemed good, and to test it Veronica remained to watch while we three men walked here and there in neighboring passages. Of course we had no means of knowing exactly what it was that released the panels, but assumed that it was the weight of a person passing over some part of the floor. Taking care to keep within calling distance of each other, we walked with fingers running along the walls and eyes alert for the telltale slots.

I had just found one, and was about to sacrifice a garment at its altar, when I heard a swish, a dull thud, and then a call that was almost a shriek from Ronny.

Being nearest I was first in the rush back. There had been terror as well as surprise in that call, so that my first thought was of unmixed relief to see her standing unhurt where we had left her.

Then I perceived that she was staring downward with a white, horrified face.

"Look!" she ejaculated as I ran up. "And—and, Hildreth, think! I had laid my hand over the slot at the side. If I

hadn't merely happened to put it up to my hair—"

She stopped, her voice still shaking, and I didn't blame her. The others had come up now. Charles stooped and picked up a dank wad of cloth. Part of a sleeve fell to the floor. It wasn't half a coat now, it was the quarter of a coat. The soggy, wet material had been sheared through cleanly, as if by a tailor's cutting-knife.

"That door fairly shot down!" said Ronny. "It whistled past my face so that I felt a wind on my cheek!"

"With an edge like a razor." Charles dropped the fragment of cloth, and, hands on hips, frowned thoughtfully at the new inscription which our experiment had brought to view. It briefly and murderously declared:

Here I Will Make Thy Grave, for Thou Art Vile.

Thinking of poor Ronny's hand that had so nearly shared fates with the Governor's coat, I shivered.

CHAPTER XV.

A DEAD MAN'S LAUGHTER.

WITH hope resigned of blocking doors that dropped like butchers' cleavers, we rather disconsolately sought out the ways which remained open. None of us cared to voice the impression of senseless and, therefore, insane malice produced by our surroundings.

I have been told that there is no experience more terrible than for a sane man to find himself in the hands of a lunatic.

To deem oneself grasped by a lunatic dead months past, a man with not only the genius of insanity, but vast wealth to execute its malevolent devices, is, I can assure you, equally appalling.

By tacit consent, further speculation as to the labyrinth's purpose was avoided. Neither did we care to speak any more of the crosses, nor crosses and circles, smeared here and there on the walls. I suppose we shared the thought that reddish-brown paint was an odd convenience for a man trapped as we had been to carry—unless he carried it in his veins.

Who had wandered here, desperate, cut off by barrier after falling barrier, each offering its threat more virulent than the last, among endless vistas of painted bars whose illusion became ever more distressing as the eye wearied, with the echo of his own feet and the rush of the trap's machinery for sole companionship?

How had he finally escaped? Had he escaped? One of those knife-edged panels, dropping inopportunely, might end a man's wanderings with frightful ease.

We turned no corners now without a quick glance ahead that feared the thing it might encounter. We made carefully sure that we passed no deadly slot unaware, and when we crossed one, did it swiftly and with discretion.

But so far the panels dropped only behind us, always out of sight in some comparatively distant corridor. That they were driving us on in one general direction was apparent. Yet we must let ourselves be driven, since the only alternative was remaining in one place, an inactivity that none of us cared to face.

We must go on, and we must keep together. Let one of those panels isolate a member of the party, and assurance that we should ever be reunited was disagreeably uncertain.

Occasionally, to leave no hope untried, we shouted or banged on the metal panels till the infernal racket deafened us. And all the while we knew our efforts in this direction to be utterly futile. Above there were many feet of heavy, sound-deadening earth. Had we been lost in the depths of a mine, the world could have been no more cut off from us. Moreover, we in our hearts knew that this had been so designed.

Charles and I were both in our shirt-sleeves now, for I had insisted that Ronny take my coat. She was thinly clad in a gown whose V-shaped neck and quarter-length sleeves offered scant protection from chill.

Physical discomfort was heavy on us all, and a sort of sickening distress caused by eye-strain. The black-and-white bars stood out, receded, wavered and danced in hypnotic revel till the mind was dizzy and sharp pains shot to the back of the brain.

Our progress was by no means commensurate with the distance covered. Again and again we traversed a series of ways which ended in a wall that was not a panel, but solid concrete. In each such case we observed that the motto was the same, though this was the only quotation repeated. The movable panels presented an astonishing variety of invective.

Its reappearance became irritating beyond belief; it was like a shouted taunt, echoing a dead man's mirth forever:

I Also Will Laugh at Your Calamity; I Will Mock when Your Fear Cometh.

We made flippant variations on the phrase; we cursed it under our breath; we laughed loudly at facing it again—and ceased to laugh, because of the far-running echoes.

And then once more we must return on our steps, always to find panels where we had left open ways, and at last choose another corridor yet untried, and emblazon a fresh series of black " R. T.'s " beside those ghastly red-brown naughts and crosses.

By what means such a multitude of lights could be supplied with current was in itself a riddle.

Asgard Heights, as its owner informed us, had its private power-plant operated by turbines from a high waterfall within the estate. There was power enough and to spare for the house and grounds, but in this subterranean maze we had already passed hundreds of lamps. They were small, it is true, being mostly tungsten filament bulbs of low wattage, but the total current consumption must have been enormous.

I tried to trace a connection between the disappearance of the lights behind us while we were among the hedges and this underground illumination. The only basis on which I could do it was the assumption that, half an hour before our descent, some one had knowingly thrown all the power from the upper circuits into these lower ones.

This, unless we assumed a complicity on Charles's part which seemed far-fetched, was improbable. It implied a foresight of our actions nothing short of miraculous.

The question was suddenly dropped in the fact of a thing that affected us much more practically.

Our wanderings had ended.

Oh, no; we had not reached a broad, beautiful stairway labeled, " This way out "; nor a man-size rat-hole, that we might crawl through into open air, and which we would have welcomed with equal joy.

Our wanderings had ended, because there was no way to go on.

We were, in fact, safely shut within a small area of short corridors, blocked, every one of them, and each presenting that silent shriek of maniacal mirth:

I Also Will Laugh at Your Calamity.

First we made sure that the " calamity " was as bad as it seemed. That did not occupy us long. Then we strayed aimlessly about, on a pretense of making sure all over again, but really because we were afraid of a certain minute that was coming.

I mean the minute when we must look at one another and admit: " Here is an end of action. From this on we have to rely on a rescue from outside. Waiting is our part, and as we have neither food, drink, nor proper covering against cold—in this damp, cellarlike place—the wait is going to seem very long and hard to bear. We three men can stand it, but how about you, little Ronny?"

Of course that a rescue would finally come was inevitable.

No matter how secretly Mason had caused the labyrinth to be built, it had taken workmen to build it. Skilled workmen—electricians and artificers of various sorts, all men of intelligence. They might have been brought from far and paid well for silence. But such a man as Clinton Charles could not vanish into thin air without news of it being flashed all over.

Probably quite a lot of people would come forward then with the information that would send us help.

True, past denial. And, nevertheless—what if no help ever came?

Your fellow man is such an uncertain creature to rely on—when you can't do one thing for yourself.

We were cut off. We were shut under the ground, in a place concealed with just that devilish intent.

Nobody said much. We strolled around a while, and came to a halt beside the last panel that had closed, ending our perilous journey.

The chill air breathed heavy, laden with hopelessness and discouragement.

We looked at the panel. Tolliver kicked it, gently and without spirit.

The inscription upon it seemed to glare at us vengefully; terse, ruthless in its use here, insane:

Thou Shalt not Live, for Thou Speakest Lies in the Name of the Lord.

Suddenly Ronny began to laugh. I asked her why. She explained that the accusation of that particular panel struck her as quite amusingly mad.

As soon as she mentioned it, we could see for ourselves that it was funny. Several very witty jokes were made on the subject. I don't now recall what they were, but at the time they appealed to my sense of humor so that I laughed till my head hurt severely.

Strange how stiflingly heavy the air had become since the dropping of that last panel.

There were weights on my feet, too. Wondering how they had got there, I looked down and discovered the explanation. I was dressed in a sea-diver's costume.

It was, of course, the great, heavy helmet on my head that made everything dark except in two round circles before my eyes.

The figure of a girl drifted slowly by. Turning jerkily with the current, it faced me for a moment. I recognized Ronny's drowned face, strained, bluish-white, with gasping, open mouth and drooping lids. In spite of the old-fashioned cork-jacket buckled round her body, she had sunk to the very bottom.

Though I knew it was too late to save her, I stretched out my arms. Those lead soles wouldn't let me move, and she drifted out of my sight.

The round windows of the helmet began to cloud over, and the heavy air failed. They had ceased pumping air to me. The windows darkened—I sank—

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RESCUE LOSES ITS HEROINE.

MY awakening from that dream is to this day a most unpleasant memory.

The odorless and insidious gas which had caused it must have been drained off soon after consciousness departed. Otherwise I should never have awakened at all.

As it was, I came to abruptly, leaping in one instant from insensibility to life. I was lying on the floor, but started up like a man roused from sleep by some loud alarm. My head, though it ached slightly, was almost unnaturally clear and memory took up its normal function as if there had been no break.

Huddled against the wall lay Tolliver, a dark, careless heap that did not stir.

Ronny was nowhere to be seen. Neither was Charles.

There were with me only silence, and that motionless heap of flesh and clothes which might or might not be a living man.

I didn't stop then to find out.

Some inhaled poison had robbed us of sense for a while. Though it had dropped two of us in our tracks, the others might have withstood it longer. They had perhaps staggered a little way off; they were lying insensible around this corner or that. The space of our prison had many corners to be searched.

Back and forth I went, running, anxious, like a lost dog questing its master. Where was Veronica? Charles might have gone to the devil in a cloud of brimstone for all I cared. I must find Veronica.

The unwelcome knowledge forced itself on me at last that the only people in this section of the corridors were Tolliver and myself.

Then I realized that I had known it from the first moment of awakening.

All that elaborate ignorance of the Governor's had been feigned by him and swallowed by us with the simplicity of children. Granted that our being entrapped was sheer

accident. It was an accident of which he had taken eager advantage. The labyrinth was Mason's, but its new owner had found good use for it.

If Tolliver and I showed up missing, who would ever look for us on the Asgard Heights estate? The only clues we had left were the two motor-cars, one hidden by the road, the other standing at the foot of that steep, apparently unclimbable slope on Kildair Mountain.

It would be another mystery as baffling as that of my cousin.

And Charles—the damnable hyprocrite—would follow his ambitious way with a smiling face, not so much as breathed on by suspicion. Oh, a perilous road to walk, no doubt, but he had already given proof of reckless daring.

Honest, straightforward Tolliver, whom I had secretly deemed boyish and crude, had been possessed of clearer vision than myself. "But a short step from kidnaping to throat-cutting," he had said. In the dark I had smiled incredulously and Ronny had laughed outright. Poor little Ronny! She deserved sympathy.

Slowly I went back to Tolliver. He must be roused, and between us we must hunt out the trick by which this prison opened. Charles knew it, so the trick was surely there.

It surprised me rather that he hadn't smashed the light bulbs before going. Darkness would have left us no chance whatever. Well, that would come later. I could almost see the sardonic smile curling his fine mouth as his hand should close over the switch that threw off every light below here.

Death muffled in the dark for us; for him, safety—and my cousin, Veronica.

Stung by the thought, I fell upon Tolliver's inert form in a rage of determination. I hauled him away from the wall, straightened him out and, as an afterthought, felt for his pulse. It was faint but regular.

All right; since he was alive he could wake up and help me.

Some whisky had remained in his flask, which we had carefully refrained from using. I hunted through his pockets for it. They were empty. The pistol he had taken from Charles was gone, too.

There was something petty and sneaking about this rifling of a helpless victim! I smiled scornfully and plunged a hand in my own trouser-pocket, whither I had transferred Tolliver's gun when I lent my coat to Veronica. To my surprise the weapon was still there.

He had overlooked it, or else been frightened off by some move of mine that threatened returning life.

With a contemptuous shrug, I shoved the gun back in its place and set to work on Tolliver. The healthy tan of his face hid a sallow paleness, and his lips were a faint bluish-purple. The nostrils, too, looked thin and pinched.

I am ashamed to say that his condition aroused in me more of impatience than pity. In my fervor of anxiety for Veronica, Tolliver seemed less a human being than a means to help get out of here and find her.

And he wouldn't rouse. I tired of pumping his arms and rolling him back and forth, the only means of resuscitation my inexperience could recall. Finally I sat back on my heels and scowled at him.

Then I bent over, took him by the shoulders and shook him savagely.

"Tolliver!" I shouted. "Wake up, man! You—wake—up!"

"Do you think you are going about it in the best way, Wyndham?" inquired an anxious voice from behind me.

I whirled like a shot.

There stood Governor Charles, with the missing flask in one hand, a small liquor glass and a silver spoon in the other.

Where he had got the glass and the spoon didn't at once interest me.

To have the black-hearted villain you have been cursing show up suddenly is always disconcerting. To have him show up bearing the utensils and the considerate air of a hospital nurse is fearfully upsetting to one's nerves.

It upset me, physically as well as mentally. In turning so quickly I lost my balance and brought my hand down full weight on the midst of Tolliver's helpless person.

He showed his resentment by a deep groan and a kick.

"After all, perhaps your method is the

best," said Charles, "though I should never have considered trying anything so violent."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAVED BY THE VILLAIN.

"I BROUGHT this spoon and glass," he continued, "because it is easier to give liquor to an unconscious person from a spoon. Without spilling it, that is, and we have only a little left."

If I hadn't been through quite so much I shouldn't have given myself away. I would have accepted him and his spoon and his glass, inquired politely where he had the rest of the hospital concealed, and, in a casual way, if he had happened to see my cousin.

But the breaking point and little Hildreth had come together at last.

My thinking apparatus took a vacation. All the dark criminalities I had believed of him came tumbling out of my mouth in a jumble of heartfelt accusation. If I didn't accuse him of murdering Veronica and burying her under a corridor, it was only because my breath gave out suddenly. I sat down on the floor beside Tolliver, who hadn't even stirred again since that one kick.

The next I knew, some one was giving me whisky—out of a spoon, I think—and there was a supporting arm around my shoulders.

"You'll feel better shortly, Wyndham," a grave voice was saying. "I took that pistol because it was mine. I really have no use for it, however, and since you feel so unsafe in my company you are welcome to carry it."

I felt something cold and heavy thrust into my hand.

"Where's Veronica?" I muttered.

"Not far off. Are you better?"

"I guess so. Tired. Empty stomach. Haven't had a thing to eat in ages. Silly way to act—I know it."

"Not at all. Are you able to walk a short distance?"

"Tolliver?" I said.

"Oh, we won't desert him. Just lean on me—shall I carry you?"

"Cer'nly—not."

That one drink had got control of my tongue with surprising ease.

I suppose I walked, but I don't remember much about it. Next time I felt any interest in proceedings I found myself lying on something soft and springy, and my face was being bathed with a wet cloth. I opened my eyes and looked straight up into Veronica's face.

"Poor dear," she said softly, and then, over her shoulder, "Hildreth hasn't been strong since he had typhoid. If this leads to a severe illness, I shall never forgive myself."

"My fault entirely."

That was the Governor's voice. Evidently he had got me safely installed in his private hospital.

"Isn't that coffee nearly made?" Veronica asked.

"Just done. Shall I pour in the cream?"

"No. Hildreth likes it black."

Things seemed to be coming Hildreth's way. Into my range of vision stalked the Governor, looking solemn and anxious over a laden tray.

"I hope the bouillon will be right," he said. "I'm not much of a cook."

"It will be if you fixed it the way I told you."

I wondered if she were training him for a chef in case he lost his job as Governor, and just stopped myself from asking. I was recovering.

I had recovered enough to sit up by the time Ronny had fed me half a cup of bouillon — out of another spoon — and some coffee that possessed more strength than flavor.

"The coffee was ready-ground, and it stood too long in the can," explained Ronny deprecatingly. "Clinton did the best he could with it."

"Clinton is a jewel," I said. Then something struck me. "Clinton?" I repeated.

She flushed to the very tips of her ears.

"Governor Charles," she said stiffly. "I think you are better, Hildreth."

"Much, thanks to you and Cl— Governor Charles. In the language of the poet: Where am I?"

The room of my quick convalescence bore no resemblance to the black-and-white

striped horrors of our recent surroundings. It was a long room, not very high-ceilinged, but furnished in a taste that amounted to barbaric splendor.

It had, however, two characteristics which prevented me, after the first glance, from thinking it a room in the Governor's residence.

One was a total absence of windows. The other was the extraordinary condition of mildew and mold which existed everywhere, and rendered the absence of windows or other ventilation decidedly unpleasant.

I lay on what had once been a magnificent brocaded divan. Before putting me there, Ronny had thoughtfully covered it with a silk rug in rather better condition. Where the brocade showed, however, it was green with mold and the other furniture was similarly afflicted.

Extravagant expense and extravagant ruin appeared on every side.

The once highly polished floor looked dull, warped and spotted with moisture. The tapestry with which the walls were hung was stiff and cracking with mold, and in a trophy of Eastern weapons above my divan, the spear and sword-blades, were a red lace-work of rust.

Down the room's center extended a table. It had been laid with a lace and damask cloth and set out with a regular banqueting service, crystal and silver and a great silver urn near each end filled with dozens of roses. But the silver was tarnished black, the cloth eaten by mildew, and the roses had died long ago. They and their fallen petals were black as the silver urns that held them.

If they had only been a few skeletons sitting around the table, and a coffin or so set up for decoration, the scene of merry festivity would have been complete.

However, there were no skeletons—except those in use by ourselves—and the scene did well as it was.

Ronny, who had been putting dishes back on the tray, remembered to answer my question.

"We are still underground. I can't tell you any more than that, but it's something to have escaped from those miserable corridors. Lean your head back, poor boy. Would you like some creamed codfish?"

"Help!" said I briefly. "Why bouillon, coffee and codfish in the midst of decay? And where's your Clinton Governor gone *now?* He's vanished again."

"Hildreth, I wish you would please not tease me about what was merely a slip of the tongue. Governor Charles and Rex have both gone to put on dry clothing."

"Haberdashery establishment next door. Old Mason was thorough. I hope the tailoring department is in better repair than the dining-saloon, though. Say, Ronny, don't tell me I've been eating things that came off that table!"

"No, indeed. Governor Charles found an airtight chest with some canned provisions in it. There were an electric percolator and chafing dish and a few dishes there, too. And we found a case of bottled water.

"I don't understand anything. Governor Charles says that one of those 'calamity' walls was a door, and he woke up before any of us and it was standing open. He's been keeping it closed since, in case of another rush of gas. He carried me in here, and when I came to he was feeding me whisky—"

"Out of a spoon."

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I know. And then he went back and rescued me, and then he rescued Tolliver, and then he cooked dinner, and now he's arranging for a new suit for Tolliver, to replace the one spoiled in his lotus pond. Dear Clinton is absolutely indefatigable."

"Hildreth, you are horrid! It's not like you to make such ill-natured fun of—of people. If you didn't look so s-sick I w-wouldn't talk to you any m-more! What if I did speak of him as Clinton? M-mightn't anybody do that by mistake?"

"Yes," I conceded, "especially if it were a habit. May I get something from the pocket of that coat you're wearing?"

I felt like a brute, for there were tears in her eyes, but I thought the "Clinton" business had better be finished now. It might save trouble later.

She jerked off my coat and extended it with the very tips of her fingers.

What I wanted was in the breast-pocket.

"Here's your letter, Ronny," I said, handing her a fragment of note-paper.

She didn't faint, though she appeared pretty near it. Instead she sat down on the divan, put her face on my shoulder and began to cry.

Finished. Nothing for Hildreth but capitulation and wild promises of anything—the earth, the moon, the stars, Governor Charles's head on a salver—oh, anything in reason, if she would only be consoled.

None of my inducements were accepted, but the sympathy they conveyed had its effect. First she forgave me; and, second, I learned at last the real facts in connection with her disappearance from the Aldine Apartments.

At the tale's end I realized what an utter brute I had been. Her familiar use of the Governor's given name had led me to the verge of another error. I had again doubted that Ronny might bear a portion of blame and Charles be to a certain extent excusable. I learned otherwise.

The tale, of course, began with my cousin's secretaryship. Her new work, which touched on interests so much broader than anything in the real-estate business, fascinated her. Charles had found a fellow-worker rather than a mere clerk; they pulled together beautifully, and Veronica might have graduated to a full-fledged stateswoman if the inevitable had not occurred. Charles, who had never paid much attention to women—except those with votes in their hands—fell hard and far.

Over this portion of her story Veronica passed hurriedly, but I inferred that she threw Charles in with the work and allowed herself to be fascinated by both. They became engaged. In our rather democratic community there was no reason why such an engagement should not be announced, except one. The work. Once the romance was published Ronny could hardly go on as his secretary. The Governor's position demanded a betrothal of due length and a full-size wedding. Ronny suggested that their engagement be kept secret till he could find an efficient man to take her place.

Touched by her devotion, Charles accepted.

A week later their interest somewhat diverted from the mutual fascination of toil, two strong wills clashed violently. The clash's object was unimportant—as always—but Ronny didn't propose to wed any man who meant to be her master.

Charles was adamant; Ronny was flint. The romance was smashed by the impact, and my cousin returned to the welcoming realm of Mr. Carpenter.

Wisely determined that her young life should not be wrecked, Ronny allowed herself to be wooed and won by Rex Tolliver. He appealed to her, I inferred, largely because he was in every way Clinton Charles's opposite.

But this, too, turned out a mistake.

"*What?*" I ejaculated here. "Why are you marrying him, then?"

Her slate-gray eyes opened wide; her brows arched.

"I'm not," she said simply. "It was all over between us that night when he took me home from the theater. I think Rex realized that it was best. There was hardly a subject in the world on which we agreed. Anyway, he took his ring and left me without a word."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WARNING.

"I—SEE!"

What Ronny had just said explained a number of things. Why, for instance, Tolliver was so concerned over a petty disagreement about the play. It was the why of his overdone jealousy, and of the sullen air he had worn ever since we found Ronny at the lotus pond. He had repented of letting her break the engagement, and had hoped that as a rescuing hero she would take him back with open arms.

The welcome, however, was bestowed on my unworthy self, and, come to think of it, she had not showered endearments on Rex anywhere along the line. In fact, she had most of the time kept close to me.

While these reflections raced through my agile brain, the story continued.

Charles, moved like Tolliver to repen-

tance, had sought to reestablish the entente. A little thing like her engagement to another fellow didn't deter him. With the wise knowledge of Veronica one would have expected from a man who had never met her, he baited his line with Asgard Heights. There entered my fragment of letter. But the letter she actually mailed to him said only that as she was soon to be married, she preferred that his attentions should cease.

Crushed, Charles retired from the field—to the side lines, where he proceeded to cook up a daring and nefarious scheme.

The only excuse I could make for him was that on this subject he must have been as mad as Mr. Daniel Mason.

Rex, after his final disagreement with Veronica, left her at the apartment door. Finding Mrs. Sandry asleep, Ronny took pains not to wake her. She was removing her hat in the sitting-room when the bell of the apartment rang. From the speaking-tube Ronny learned surprisedly that Charles was below and wished to speak with her on a very important matter.

With childlike faith — having then no idea of his true quality—she told him he could have three minutes.

The elevator had stopped two hours before. Charles walked up, met Veronica in the sitting-room and related his tale of woe.

Here again Veronica somewhat slurred her story.

"He told me of a great misfortune which had come upon him and explained how I could help him. It was all a trick—a miserable, contemptible trick—but I believed him implicitly. His car was below, and as I meant to return inside an hour, I didn't leave any message for Mrs. Sandry. I put on my hat again and went with him and—and he wouldn't let me come back! He brought me out here and ever since he's been doing nothing but argue—in what little time he could spare from his work. I've been alone all the rest, with no company but a lot of miserable Chinamen. Well, old Li Ching is rather a dear. I've spent hours talking with him—he speaks beautiful English—and he used to tell me long stories about the old Chinese gods and heroes. You've no idea—"

"Yes," I said, thinking the subject had rather strayed, "but why did you go out with Charles at that time of night? How did he persuade you? Are you quite sure, Ronny, that you don't still—well—care for him?"

"Don't be horrid again. I despise him. He appealed to my pity and sympathy. I'll tell you the whole conversation another time. He and Rex will be back here in a minute. But I simply detest Governor Charles."

"Then, of course, you won't marry him."

"I—I can't."

"You don't have to. What's more, he is going to pay for this high-handed outrage with everything he cares for in the world. We'll force him to resign under threat of—"

"You won't do any such thing!"

She faced me, a high color in her cheeks, her dimpled chin well raised.

"But he deserves—"

"You don't understand. Governor Charles personally would neither deserve nor receive from me any consideration whatever. But it isn't fair to the State. He is the first decent, straight Governor we've had in ten years. You don't realize the work he's doing, Hildreth—"

"I realize that—never mind. We won't talk of it any more now, Ronny. Plenty of time for that when we're above ground. Did I hear you say creamed codfish?"

"Yes. I'll fix some more. This is cold."

I let her go, for I wanted to think, and the more I thought the more provoked I became.

Charles's recent amiability could be due to but one cause. A man as clever as he could not but have seen wherein his safety lay. Having lost the game, he threw down his cards with a great show of frankness.

"Here am I," he posed, "meek as a lamb and ready to take any punishment you choose to hand out. True, if you publish the story it is going to injure Miss Veronica Wyndham. You may depose me—send me to the penitentiary—I offer no resistance. Miss Wyndham has spent a week alone in my house with not so much as one woman for company. By all means publish. Certainly, take this pistol back.

Do you think I would resort to such crude means of self-protection? I am yours to command!"

I saw that Charles had left the pistol in question laid conspicuously on top of a tabouret close to my hand.

Picking it up carefully, I weighed it thoughtfully.

Just then a door at the other end of the long room opened and two figures entered.

Among the first symptoms of that poison gas had been delusion. Had some more of the gas leaked out and penetrated here? One of the figures was clearly a swashbuckling Charles I cavalier. The other was Hamlet, or the lord high executioner, or somebody that wore black tights and a long black cloak.

They approached nearer. Veronica, who was hovering over a chafing-dish, glanced up and said casually:

"Oh, you did find some things you could manage to wear. I'm so glad. Are they dry?"

Hamlet drew the conspirator-like cloak around him a bit more closely.

"Drier than those we took off, at least."

The cavalier swaggered over in my direction.

"Get in style, Hil," he grinned. "You can be anything from a pirate chief to little Bobby Shafto."

"Tolliver," I said, "let me be Haroun al Raschid. Which of the thousand and one tales is this?"

"The one, I guess. There's a roomful of giddy garb back there, but most of the costumes are in bad shape. They're the real thing, though. Look at these doeskin thigh boots, and this gold lace on the cloak is real. It's hardly tarnished at all."

"You have patches of mold on your doeskin boots, and your cloak is full of moth-holes. You look like a resurrection from a seventeenth century grave."

"Don't find fault. The conspirator there," he waved a lace ruffled cuff toward Hamlet, "has a hole in the back of his doublet as big as my hand. That's why he's a conspirator. The cloak covers it up."

"You're on friendly terms with him now?" I asked tentatively.

There was something in Tolliver's manner that puzzled me. An indescribable air of swaggering indifference. Though his rival was talking to Veronica across the chafing-dish, the cavalier seemed not in the least concerned.

"Oh," he said, "there's no use fighting all the time. He's a good enough fellow in his way. You see, Hil—"

He broke off with a gasp, biting at his lip, and all the swagger was gone.

"I'll talk to you about it later," he choked, and strode off—in another direction from the chafing-dish.

His sudden emotion hit me hard. I knew the reason for it. Tolliver had given up hope of Veronica for himself, and had noted those same little reminiscences of intimacy between her and Charles which had deceived me. With a boyish generosity as headlong as everything he did, Tolliver had withdrawn from the field.

Well, I could protect my cousin without his aid.

I got up, a bit shaky, but strong enough, and meandered over to the chafing-dish party. I touched the conspirator's arm.

"Just a minute," I said. "You'll excuse us, Veronica?"

"If you'll hand me that can of cream—and the salt, please. Thanks."

The conspirator and I withdrew. He looked at me questioningly.

"Charles," I said, and the prefix was purposely omitted, "I have learned the full history of your—your proceedings in connection with my cousin."

"Oh! Did she tell you?" he murmured.

"Yes. Your cleverness will have informed you that for her sake you will go scot-free of the law. Her reputation is your shield. I congratulate you. There will be no publicity, but—here, take your pistol."

I thrust the automatic into his hand. He stared down at it with a very red face, saying nothing.

"I want you to have it," I continued, "in case I should catch you annoying my cousin any further, or speaking one word to her beyond absolute necessity. Should that occur—I wouldn't care to shoot an unarmed man."

Turning on my heel I walked back to

Veronica. When I reached her he was still standing there, staring down at the pistol.

CHAPTER XIX.

"EXIT."

THÉ finding of this decrepit but once splendid banquet-hall cast a different light on the purpose of the labyrinth. Multimillionaires in search of novel entertainment for their guests sometimes produce strange fancies.

The misuse of scriptural quotations to give a deadly thrill or so in advance of pleasure was an irreverence which would not have troubled old Dan Mason. He was scarcely of the church-going type.

Guests of the sort he affected would have stood for the deadly thrills if they got their fun out of it afterward.

I could picture a gay party gathered about that table when the black silver was bright and the roses were fragrant. How they would shriek with laughter as each new arrival stumbled in, sick with the fear that he had been inveigled to death in a madman's trap. How they would shoo him over toward the master of the wardrobe, to be invested with fanciful trappings and emerge as gay a masker as the rest.

The threat of mocking death—the rush of asphyxiating gas—the awakening—an opened door, and all to end in wine and merriment.

Rude play, it is true, but Dan Mason had risen from ranks where rudeness is a synonym for mirth.

How he had so pledged his merry victims to secrecy that not a word of the device leaked out was a question we did not try to answer. One suspected that the revels were of a kind not to be bragged of publicly.

However it was, the hard-faced old master of the mask lay quiet now, while mildew and mold ate up his pleasure hall.

I had a great longing to escape from all this dank decay and breathe clean air again.

I had resumed my coat, Veronica flung about her the white wool outer garment of a crusader's costume, and, heartened by food and drink, we set out to find the exit provided against the ending of the mask.

At first sight the banquet-room had but two entrances, one of which led in from the wardrobe, the other from the labyrinth proper. Above this latter door, on the inside, was written in letters of gold:

If Thine Enemy Be Hungry, Give Him Food to Eat; and if He Be Thirsty, Give Him Water to Drink.

Mason's "enemies" had probably been served with something a good deal stronger than water, but the quotation was apt enough to pass. We left that and hunted along the walls, behind the rotting tapestry.

Our search soon met reward. Charles, who had been very silent, apparently taking my warning to heart, called out, and as I was nearest I reached him first. Tolliver and Veronica were then at the room's upper end.

He had drawn aside a cloth-of-gold drapery, and there, sure enough, was a door. It was an ordinary-looking door, with a brass knob and mahogany panels, and across it was printed in large welcome letters the one word: "Exit."

Charles took hold of the knob, but it wouldn't turn.

"Pull it sidewise," I suggested. "Most of these doors either slide or drop."

This one slid. It drew aside easily and revealed, not a passage or stair, but a small, square, bare chamber with another closed door at the far side.

Charles crossed toward it and I stepped in after him. As I did so I heard a sharp crash behind me and, wheeling, saw that the door had slid to automatically.

There came a rap on the outside and Tolliver's voice shouting:

"Hey! You in there! Open this up! I can't stir it."

I would have liked to oblige him, but I couldn't see any knob to take hold of. The word "Exit" had confronted the banquet-hall. This side was more voluble. It observed:

The Simple Believeth Every Word, but the Prudent Looketh Well to His Going.

"This other door is only a dummy, I fear," Charles sadly remarked. "It won't move."

"We're the dummies," I retorted sav-

agely. " Now what are we to do? Tolliver," I raised my voice, " can't you find an ax and smash this confounded door?"

There was no reply.

" Do you hear the groan of machinery?" demanded Charles.

" Of course I do. And the place is shaking like a factory. We've got to break out of here. Come on, put your shoulder beside mine and push."

Comrades in dismay, animosity was forgotten. He sprang to do as I asked.

And just then the noise and vibration stopped with a kind of jolt, there was a snapping sound and the door opened as it had closed, voluntarily.

We emerged.

The banquet-hall had magically vanished, and confronting us was a curving flight of white stairs.

With a contemptuous bang the intelligent door had shut again and didn't even offer a motto for our edification. There was merely what looked like a recess in the wall, covered with those eternal black and white stripes.

" I trust," said I, " that the lift or sliding car, or whatever the darned thing was, has gone back after the rest of us. It seems to me that Mason carried his jokes to the point of banality."

CHAPTER XX.

THE VILLAIN CONQUERS.

HOPING that " Exit " had meant what it said, though after a tricky fashion we ran hastily up the stairs. They led to the padded chamber beneath the pavilion.

Disappointed, but not despairing, we surveyed the ceiling. Presently, as the lighter man, I accepted the use of Charles's shoulders to examine that ceiling more intimately.

The embossed metal was worked into highly involved patterns, and I couldn't so much as find a crevice to mark the trap-door's boundaries. It wasn't thin stuff either that one could cut into and strip off with a pocket-knife.

After a fruitless hunt for some kind of knob or projection that would slide like the carving on the pedestal, Charles politely asked me to descend.

" I'm going back," he announced when I stood beside him again. " If Veron—your cousin and Mr. Tolliver were able to follow the route we did they would have arrived by now. They are imprisoned in the banquet-hall. You can stay here, if you like, and try to get the trap open, but I'm going back."

" You don't say! And may I ask why I should let you go to her—you—and myself remain here? She is in safe company now, but—"

" Mr. Wyndham, you choose to be extremely insolent. Whatever her feelings toward me, Veronica is my wife, and—"

" Your what? That's a —— lie!"

I jumped for his throat, but he caught me and held me off by the shoulders at arms' length. My strength had by no means returned, and anyway he was the more powerful man. I struggled. Anger had robbed me for the time of reason. The blood surged through my brain, and his face loomed hatefully through a scarlet mist. Staggering about, our feet sinking deep in the green upholstery, I felt myself jammed tight to the wall, and the pressure drove Tolliver's pistol hard against my hip. Ceasing to try for his throat, I reached for the gun.

It was in my grasp. His hand slid down my arm, but before it reached the elbow I had brought my wrist up and fired.

An automatic will shoot as fast as one can press the trigger, but I had time to press this one only twice. Then I was caught in a bearlike hug and fairly lifted off my feet. Half-smothered in the folds of the conspirator's cloak, I was swung round, and next thing found myself flat on the padded floor, staring up into Charles's face.

He had tripped me, twisted the weapon out of my hand, and now knelt triumphantly on my prostrate person. The two bullets fired had found a mark only in the voluminous folds of that cloak. I noticed that instead of reciprocating my effort to kill he had tossed the gun aside.

" Do you often go crazy like this, Wyndham?" he demanded.

I didn't answer. The first red mist had passed, and it was occurring to me that I had been foolish. I should have used the automatic to start with.

"If I let you up," he said, "what will you do?"

"Let me up and find out!"

"Thanks, no. Now, Wyndham, won't you be reasonable? You think me an utter scoundrel, and I'm not sure you are wrong. Still, you were calm enough before. What did I say that—"

"You lying hypocrite!" I snarled. "You referred to my cousin as—as your wife!"

"But why shouldn't I? I assure you the marriage was perfectly legal and in good form. She told you everything, so she must have told you that she entered into it willingly, even though under a misconception. Of course I lied to her—I've been bitterly regretting it ever since—and, of course, I did an unpardonable thing in bringing her to Asgard Heights against her will; but you must know—"

I went suddenly limp from head to foot.

"I don't know anything," I admitted. "Let me up, please."

"You won't?"

"No, I won't. It's all over. I'm subdued."

He courteously assisted me to rise, and again we faced one another.

"I don't at all understand you, Wyndham," he complained, and there was a certain pathos in his voice.

"The Wyndham family are not to be lightly understood. When I said that Veronica told me all, I exaggerated. Comparatively speaking, she told me nothing. If you won't consider it impertinent on the part of an utter stranger to Veronica and yourself, may I ask when this marriage took place?"

"Monday night — or rather Tuesday morning. About 1.15 A.M."

"*The* Tuesday morning, you mean?"

"Yes, the fifteenth. I hadn't supposed that Veronica would wish it kept secret from you, or I should have said nothing. Too bad. I told Tolliver, too."

"Of course. Friend Tolliver was about to impart the glad news, but he was overcome by emotion and desisted. You have such a casual way of announcing your weddings, Governor Charles."

"You are bitter over it, but that's hardly strange." He sighed. "I made a great mistake," he added sadly.

"It does seem that a slight error has been committed somewhere. However, as you suggested a while ago, we may as well hunt up the lost bride. Shall we try and open the door of that sliding car and make it slide back to the hall?"

He acquiesced and we did—try.

Like every other device in these lower regions, the door followed some sweet law of its own being, and was obdurate to all persuasion.

"I was afraid of this," said my companion gloomily. "We can only return by following our original path."

"Those closed panels," I reminded.

"That would be provided for. As the guests arrived they would pass through, as one might say, in series. Therefore, as one panel drops, another nearer to the entrance must rise. In that manner any number of people could journey through, and the trap remain perpetually in readiness. I shouldn't wonder—" He paused reflectively.

"Well?" I queried.

"That would explain the lights. The same mechanism that controls the panels may throw off one circuit and turn on the next. In other words, only a comparatively small number of lamps would be in use at any one time. Light follows the victim's wanderings about the labyrinth at a very slight expenditure of current."

"No doubt you are right," I conceded rather impatiently. "I'm no electrician. By the way, how about those other two archways? One of them may lead to an easier road."

"Impossible. Mason would not have offered any real choice, or the joke would have been spoiled."

"Nevertheless—"

"We can look, if you wish."

A hasty glance from one of the stairways in question showed that it led into the same system of corridors as our original choice. The other ended similarly, but to our surprise we observed, set on the lowest step, a number of objects.

They proved to be several bottles of fine wine, Chablis and Madeira, two jars of anchovies, three of pâté de foies gras, and six tins of French sardines.

"The butler grew weary last time he went to provision *Bluebeard's* chamber," I suggested. "His burden was left by the wayside."

"Put some of these in your pockets," advised the conspirator, as he stowed away a couple of boxes of sardines in the front of his medieval doublet. "We ate most of the provisions in the banquet-hall."

I complied.

"You are intending to live there indefinitely?"

"It is well to be prepared for anything. I am not sure," he continued, "that I should take you with me, Wyndham. Veronica was greatly worried when you fainted. She says your health is poor; the fatigue of the return journey might be too much for you. Rest here, and let me go alone, and if I—er—shouldn't return, you can come on later."

Such anxiety was touching, but not so personal as it might have been. I could see in his eye that to him I was only a treasured possession of Ronny's—something she would hold him responsible for if harm came to it.

"My health," I said grimly, "is better than yours will be if you try to prevent my going. I'm not afraid of Ronny, and you are. I can hit you and you daren't hit me. Forward!"

Charles eyed me strangely. Either he thought I was crazy, or he was embarrassed that I had discovered his secret. No matter which.

The continual reversal of all the ideas I could gather concerning him and Ronny was enough to drive any man to mental irresponsibility.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

SONG TO SCOFFERS

BY MURRAY GARDNER BREESE

I HAVE walled myself in a woman's heart.
Now laugh, you lads! Say, "Nay,"
For laugh is Youth's prerogative
While the sun drives up the day,
And doubt, you dancing devil-may-cares,
For that is your heedless way!

I'll scorn you not, you scornful tongues,
But give you laugh for laugh;
For I've been one of your blithesome band—
Be it pageant splendid or chaff—
But *women* are many—a *woman* is *one!*
Now ponder this well and quaff.

I have walled myself in a woman's heart,
And the walls are not of deal,
But firmly muscled; apulse with blood
Keep me and my dreams enseal,
And moth nor rust may never corrupt
Nor thieves break through and steal.

When Red was Black

by Stephen Allen Reynolds

"BIG DICK" SLADE, proprietor of the Strayhorn, the largest and possibly the most gorgeously furnished establishment of its kind to be found between El Paso and the City of the Angels, strolled through his mahogany-fitted bar, sauntered leisurely along the cleared space, roped off from the dance-hall proper by silken cables supported by silver-plated stanchions, and halted at the door giving access to his "Parlor of Fortune."

Business was good at the Strayhorn, and Big Dick smiled to himself as he stood peering over the low door into the room where roulette and faro held court, where "stud" and "draw" could be played seven afternoons and nights a week, and where even the more humble seekers for action at vulgar craps and Mexican monte could find what they wanted during at least sixteen hours of the twenty-four.

From his position of vantage Slade commanded both a view of the dance-hall and the gaming-room, and to his ears came music from all three of the ground-floor rooms which had brought him in money enough to make his balance the fattest one on record at the Mesa National. And it was whispered that Big Dick had other balances in Tucson and El Paso banking institutions, for he had been a long time at his trade, had able lieutenants, and always employed the best male and female talent for plucking his guests and patrons, while giving them entertainment of sorts.

Thus gold-toothed and white-coated "Reno" Ryan, the genius who presided nightly over the "deck" behind the dollar-inlaid bar, was a person who could concoct anything in the line of a Sazarac, a real Louisville julep, a "blue moon," or a "pink skirt"; while a smile from the cherry-red lips and baby-blue eyes of either one of the Seattle Twins was a ticket straight to the purse of many a tight-wadded Arizonan who neither drank red liquor nor backed his judgment as to which way dice would fall or cards turn up. And there were others among the rouged and ready contingent who, when the waxed floor reflected dully the pale light of breaking day, cashed commission checks totaling close to the earnings of either of the famous twins.

And Slade's experts at the faro and roulette tables were wonders in their way. Even now, as Big Dick stood looking, a glint of satisfaction came into his hazel-green eyes as he saw the nimble fingers of his best faro-dealer practically sweep the layout and heighten the "house" stacks of white and pink and chocolate in the chip-rack at his side. A quick and accurate dealer of faro was "Reub" Coleman—a man well worth the twenty dollars Slade paid him for each sitting.

And every whit as good as the pale-faced faro-dealer was the wrinkled person with the dyed mustache who stood behind the roulette-wheel nearest the dance-hall door. "Old Ed" Gibbons knew roulette

as a professor of mathematics knows arithmetic. With engineers and firemen from the near-by roundhouse of the S. P., and cow and sheepmen from more distant ranches; with miners from the copper country and prospectors up out of Old Mexico, he was a hale old fellow well met—and one who knew his business. With a mixed crowd lined up two-deep around his layout, with each man of it intent upon his own system of trying to beat the house, Ed Gibbons needed neither pencil nor paper to help him when the ball fell and there were complex chances to be paid off.

Through years of experience behind the whirling mahogany bowl and the glazed layout of red and black, it had become as easy for him to pay off a "transversal-six" paying five for one as it was to satisfy a simple play for even money on red or black or odd or even. "Horse" bets at seventeen to one, *carrés* of four numbers, paying eight for one, were, when they won, as easy for Old Ed to reckon and pay as the problem of two plus two would be for the professor of mathematics.

In his day Gibbons had traveled far and wide and had tried out many systems of his own. Now he smiled as would-be wise patrons tried the dangerous "martingale progressive," the simple "dominant dozen," the "parlay of three," or the intricate "37-column pyramid," or any other one of the well-known twenty systems which had sometimes prevailed—with profit to the player—at Aix and Monte Carlo. The fact that European wheels have but one zero which, when it appears, means a forfeit of half the players' stakes on the even chances, while American wheels have two zeros, either one of them sweeping the board in the favor of the bank, was one reason for Old Ed's smile. And he had another.

It was years since he had laid a bet himself. He never expected to again. For it was rumored that gambling was to be killed at the coming session of the Legislature. Nevada would then be the last open State for licensed gaming, and even now it was said that Nevada would be closed in another year. Ed Gibbons had never fancied Nevada. He liked the towns and cities along the Mexican border, and was satisfied for the time being to be on Big Dick's pay-roll. He had a little money banked himself at the Mesa National across the way. His pay was good and certain, and in spite of the sixty years which had whitened his head but had by no means dimmed his eyes, Old Ed was contented with the present and wasn't worrying about the future.

"What time'll we shut down?" came a voice at Slade's elbow as he stood watching the thinning crowd at the gaming-tables.

Big Dick turned and confronted his "dance boss," the slick Easterner who called off the lancer numbers, kept the girls in line, and saw to it that the members of the orchestra took two-bit cigars oftener than drinks after playing "request" music.

"I reckon about seven," Slade uttered from a corner of his mouth. He flashed a glance around the dance-hall, another at his watch, then stood toying with its heavy platinum chain as he added: "Forty minutes more. That 'll give you eight more dances if you cut 'em short. Then chase the girls to breakfast and get rid o' that San Antone hardware man nice and easy. I hear he bought 'French' Annie eight quarts."

"Nine," the dance boss corrected. He chuckled and turned away.

For a few minutes longer Slade stood listening to the recurrent tinkle of the cash-register in the bar behind him, the rattle of dropping roulette-balls and the clicking of chips ahead of him; then, as the orchestra struck into a popular two-step, he lit a cigar and sauntered into his parlor of chance.

As was his habit, he strode slowly around the room, with an eye on the chip-racks behind each game—an all-seeing eye which took in his dealers, lookouts, and customers—to come to a halt at the table where the play was the heaviest. And on this particular morning it chanced to be in front of Old Ed's layout.

Gibbons stroked his dyed mustache as the little ivory ball sped around the revolving mahogany rim of the wheel. Sensing the approach of his employer, he

glanced up at him once from beneath his green eye-shade, then his eyes dropped to the slowing ball and his hands fell to shuffling a stack of chips ready before him.

The ball sank below the smooth rim, leaped and rattled over the nickeled obstruction riffles, to come to rest finally in one of the partitioned pockets.

"Twenty-seven wins, gentlemen," Old Ed called evenly. "It's red, odd, and falls in the third dozen." Nimbly his fingers gathered in a tall stack of purple chips resting squarely on the black diamond, and some other trifling single-chip bets on losing numbers; then he paid off a solitary five-dollar stake on the red and stood waiting for the players to lay fresh wagers.

"All set, gentlemen?" he asked presently as he picked the ball out of its metallic nest ready for another spin.

"Just a minute," the man who'd lost the stack of purples suggested. "I got a hunch that the black's *got* to come this time. I'll press my bet another three hundred. You can't make it red *every* time."

The speaker pushed three ivory markers onto the black diamond, where they rested beside another stack of purple chips—a stack he had just taken from the rapidly diminishing pile before him.

But Gibbons held up a protesting hand. "That's over our limit," he said. "Can't take more'n fifty on a single number, or more'n a thousand on even chances. You've got twelve hundred there. You'll have to draw down two hundred if you want to play the maximum."

"That's a hell of a way to treat a man that's dropped eight thousand here tonight," the player declared with considerable heat. "This is all I've got left—besides some chicken-feed." He pointed to the few hundred dollars' worth of chips remaining in front of him, then fished out a small handful of mixed U. S. and "Mex" silver. This he dumped contemptuously on the edge of the layout.

But Gibbons shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry," he said not unkindly, "but rules are rules—unless the boss wants to break 'em. Sometimes he raises the limit to accommodate sports."

"Where *is* the boss?" the player asked.

"Standing right behind you, it so happens, at this moment," Old Ed said as he speeded up the wheel a little and stood awaiting the nod of consent which no doubt would come.

The player whirled, and Big Dick saw that he was young and rash. A hat with a Sonora shaped peak crowned a head of curly brown hair. His face, weather-worn and burned by hot suns, contrasted strangely with the neat business suit he wore. But further evidence that he was a man of the open was forthcoming by reason of his bronzed and calloused hands, the depth of his level gray eyes, the fearless swing of his broad shoulders as he turned to face the proprietor of the Strayhorn.

"What d'you say, mister?" asked the young stranger. "Can I go as far as I like?"

Coolly Slade eyed and weighed his patron for a moment or so. Then he removed the cigar from his mouth and pointed its burning end toward the ceiling.

"Give him the sky, Gibbons," he said.

There was a certain danger attached to taking off the limit. It meant possibly a continuous doubling-up of winnings that would soon break the Bank of England. On the other hand, it might mean that the stranger would draw a large bank-roll from his pocket and "martingale"—increase by progression—each losing bet until such a time as the first winning bet would cover all his losses and possibly cripple the bank itself.

But Slade had met rash young men of this stranger's type before. His silver-corded hat, his bronzed face and hands, told the gambler that he was dealing with no brother shark. The master of the Strayhorn awaited the fall of the ball—the drop which would mean a difference of twenty-four hundred dollars to him within the next few seconds. Likewise the young man waited, his fingers nervously stacking up the little pile of silver in front of him.

Old Ed, croupier *par excellence*, watched impassively the slowing ball. It rattled into a pocket. The next instant he scooped in the chips and markers on the black diamond, while the young man heard him say:

"Nineteen wins, gentlemen. It's red, odd, and in the second dozen."

A mild oath came from the young stranger. Recklessly he shoved his little stack of silver and all his remaining chips over on the black.

"Might's well go clean," he grumbled. "Then maybe I'll have to go herdin' sheep or shovelin' ore. That there represents nine thousand two hundred dollars." He pointed to the chips and money on the black.

Slade lingered to see the "clean-up." He wasn't particular about the last few hundred dollars, but as it was near closing time—unprofitable to remain open much longer—it was just as well that the next ball should fall into a red pocket.

It did. The man in the silver-corded hat stepped back from the layout a little, grumbled under his breath, then got out the "makings" of a cigarette. Slade noticed that the stranger used a little more tobacco than was necessary, and that his fingers trembled as he rolled his smoke, but, used to such sights at the Strayhorn, he turned from the cleaned-out man and addressed himself to Old Ed.

"Might's well close up, Gibbons," he directed. He jerked his head in the direction of the other two roulette-wheels now covered up until the afternoon, then wagged his thumb toward the single faro-table that was being patronized. "There's nothing left over there but a couple high-card pikers after drink money."

His orders given, Slade turned with the intention of walking toward the dance-hall. But before he had taken a step in that direction the voice of the young stranger came to him.

"Just a minute, mister. What 'll you lend me on this?"

From his vest-pocket the man who had apparently been cleaned up produced a heavy gold watch. Slade took it sort of gingerly, saw that the expensive works were enclosed in an old-fashioned hunting-case of unusual thickness and weight, then "hefted" it in his hand.

"What d'you mean, how much will I *lend* you?" he asked. "I'll give you fifty outright for it, if that 'll help you out toward grub or railroad fare." Again he looked at the watch and squinted at an inscription engraved on the reverse side of the outer case.

"I wouldn't *sell* the watch for any money on earth," the stranger said hotly. He reached for the timepiece, but bit his nether lip at Slade's next remark.

"This is no hock-shop. There'll be one open about nine o'clock."

With these words the master of the Strayhorn glanced at his own watch, then turned his back and sauntered coolly away.

Hot and bitter words were on the young man's lips, but at a word from Old Ed he turned around. The other players had drifted away toward the dance-hall doorway, and the two were alone.

"Are you really clean, young feller?" Gibbons asked gruffly but in a manner far from unkind. The other nodded.

"Wha'd'you want the money for—to buck the wheel some more?"

"Not by a damned sight! I want to make the eight-ten west for Los Angeles. I can't wait till the pawn-shop opens. The watch is all I've got left, but I wouldn't take all the money on earth for it. It belonged to my dad. It was a present to him from a convention of mining engineers held in Denver about the time I was born. I know I've been a fool to gamble, but—"

"Let's see the watch," Old Ed interrupted. "Maybe I can help you out personally to make your train. I can pawn the watch later and mail you the ticket."

The young plunger passed over the timepiece. The old man took it from him and held it under one of the shaded lights over the glazed layout. Carelessly he snapped open the front lid of the case to observe the name of the maker on the dial. It was a world-famous name, and one of the costliest products of their factory. Likewise the name of the case-makers was satisfactory, as further inspection disclosed their stamp and carat markings. Now Gibbons bent closer over the watch to read the presentation inscription: *To Luther B. Folger, Our Good—*

This far Old Ed made out the deep script, and this far only. He stiffened and

closed his eyes. Had his back not been turned toward the younger man the latter might have reached out to support him in what might have been a spell of faintness.

The seconds passed, the gaming-room became quiet as the last of the pikers filed out and the faro-dealer covered his table. The strains of the last waltz died away in the hall beyond, and a babble of female voices floated to the spot where the two men were standing. Still Old Ed remained as he was, his mind busy with recollections of the long ago. The young man grew impatient. He shuffled his feet and cleared his throat.

"Well?" he inquired.

Gibbons opened his eyes and turned slowly around. A porter was looping back the heavy curtains preparatory to airing and sweeping the room. In the broad light of day that now streamed into the room, it seemed to Gibbons that there was something strangely familiar in the face of the younger man. Only his gambler's training prevented his emotion showing, kept his voice from trembling, as he asked:

"D'you mean to say that you're the son of 'Buck' Folger of Los Angeles?"

The young man nodded. His eyes grew wide. "Did you know dad?" he asked.

"Did I *know* him?" the old man echoed. He reached for young Folger's hand and crushed it between his own. "And I knew your mother, too," he added under his breath.

Aloud, he went on: "There was a time when your father and I packed all we owned in the world on two burros. For five years we rambled over the Chiricahua country, and more'n once stood off the Apaches that came boilin' down from the White Mountain Reservation. Then we put in three more years tearin' up the Sierra Madres through western Chihuahua, till Governor Ahumada—"

"You must be Ed Gibbons," Folger interrupted.

The words seemed to bring the thoughts of the older man from the past to the present. The porter was waiting. Some one was calling from the bar where Slade was counting cash.

"I *am* Gibbons. I was your daddy's partner once, and I'm *your* friend now. I've got to cover up this table and turn in my cash. You beat it out o' here and put a good breakfast into yourself. Never mind your train to Los Angeles. Meet me in the back room o' the Paragon Bar about eight o'clock and it 'll be well worth your while."

For a moment the young man stood hesitating, but Gibbons thrust the watch into his hands and urged him gently toward the door. He walked away while Old Ed busied himself with the big rubber cloth—walked through the dance-hall, through the bar and out into the blinding daylight. Mechanically slipping his watch into his pocket, he was about to pass on up the street when something fell jingling to the sidewalk.

Folger stared, then stooped to pick up a ten-dollar gold-piece which had fallen from his hand. Then for the first time he realized that he had indeed found a friend—a friend who had given evidence that he meant business.

Ashamed of himself for the weakness he had indulged, his costly folly of the night, he stood for some moments contemplating the coin in his hands. A lump gathered in his throat as he thought of his unworthiness. Then he wondered what Gibbons meant by the words "well worth your while."

With curiosity strong on him, Folger walked slowly away—walked until the odor of broiling ham and frying eggs which came floating out of the doors of the T-Bone Restaurant aroused in him the consciousness that he had eaten nothing since the previous afternoon.

He entered, ate heartily of the fare, and promptly at eight o'clock sought the rear room of the Paragon Bar, where he found Gibbons waiting, a cup of black coffee before him and a long, thin cigar between his teeth. And quite promptly the old man got down to business.

"What special business takes you to Los Angeles—if it ain't askin' too much?" he began. "I want to do somethin' for you."

Young Folger hesitated for fully half a minute, then he burst out: "Damn it all!

I'm not asking favors. I know I've been a fool to gamble away that nine thousand. And it came hard, too. It represents two years dry panning down in Sonora. And I can't go back, either, on account o' the Yaquis warning me off. Six of us had one little brush with 'em, and I wouldn't care to go much south o' Naco. It wouldn't be healthy for me."

"Where were you pannin'? Your dad and I were down that way long before you were born."

"Dry bed o' the left fork o' the Moctezuma," Folger answered briefly.

Old Ed's eyes brightened. "I knew that strip above the bend," he said, "just below Spanish Gully—red clay bank on one side, yeller on the other."

Folger nodded. Most unquestionably Old Ed knew the country. But now the latter changed the subject. "About this Los Angeles trip," he prompted.

"Well—it's about all that's left for me to do. I've blown in my earnings on your game"—Old Ed winced at the words—"and I can't go back to Mexico. I own a little house and lot up in Los Angeles that dad left to me. It's mine, free and clear, and I figured I might mortgage it for a couple o' thousand—enough to grubstake me for a year or so while I go through these hills back here."

Folger waved his hand toward the purple mountains in the distance. "Arizona's far from bein' fine-combed by prospectors," he went on with a laugh. "I believe there's a chance of finding something worth while in the line o' copper—give a man a year or two. I've been at it since I was twenty. I'm twenty-five now—and considerable of a fool, I guess."

So bitter was the tone of the last words, so self-accusing were they, that Gibbons felt called upon to deal a grain of comfort. Now he leaned forward and clapped a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Cheer up, son!" he said with a reassuring pat. "Be glad that you didn't lose ninety thousand instead o' nine. We all get bit—have to buy our lesson, and you got off pretty moderate. Now, you sit up and listen to me, and don't feel as if you've committed a crime or a terrible sin. Many's the time your dad and I bucked these games along the line, and sometimes we made things smoke. More often we got cleaned out. Then we went back into the hills for more. When a man's got only a few dollars in his pocket and no woman and kids to look out for, he's got a *right* to gamble. I take it you've got no one to support? Your mother isn't alive?" Studiously Old Ed dropped his eyes as he put the last question. He feared that the younger man might read something in them.

But Folger was looking out of the window at his elbow. "No," he said, shaking his head as he gazed at the mountains in the distance. "I haven't got a living relative that I know of. My mother was lost in the Galveston flood."

A long minute of silence followed. Old Ed's gaze followed that of his partner's son. Never had the mountains seemed so cold and chilling to him as at that moment—so distant and unattainable.

At length he roused himself and fumbled in his pocket for pencil and paper. A cautious glance around the room disclosed the fact that they were alone and in no immediate danger of being disturbed. Now, his voice businesslike though low, he asked:

"Just how much did you lose at the Strayhorn? I'm goin' to fix it so you don't *have* to go to Los Angeles."

Wonderingly Folger answered. "I had ninety-three hundred dollars through Wells-Fargo for my dust. Outside o' the suit of clothes I bought and what I paid out for two meals yesterday I can't think of anything else I spent since I hit town. I might have had a drink or two, but I'm not keen after liquor. I suppose Miss Roulette touched me up for about ninety-two hundred and fifty."

Old Ed put down some figures, thought a while, and then set down more figures. These he added. Then he leaned over and spoke earnestly to the son of his former partner. A half an hour later they separated.

Business that evening at the Strayhorn was not as good as usual. There was a

dearth of drinkers, dancers, and plungers, and all three of the rooms devoted respectively to wine, women, and chance were in consequence but scarcely patronized.

Long before midnight two of the dance-hall women quarreled over the temporary possession of the heart and pocketbook of a bibulous real-estate person hailing from Phœnix who claimed that his name was "Jingle Bells" and that he owned the finest tract of land in the Salt River Valley. When French Annie's forefinger had been extracted from between the gold-crowned teeth of a brunette from New Orleans, and the lady from Louisiana had found it necessary to have her hair done over again and a big rent in her frock repaired, the clock over the bar indicated eleven-thirty.

At eleven-forty-five and a fraction Reub Coleman's lookout fell off his high stool and lay still on the floor. It might have been epilepsy, it might have been an over-indulgence in alcohol, but before any of the attendants could interfere a big stockman heaved the contents of two fire-buckets over the prostrate man, drenching both the lookout and the carpeted floor.

Therefore Big Dick Slade was in particularly bad humor when, shortly after midnight, the black attendant from the gaming-room knocked on the door of his little den situated just off the end of the bar.

"Who's there?" he snapped. "What's wanted?" He got up from his seat beside the tall safe that was by far the most conspicuous object in the den, and anticipated the answer by jerking open the door himself.

"Mistah Gibbons, sah—he tell me his bank done busted. He need mo' money and want you-all to fetch it."

With an oath on his lips Big Dick seized a large wallet from his reserve cash-drawer, and then slammed the door of the safe. He then twirled the knob on the dial and, with an angry light in his eyes, headed for the Parlor of Chance.

"What's the trouble here?" he asked evenly a few moments later as he pushed his way through the throng gathered around Old Ed's layout. His tone was unctuous, his vexation masked from the eyes of the crowd.

"This young feller seems to be after our hide," Old Ed answered as he pointed to Folger and indicated the big pile of chips and gold and banknotes that was heaped and stacked up before the young plunger. "He's got eight hundred or so more than what he lost yesterday—which cleans up the ten thousand I started in with to-night."

Slade's hazel-green eyes widened a trifle as he recognized the man who had tried to pledge his watch with him, then they narrowed as they lit on the pile of chips and money. Gibbons leaned closer and whispered:

"He dropped in at ten o'clock with fifty dollars that he must have raised on that watch. He's been playin' black for the last two hours, hittin' the limit for the last few bets."

Now Folger felt called upon to speak. "What d'you say, boss?" he asked in a tantalizing way. "Are you goin' to give me more action or are you goin' to close up because I'm eight hundred ahead of you? This is practically all my own money here in front of me. Suppose we cash in these chips here and play for real coin?—unless your feet are cold."

A titter of laughter from one or two of the crowd aroused the animal in Slade's nature. "Cash the chips and start your wheel," he snarled at Old Ed, then fell to counting bills of large denomination which he took from the wallet and laid in several orderly little heaps atop the chip-rack. Now he turned to Folger.

"There's twenty thousand more there—*if you can get it!*"

"I'll do my best," Folger came back good-naturedly. He pocketed the money which Old Ed handed him in exchange for his chips and laid two five-hundred-dollar markers on the black diamond.

Around and around the ball sped, propelled by the croupier's fingers. The crowd edged closer. Not a man of it save Folger had a dollar down, but each individual sensed that something was "coming off." Big Dick stood aloof, a sneering sort of a smile on his face as he peered over Old

Ed's shoulder for a fuller view of the wheel.

"Want to give me a bigger limit?" Folger asked coolly as the ball slackened speed.

"Not *yet*," Slade answered shortly. He continued to smile, but as the ball fell into a red pocket he edged in closer to Old Ed and whispered something in his ear. Gibbons shook his head.

"Thirty wins, gentlemen," he droned. "It's red, even, and in the third dozen. You lose this time, sir."

He swept the thousand-dollar stake to his side of the layout and watched Folger count out another bet of like dimensions. Almost savagely Slade addressed himself confidentially to the wheelman. But this time Old Ed wasn't contented with merely shaking his head in the negative. Instead he uttered for Big Dick's ear alone:

"It's no use. I never *have* done it, and I won't do it *now*—for you or any other man. I won't educate a sucker either. If you want to trim this young feller, I won't interfere. But you'll have to take the wheel yourself like you've done many a time before."

"Then stand one side," Slade grumbled. He stepped behind the wheel as Gibbons made way and plucked the ball from its red pocket. "The boss himself is dealin' now," he said in a loud tone. "The roof is the limit to one and all, and may the best man win."

"Five thousand on the black," Folger snapped. He laid a sheaf of banknotes on the black diamond and eyed Slade coolly. Old Ed stood near by, impassive and taciturn as ever. The play was now out of his hands, but he was interested in its result—a result which seemed fairly certain to him.

A gleam of cupidity flashed in Slade's eyes as he saw the size of the stake he was rolling for. He snapped the ball into the rim of the wheel and let it go. One ham of a hand caressed his smoothly shaven double chin. The other caught the edge of the layout and rested there. Slower and slower the ball sped on its course. All eyes were on it as it left the smooth mahogany and began to leap over the metal riffles.

Stealthily the thumb of Slade's right hand stole beneath the edge of the layout, leaving the four pudgy fingers visible alone. The ball began to "die." Simultaneously Big Dick's thumb found a row of small push-buttons. It pressed hard on the third button, counting from the left.

The ball all but fell into a red pocket, then wabbled across the partition and sank with a *click* into the adjoining black one. A worried look came into Slade's eyes, but mechanically he called out:

"Number 2 wins. Black and even."

Folger looked at the five markers slid across the layout to him. He shook his head. "Cash, please," he insisted. "Those may be good for a thousand apiece, but we might get excited and forget what they call for."

Big Dick's gambler's training served him well at this moment. Yearning for the heart's blood of this young plunger who was nearly five thousand dollars ahead of his game, he drew back his markers, and with a grim smile tossed over a package of banknotes. He wondered what was wrong with the "red control" of his wheel. He flashed a glance over his shoulder at Old Ed, but that individual was coolly stroking his dyed mustache.

"Ten thousand on the black!" Folger called triumphantly. He slapped down two thin packages of notes and stared at Slade.

For an instant the latter hesitated. He knew that cunningly hidden within the ivory ball was a core of soft iron. And he knew that, by pressing certain buttons connected with certain pockets in the wheel he could make the ball fall either red or black, or odd or even. Magnetic attraction had been the secret of his success whenever his bank had been too hardly pressed. Folger wasn't playing odd or even. Those control buttons were of no use to the schemer. And something had gone wrong with the red control. But he still had an ace in the hole.

"Your ten thousand *goes!*" he declared, and spun his ball.

Again the ivory sphere whirled around and around the inner rim of the polished wheel. The onlookers held their breath. Few of them had seen such sums wagered on the single rolling of a ball. Old Ed

stole time to light one of his long cigars, then his eyes became glued on the speeding ball.

Once more Slade rested his hand on the edge of the layout. Confident this time, irrespective of the failure of the red control, he smiled as his thumb slipped under the layout and pressed hard on the button at the extreme right hand. It was connected with the most powerful magnets of all: those energizing the two pockets which swept the board for the house—the single and double zero.

Its impetus lost, gravity pulled the "unfair" ball lower and lower into the bowl. It began to leap and rattle. The words, "The green zero wins and the house takes all," were forming on Slade's lips, when a miracle was performed before his eyes.

The ball actually *balanced* on the partition separating the green single zero from the neighboring pocket, then visibly *hopped* into the latter receptacle.

"Twenty-six wins," grated Slade in spite of himself. To complain that his wheel had been fixed would have ruined the short future of the Strayhorn. Automatically he added: "It's black, even, and in the third dozen."

"Ten thousand more on the black!" Folger shouted even before Slade's reluctant fingers began to seek the bills to pay him off.

"Not to-night," the latter said in a low, tense whisper. "Not on *this* machine." Grudgingly he counted out ten thousand dollars.

Quickly Folger gathered up his money and thrust it into his pockets, and almost immediately a powerful-looking fellow stepped close behind him. "Better get away," he whispered. "You've just got about time to make that northbound train."

Luther Floyd, Jr., "got," his guard close behind him.

There followed a counting of money, a clanging of the safe door as Slade put back the slim balance of his reserve cash. He wondered where Old Ed had disappeared to so soon after the drop of the ball into disastrous No. 26. But after the early closing and an investigation behind locked doors of the wired wheel, he wondered no longer. All the control wires save that leading to the black had been disconnected. And these disconnected wires, still attached to their batteries, had been connected up with the black wire.

"No wonder red was black and green was black and every other damned thing was black every time I pressed the button," Big Dick swore as he surveyed Old Ed's handiwork.

And two days later the last of the mystery was cleared away by the receipt of a letter mailed some distance up the line from a junction point in New Mexico. The contents of the letter seemed to have either been scrawled in haste or else written on a rapidly moving train. But in any event it read:

DEAR SLADE:

I felt called on to leave kind of sudden like, but I don't owe you anything and have never stolen anything from you. I don't believe in educating suckers, and I haven't told the kid anything except how to play his money. I never used the buttons, as you know yourself I believe the percentage is high enough without 'em.

I *did* go into the back room again that morning you tried to buy the kid's watch for fifty bucks. And the coon porter was paid to lock me in that room and not let me out till I rapped. He got well paid, and he's gone where you'll never find him. You can find us, though, any time you like by making inquiries through the First National Bank of Guthrie, Oklahoma. That's where I'm going to bank the money that I drew out of the Mesa National the afternoon before I spinned my last ball.

The kid and I have enough money to take up several thousand acres of hay-land at a dollar an acre, and we're going to cut considerable hay, which ought to bring us in fifteen bucks a ton. If your banks get busted by any rough people down your way, we'll be glad to have you come up to Oklahoma and drop in on us. We'll treat you right and give you a job on one of these patented mowers that you run by pressing buttons. That 'll be right in your line.

I forgot to say who the kid is. He's the son of my old pal that I split up with in the early days on account of a girl. I couldn't stand to see the kid trimmed. Give my regards to Reub Coleman and the bunch.

Yours respectfully,

EDWARD GIBBONS.

P. S.—We'd have trimmed you closer, but we might have been murdered getting out of town. As it *was*, I advised the kid to hire a guard to see him to the train. And I caught the same train.—E. G.

Allatambour

by Joseph Pettee Copp

CHAPTER XII.

A TRIAL.

THE night was dark. Fitful flares from the fire-pit cast a flickering lume over the dusky figures encircling the flames.

The captain and I could see the eager excited expression on the black faces as the light fell on them. Something of moment was in store for the morrow.

We could guess what it was. We would be the chief attraction.

Between our isolated hut and the gesticulating, chanting, loud-talking crowd a lone, forlorn figure sat on the ground dimly discernible or nervously walked around. Always he kept as near our prison as the guards standing by the gate to our hut would let him.

It was the hunchback. He was there compelled by his love for one of the girls with us. He was loyal. He could do nothing to help her, but he would not leave.

I thought of Patience Standish. I prayed that she might be saved torture. I hoped that I might be near her, especially in any hour of peril. But I was at a loss—I knew not where she was.

The five black girls lay on the ground, huddled close together. They seemed to gain comfort from each other.

The fourteen-year-old saw her lover near and called. Eagerly he answered. The guard chased him away.

Then, as I was at a loss to help Patience, I began thinking of some plan to help these two.

Two guards stood by the gate to our enclosure. Two more I knew were immediately in the rear. The four could easily keep their eye on any one within the confining human-bone fence.

Captain Standish sat beside me in the doorway of the hut on the split-cane floor, his feet dangling near the ground as mine were. We were wishing for a cool breeze.

"Captain," I spoke, "have you noticed the hunchback out in the dark, open space between us and the fire?"

"Yes—I've been watching him. He's gone on one of the girls, isn't he?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "and I want to help the girls to escape—remember what Allatambour said about killing them to-morrow?"

"The old son-of-a-sea-cook is just the one to do that little thing, too; damn him!"

"Well, how can we help?"

"Search me, son," and he very expressively pointed to the vigilant guards in front of us and jerked his thumb over his shoulder to remind me of the equally watchful men standing in our rear.

We kept quiet for a while. My hands rested on the floor behind me. I gave my whole attention to try and think up a plan.

A big crawling centiped made his way across my right hand and was starting to navigate my left before I realized what it was. Silently and motionlessly I let him finish his promenade. Then I despatched him with a blow from a coconut. I don't like the feel of them walking over me even if they are harmless in these islands.

Then came a commotion in the dark. The natives by the fire were dispersed by armed blacks. They unwillingly left the plaza. The soldiers retired to their mess-

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halls, which were the barracks. Soon the whole town was quiet. All seemingly slept except our guards—and the hunchback. Somehow he had escaped the soldiers and returned to his untiring love vigil.

The five girls hardly moved. They seemed breathlessly awaiting their fate. Then one sobbed. Again quiet.

A low, soughing noise came to our ears.

"What's that!" exclaimed Captain Standish. Both of us were on nerve tension. I listened.

"A breeze comes our way and is swaying the bamboos in the swamp brake," I told him. Then a puff of cool, refreshing air fanned us. It felt good. It felt wet.

"Rain," the captain declared with certainty.

The puff was followed by another, then a gust, and more, till a squall hit us. But the rain did not come as we expected. The wind blew and tore at the loose thatches.

The drone of bamboo rubbing bamboo became a shriek.

I could see the giant stalks towering high. They were just visible against the lowering sky over the roofs across the plaza from us and I knew there the swamp was.

I watched the swaying, bending, shrieking poles as the wind rubbed and rubbed them. Then I thought I saw a flash like a firefly among the moving mass. I looked again and more little lights appeared like a shower of sparks. Then a faint smell of burning wood wafted with the wind.

The guards also smelled it. One cried out in alarm. The two from the rear of our prison came running to see what caused the outcry. The four talked. More sparks flew. Smoke came to my nose with each gust of wind.

Soldiers poured from the mess-halls. One of our guards ran to tell them what was wrong.

A flame sprang to life in the cane-brake. It was a real fire. The rubbing of bamboo had generated enough heat to start a blaze.

Excitement reigned everywhere about us. The three of our guards left were intently watching the conflagration.

Then an idea came to me. Quickly dropping to the ground I went to the little girls so pitifully huddling for companionship. I relied on the turmoil and noise of the fire to cover my action.

I touched the eldest on the shoulder.

"Come!" I said.

She drew away from me fearfully.

"Come!" I said impatiently, motioning her to follow me.

They all clung to each other.

There was no time to waste. The guards might look around at any moment.

"Come!" I said for the third time. And more by main strength than understanding I got all five on their feet. Then I pushed them around the house to the rear.

"Vamose!" I said. They stood trembling.

"Get out! Vamose! Shoo!" I said again, getting impatient. "Go on and don't come back!" I gave them a shove to get them stated. Then they grasped my idea. And with one exception they sprang into action like four young deer. Flashing me a grateful look the four turned and darted under the nearest mess-hall.

But the exception—the oldest girl—the one I most wished to help—stood stock-still. Up went her head, haughty and proud. Her hand went to her hip and, stamping her small bare foot, she refused to budge. The glare from the burning bamboo, shone upon her.

On her face I could see a piqued, angry expression. She understood my action according to her own code; she had been sent to us—we sent her away—she was not good enough for us. I could see it all in her look. With flashing eyes she glared at me. Her lip was between her teeth.

She was indeed aroused.

The woman of it first amused me, then made me impatient.

"Go on!" I said. "Don't stand and glare at me if you want to see your lover again."

What cared she for death or anything else—she had been spurned.

The others—the four who had sensibly gone—returned. They would not go without the fifth, their apparent leader.

Grasping the obstinate, scorning shoulders I turned her gently about and starting her on her way with an easy push, and I was pleased to see the other girls take her in charge and keep her going.

I breathed a sigh of relief. Returning to the front of the hut I found the guards just starting to look for me.

They gave only a casual look around for the girls—not seeing them outside, they exchanged glances, nodded toward the hut and, grunting approval, went back to their posts to continue their vigil. I went inside. The captain left his seat in the door and joined me.

The wind yet whistled around the eaves and smoke from the cane-brake fire blew over us. The rustling of the loose palm-leaf thatch made talking difficult.

"What did you do with 'em?" the captain asked.

"There weren't any guards back there so I got 'em started—now if they keep going and stay in the jungle they may be able to stay alive until we're disposed of anyway," I told him.

"You say there weren't any guards there!" he asked, giving me a peculiar look.

"None at all," I told him.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed, giving me another look. "And you never called me."

I hadn't even thought of our own escape. I felt foolish. "Honest, captain, I'm awfully sorry," I said, feeling very guilty.

"It's going to rain," was his seamanlike comment, and I knew he had forgiven me and was thinking of those naked children out in a storm.

"Never mind them," I said, "they're used to weather, but I hope Miss Standish and Mother Zuribar are all right."

Then, as if our speaking of it had been a signal, the storm-cloud broke and torrents of water seemingly poured directly on the roof of our hut.

"I wish I knew where they are—I'd feel easier!" Captain Standish yelled in my ear.

"I don't think they're here!" I shouted back.

"Don't think they're here!" Startled by the thought the captain eagerly thrust his face close to mine, turning me that the now dying fire might show my expression.

Then the rain quenched the blaze and we were left in black darkness. Anxiously he grabbed my hand as if the contact might lend credence to the new hope.

"No," I said, "or else we would have been made aware of the fact either by letting us watch them suffer as a nice manner of torture for us, or by actions of the people."

"Oh, hell! Is that all? I thought you knew," he said, disappointed. "Don't set too much faith in that idea; to-morrow seems to be our day, and the old devil who ordered the killing of those kids we had here, as like as not is saving up a nice surprise for us. Leave it to him to devise ways and means of springing them on us at the very moment when they and we are most helpless. And it won't be pleasant, I'll bet. I'm going to bed. How about you?"

I could see no use in staying up longer, so we lay down on the blanket that was spread on the floor.

It seemed a sacrilege to disturb the other bed which, from its appearance, must have been unoccupied for years.

Lying on my side I could look right out the door. And on the level with the floor I saw the two guards, from their waist up, as they stood talking by the gate. Then occasionally I could see a distant flitting, bent, shadowy figure restlessly pacing the plaza near the fire-pit. The hunchback was awake.

"You poor devil," I thought, "you think you know where your girl is and you're unhappy. I don't know where my girl is and I'm equally unhappy. I wonder if you could give me as much pleasing news about my girl as I could you about yours." And my thoughts of Patience drifted along and hopes for her safety entered my prayer. Then I must have slept.

For a sudden shriek, as if from a giant steam siren, brought both the captain and me to our feet fully awake. The sun was just rising over the swamp.

"Now what?" the captain asked, and we both wondered. I remembered Urido's "Listen to him howl—Allatambour's howl!" —and tried to guess where the loud, shrill sound came from.

People poured into the plaza through "Death's Head" gate. The soldiers piled out of their mess-halls armed with bamboo lances and throwing machetes. They formed

into ranks before their respective huts, were mustered, then the six companies marched to a position directly opposite Death's Head gate to where an exit equally large led to the road up the mountain. The shriek of the siren seemed a general call to the people.

At the command from one whom I took to be the military leader, he being alone in front of the men, one company marched up the hill road to the plateau. Two of the companies lined the road on either side from the gateway up, the fourth and fifth policed the crowd in the plaza, while the sixth came for the girls, the captain, and me.

The leader came with this last guard and personally entered our hut to summon us. He was a physical wonder of a man, a regular six-foot Apollo, but black—even coal shines, but he was dull.

We were ready.

There were no girls.

I thought the colored captain would go into hysterics. He summoned the guards. The four of them had only come on duty some time earlier in the morning and they knew nothing.

They were arrested, bound and seemingly were to take the place, in the coming ceremony, that the girls were supposed to take. The poor fellows didn't enjoy the prospect.

A commotion came to our ears from the plaza.

Allatambour, dressed in breech-clout and head-dress, carrying a massive bolo, had come down to personally give us a look over and he had found things not to please him.

The village fire in the pit had gone out during the rain the night before. The hunchback had been inattentive to his duty. He was arrested.

Some one had told the chief of the old woman's kindly act in giving us the chickens. She was in the hands of two soldiers. Both were as downcast as the four guards from around our hut.

Then Allatambour came to our prison and the captain of the guard prostrating himself on the ground at his chief's feet reported the escape of the girls.

A most diabolical expression of rage passed over his face when he heard the news. I hope never to see the like again. Then he seemed to find some satisfaction for his injured feelings by hacking the life from the body of the prostrate captain at his feet. What was left he kicked to one side and entered our hut.

"Fine sun!" he exclaimed, looking up. It was his greeting.

"Good morning," the captain and I chorused.

"Him good sun—she fine water"—and he pointed to the fall above the plateau—"you make large trial—huh?"

"Did you get him?" the captain asked.

"Sure," I said; "he means the light is good, the water plenty—from last night's rain, I guess—and you and I are going to have a fine trial." Then I turned to Allatambour: "You Big Stew Bum! What are you goin' to do with us?"

"Yah! Me Big Stew Bum"—and he glowered at me then as if issuing a challenge—"Me Bigger Stew Bum here"—and puffing himself up like a pouter pigeon—"you make Big Tambour—bah!" Explosively he let out all his wind decisively. "Me Allatambour!" Then he went out to yell orders and start the ceremony.

So I was supposedly some sort of fetish or native god—it was news to me, but I was glad to hear it, for if the opportunity offered I would surely work the part to a finish.

Another captain of the guard was elevated from the ranks. And after stabbing two malcontents to death he was allowed to stay in the official position unmolested.

After Allatambour had disappeared over the plateau road we were taken from the hut and between two files of armed black guards marched out of the hill-gate.

The four guards, the hunchback, the old woman who had been arrested were brought along directly behind us. Their passage was punctuated by cuffs and kicks, ours was remarkably free of any demonstration. Even the soldier guards seemed to stand in awe of us.

The road we walked was unique. It had been paved with large oyster and clam shells.

I winced in sympathy every time Captain Standish put his feet down.

But the soldiers did not make sport of him. I was not sure whether they thought we had descended from the air or come up from underneath to live on their holy ground. Whichever way they thought, we were willing to be saints or devils as the occasion demanded.

And I knew one who wouldn't be any saint if he saw Patience Standish being in any manner mistreated.

Looking back as we mounted upward I saw what must have been the whole population of the village following up the hill. Old men, women, and children trooped along herded onto the road by the armed guards.

Along the path leading over the ridge from the girl's village came all the young marriageable females.

By these things I knew this to be indeed an important ceremony.

On the plateau all was clear inside the line of guards standing rigidly around the edge.

The ground of this flat is level and must be two acres in extent. It is a quarter of a circle cut out of the mountain by some past gigantic fault during an earthquake. It looks like one of these American slices of pie that marines get on Sunday's at their noon-day meal.

The point of the quadrant is in the cleft where the water from a crater lake above pours down in a steady stream into a cup-like depression and disappears into the ground.

At our right the stone house was prominently placed. It was noticeable here, for it struck out from the base of the cliff beside the fall. Even its wall was drenched by water and its roof by flying spray so little rivulets trickled from the slabs of its eave.

This was a long, one-story building backed up to the fall. Under the overhanging of the roof every other block of stone in its outer wall had been left out for ventilation, but the only entrance seemed to be toward the swamp.

When all the people of the village were properly distributed over the plateau, and the captain, the other prisoners, and I stationed in front of the central mound, which, like an altar, stood a little way from the waterfall in the exact middle of the angle, Allatambour came from the stone house. He was followed by his ten personal guards.

He took his position on the throne-mound. The childlike chatter of excited voices from the eager blacks behind us ceased.

Allatambour spoke. He harangued the crowd in their own language. Frequent allusions to us were made. Then he seemed to be centering his talk on me with many sneering glances and sympathetic jeers from the crowd.

He pointed to the land beyond the swamp and, following the direction of his extended finger, I looked.

There, in the little flower-grown clearing where we had landed, I saw Urido. He was dancing and waving his arms about. And he still had the tribal emblem sword.

Allatambour saw him. His face became distorted with anger and he let out a voluble string of guttural grunts that I took to be his choicest collection of curses.

Then Urido ran across the little clearing, far below us. From the swamp toward the cleft, for which I had steered when crossing the reef, he ran. And he didn't stop, but seemed to enter the bare face of the stone wall.

I rubbed my eyes. I looked again. Urido was gone.

Again Allatambour centered his attention upon me. This time he spoke in English. Where this big, burly black learned the language was a puzzle to me.

"You," he began, "young Tambour—ha, ha!" The thought seemed to amuse him. "You come. Me—Allatambour—me!—try you like old medicine-man Hoculotus, say: 'Let Tambour of Fall pick our Tambours—you no come back.' I speak:

"Suns and winds ago a white man come out of the water." And he pointed to the blue ocean stretching to the horizon below us. "He come big ship. A white woman, too, big with young. Like you this man"—and Allatambour looked hard at me as if trying to trace a resemblance in me to this man of long ago.

"Eyes, hair same like night, man-not-afraid. He scowled at me—Allatambour.

Old Hoculotus say, 'Bad man—bad medicine.' I laugh. I try him by water like I will you. I say, 'Man, go in waterfall, if Tambour, you come back.' Other men no come back. He did. He Big Tambour, he come back from trees-grow-in-water." And he pointed to the swamp.

Captain Standish gazed at Allatambour as the story unfolded like one entranced.

"It tallies," the captain kept muttering; "it tallies!" And I who felt like laughing at the superstitious attempts of this black in trying to find "Big Tambour," some kind of fetish to him, in every white man he caught alive was only kept in check by the thought of what was coming to me. I looked at the waterfall. It was running full, and as I watched it the volume of the stream seemed to increase. The rain of the night before had evidently filled the lake above to overflowing and this, a spillway, was supercharged. Behind the falling water was a blank wall, except for a spot just above the pool for about the height of a man, where a blackness like a hole behind the water seemed to yawn open. In the basinlike depression where the water fell and disappeared, a bubbling and gurgling, like a boiling caldron, was kept up. I wondered where the water went.

And Allatambour continued:

"The white woman—she all white"—and the eyes of the dusky fiend rolled in pleased reminiscence of her fairness—"she have baby. I want this white woman. Old Hoculotus, big medicine-man, say, 'Bad medicine,' but I take this woman. I no like baby, so I say send it after white man." And he pointed toward the basin into the boiling, churning water. I shuddered at the thought.

"Old Hoculotus he say, 'No—you no please Water Tambour with white baby!' I say, 'Yes.'"

"He say, 'Water—water—water—flood wash, kill!' Like that." And Allatambour roared the curse. "Old Hoculotus big medicine. I say, 'All right, I no kill.'" And his eyes showed a shrewd light. "I take baby—canoe, pull um out sea, leave um. Ha! Ha! I come back, white woman she die." And a regret sounded in his voice. "White man come back from trees-grow-in-water—old Hoculotus say, 'White baby come back a man, Allatambour sorry!'"

I pondered. It seemed to me from what I gathered of his story that some old medicine man had held sufficient sway over Allatambour's superstitions to make him believe that a curse had been heaped upon the chief's head. And Allatambour, having faith in the fetish selecting qualities of the disappearing stream dropped all live white men in to see if they were saintly enough to survive and come back. Just what would happen if they did I do not know, but I have sufficient belief in Allatambour's villainy to think he would devise new methods of torture to make them prove up. As he declared: "Me Allatambour"—and he showed by his action that he would firmly and treacherously fight any competitor for the honor.

And unwittingly I was a candidate for his place—in his mind.

Then followed the most horrible sight I ever witnessed.

The big black chief turned from me at the conclusion of his story and, facing the waterfall, he raised his hands over his head in supplication and prostrated himself before it. He yelled forth apparent prayers, the word "Tambour" being noticeable as if that was the deity's name who was supposed to live in the fall.

And a little baby in its mother's arms in the first line of encircling natives cried. Allatambour suddenly rose, strode quietly to the infant. Tearing it from its mother's frantic grasp he pitched it into the pool.

Two guides by my side restrained me.

The child was instantly sucked under the surface. There was a gurgling sound as if a blood-craving monster lived there and enjoying the morsel thus asked for more to satiate its carnivorous appetite.

Allatambour became wild. Like a whirling dancer he jumped and swung himself about. He waved his arms. His eyes seemed popping from his head as he worked up a frenzy. He yelled an order.

The old woman who had given us the chicken was dragged forward by the guards. She was thrown, struggling, into the basin, another sacrifice to Tambour. The four guards who had been arrested at our hut

followed her. The crippled conch-blower was held in readiness.

I was glad the little girls who had been scheduled for this sacrifice were not there.

None came up again who went into the water.

Allatambour became as a maniac, yelling and hopping. He jumped to his moundlike throne and seemingly called upon the waters to bring him good luck. He growled. He foamed at the mouth. He raved.

Suddenly as if in answer to his repeated calling for Tambour there came from the bowels of the earth a fearsome howl. It was like the concentrated wail of all the lost souls in hell. In it I seemed to hear the demons' gleeful laugh, the moan of the tortured and the strident blast of the defiant.

The earth under us shook with the violent volume of sound. The water from the fall, blown by some force, flew straight out in a drenching sheet over us.

All the natives fell flat on their faces. They seemed stunned by surprise. Allatambour, quivering in every muscle, lay prone. His call had been answered.

Captain Standish and I, alone of all the hundreds present, remained standing. Our guards were down. We were unwatched.

As the sheet of water blew out from the fall I noticed that the rim of the pool was complete all around. And such was the suction downward in the basin that even for the moment that the water was stopped from its fall the basin emptied and a yawning deep, black hole showed.

I was to be thrown into that. Horrified, I looked. The water again descended naturally and the well-like basin filled.

As I gazed in awe at the water a hand momentarily appeared from out the fall about three feet above the pool. It was a white hand. It beckoned. Then as if the owner was jerked back by some other behind, the hand disappeared. I rubbed my eyes. "Am I losing my mind?" I wondered.

I looked. Again the hand burst through the wall of water. Drops fell from the slender fingers. The white skin glistened, wet. The fingers wriggled, alive. I was beckoned.

I cast quick glances around. The guards were digging their noses into the ground at my feet. All the natives were as arduously devout. We were free to go.

"Come, captain!" I whispered and, grabbing his arm, I dragged him after me toward the fall. I believe he thought me suddenly gone daft. He resisted. He had not seen the beckoning hand.

"Come!" I repeated. "We have friends behind the fall—come!" He went with me, for I made him.

At the brink of the pool I did not hesitate, but firmly holding the captain's hand I stepped around the edge and, ducking through the dropping stream, I was delighted to find a narrow opening behind.

I pulled the captain in.

As we went from the sight of the natives I heard a yell of rage and chagrin from Allatambour.

But I did not care—neither did Captain Standish, for standing behind the fall in a cleft of the lava rock, he was holding his daughter Patience in his arms, and I had Mother Zuribar.

It was Patience's hand that had beckoned us to come through the water.

But we were not yet out of Allatambour's clutch.

CHAPTER XIII.

PATIENCE'S STORY.

WE stood in a cavern behind the fall on a solid lava floor. The fissure-like opening through which we had come was just high enough for us to pass through comfortably by ducking our heads, and the water like a transparent curtain fell in a broad sheet that completely covered it. Noises of the falling, rushing, bubbling stream resounded through the damp chamber. And looking toward the plateau I could see the people there quite plainly. For we were in the dark, looking toward the light.

But my eyes could not leave off looking at Patience for very long and our eyes met often. She seemed anxious to speak to me. I was indeed anxious to speak to her. Talking was difficult in the echoing cavern. The

roar of the fall rang in our ears incessantly. Drops fell on my head from the peak of the roof. Rivulets ran around my feet seeking some outlet further in the cave.

Patience left her father and I met her as she stepped toward me.

"Are you all right, Alonzo?" she asked, placing her mouth close to my ear and grasping my hand. Her voice was full of concern. I controlled myself the best I could. But things seemed blurred before my eyes. Having her by me alive and well when I had dreaded the worst made me wish for even a brother's right. The touch of her hand, the closeness of her mouth to my ear, her warm breath against my face all made me feel peculiar. I know my hand shook. I could not articulate for the big, dry lump that rose in my throat. My tongue felt thick, and though I wanted of all things to see Patience clearly, her nearness seemed a distance. I thought the thumping of my heart must betray me even above the noises of the waters.

But her hand trembled, too.

"Yes," was all I could say. I just looked. Her gaze dropped.

"I was so afraid!" she said, and I knew it was myself she had been fearful about. And I felt happier.

Then words came to me.

"You're glad I'm safe?" I asked, an exultant feeling went through me and I became bolder.

"Yes, Alonzo."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because—" And she looked down. I felt her responding pressure to my grasp. Again I felt the queer palsy of nervousness. Her answer meant so much to me.

"You cared?" I managed to get out. She just nodded. But it was a "yes."

"Oh, Patience!" her father interrupted, coming near enough to be heard. "How did you get here?" And I knew from his amused expression that he had asked before, but we had not noticed him. She blushed most becomingly because she had not heard him the first time.

"Why Mother Zuribar is responsible," she answered, "she and Captain Gregory."

"Captain Gregory!" her father exclaimed in apparent amazement. The name sounded familiar to me—then I remembered Mother Zuribar's story she had started to tell me when we were alone in the canoe as we left Guam and how she had sailed with Captain Gregory and his bride.

"Yes," Patience said. "He was here a moment ago," and peering into the darkness of the cave behind us, exclaimed, "he's over there." Then letting go of my hand for the first time since greeting me she quickly stepped into the gloom. I was loath to have her leave me for even a moment. I followed her. It was only a little way when we came to a turn in the cleft. An open crack in the right wall led away from the main chamber in which we stood. There, leaning against the sharp lava corner was an old man. I could see him, but indistinctly. His white hair was most conspicuous in the dark.

As Patience touched his arm he started as if disturbed in a dream. He stood away from the stone and I saw he was stooped with age, but massive for all that, and was not overly firm on his feet. I took his other arm and we helped him back to where Mother Zuribar and the captain waited for us. I wondered at a strange thrill that went through me at the proximity to the man. I felt as if assisting a martyr.

It was lighter by the fall and I could get a better look at him. His skin was white. He wore only a native waist-band and cord. But his wealth of snowy hair and beard fell over his shoulders and chest like a garment. Bristling white brows almost concealed his eyes, which were dark and seemed to lack the forceful gleam I would expect from one whose brow was so heavy and chin so square and firm.

A lurid scar ran crosswise of his temple from over the right eye to his ear. It must have been a horrible blow that left such a wound. I took to him at once.

"This is Captain Gregory," Patience announced as an introduction. But the old man seemed preoccupied.

"He's not himself," Patience explained, pointing to her head; "but Mother Zuribar knows him and she says he was a marvel of a skipper. He sailed from Gloucester. Father, did you ever hear of him?"

Captain Standish was looking quizzically

at the old man as Patience spoke. Mother Zuribar was standing by Captain Standish eagerly watching all of us. Captain Standish stepped forward with hand outstretched as in friendly greeting.

"Hello, Miles!" he said. But the old man beside me took the proffered hand limply as a matter of form without recognition.

"He don't know me," Captain Standish said sadly. "Don't you remember me, Miles, I am Efrem Standish. Surely you remember the shipmate you bunked with on our first cruise to the banks—or how, as boys, we used to go clamming in the mud-banks at low tide, back in Gloucester?"

No! The old man could not remember. He seemed to try. But all this was a closed book to him.

"Allatambour here?" he asked.

"No," Captain Standish said.

"Allatambour everywhere," Captain Gregory muttered, giving a nervous glance around.

In my heart I recorded one more mark against the villainous black who had so successfully broken this white man's spirit and unseated his reason.

"No use," Captain Standish said, gazing sympathetically into Miles Gregory's face. "Ah, but he was a stanch shipmate and an able captain when I last saw him," he added sadly as he again turned to Patience. "Go ahead and tell us how you got here," he said to his daughter.

"The morning," Patience began her tale, "after the war-dance I was awakened by Mother Zuribar just as the sun was coming up. She told me to get up and come look into the meadow of flowers. I followed her and was frightened at first when I saw Captain Gregory standing out in the open near the cleft in the mountainside. He was just standing there among the lilies aimlessly looking toward the rising sun.

"'Don't be afraid,' Mother Zuribar said, 'he's a white man and I know him.' Then she told me how she went as a companion and maid to his bride when the Saucy Belle touched Guam and how the cannibals there attacked them. And we went out and spoke to the old man.

"He was so pleased to see us, although he could remember nothing about Mother Zuribar or his wife or anything except what happened after he came to from the knock on his head that he received when Allatambour had him thrown into the pool out there and he had fallen to the rocky bottom way down below, and he was so gentle and so anxious to have us enter the cave where the river comes from the mountain into the swamp that we went with him.

"This is a part of the same cave. He lives in this cave and it goes right through that saddle from this mountain over to the other mountain above the swamp. This stream pours out of the cleft you steered for when we came in your canoe, Alonzo," she said.

"And when we came back to the camp—it was gone and you, Alonzo and father, were having a fight with the natives upon the saddle. And Urido, the coward, came running to us, carrying that great big sword. Captain Gregory was amused when he saw it and said something about some old medicine man named Hoculotus and how he would have laughed at the sight of this sword out of Allatambour's hands—had he lived.

"And I was so scared—Mother Zuribar and I were—we thought that you were killed," she said, speaking to me and blushing prettily as she said it. I caught the message her eyes sent me. I was very happy.

"Allatambour beckons," Captain Gregory said, pointing a palsied hand for us to look out through the clear water.

Plainly we could see the huge savage standing on the little eminence before the pool. He was gesticulating wildly and his bodyguard were standing uncertainly below him, five feet on either side, apparently unwilling to approach nearer the fall as he seemed vehemently ordering.

"What 'll we do?" Captain Standish asked.

"Aren't you going out?" the old man beside me asked in a surprised tone.

"No!" Captain Standish yelled.

"All right," Miles Gregory said, and a different attitude came over him. I saw a momentary gleam of independence flash from his eyes. "I'll fix it," he said, and suddenly turning, he shuffled away into the

darkness behind us. I believe the presence of other white people had stimulated his American spirit to a partial revolt against the black chief's dominance.

He was gone but a moment when Patience grabbed my arm and said, "Brace yourself!"

I wondered why. Then a rush of wind swept upon us that nearly carried us all off our feet. We threw ourselves down on the wet rock floor to save being hurled with the terrific draft through the waterfall into the pool.

The restless wail of the damned again smote our ears. This time from right around us. It was as if we were in the funnel of a horn and some mighty lungs blew through the instrument. The mountain shook with the intensity of sound. I looked into the dark passage to try and see whence the wind came.

A bright spot of sunlight shone like a jewel set in jet, straight before me and a little above. Some passage to the sky had been opened and let in this awful wind with the sun. Then the spot of light was eclipsed. The draft stopped. The ear-splitting sound quieted and Captain Gregory came back. He was laughing like a little boy pleased with what he had done.

"Look!" he said. And following the direction of his pointing finger we saw through the water screen the natives outside all flat on their faces doing obeisance to the "Allatambour howl." And the ground about the pool was drenched and running with water.

"Ha! Ha!" the old man laughed, "I pushed the rock aside, let the west wind off the lake above come through and see how the devils drop. Oh! I know my part well. Allatambour has seen to that. Since old Hoculotus died I'm the operator of the 'Allatambour'—all the drums—I named this noise that and the old sucker liked it and has called himself Allatambour ever since. I taught him to keep his village clean and everything—I did." Then the fire in the old man's eye subsided and again he was the broken spirited, sagging prisoner of the big Chief Allatambour.

Captain Standish was watching his boyhood friend closely. He seemed to have something on his mind. Finally he asked: "Did you teach Allatambour English?"

"Sure!" the old man answered. "He wanted to be able to talk to me without Hoculotus understanding what we said—but I taught the medicine man, too, when Allatambour wasn't with us." And he laughed gleefully at his shrewdness.

As we watched, Allatambour got to his feet again. He was angry. Waving his arms about and yelling, he was trying to get his guards to do something. They were loath to get up and looked with scared eyes toward the weird fall that had screeched at them.

But when their chief jumped from his throne-hill and ran toward the stone temple-house they followed—for that was away from the fall.

The other blacks, men, women, and children, all lay prone while Allatambour and his ten bodyguards trampled them.

"Where's he going?" Captain Standish asked curiously and anxiously, fearing as I did, some devilment.

Captain Gregory knew. Again a spark of action entered his veins. "This way," he called, leading us back along the cavern floor to the cleft and turning to the right.

In the cleft we were soon aware of a danger. The path we followed was but a ledge about two feet wide jutting from the right wall. The left wall was a good six feet from us and a deep chasm yawned between.

I could hear rushing water far below. The river ran down there. The water from the pool emptied through a hole in the bottom of the basin of volcanic rock and ran toward the swamp in this subterranean fault. It was pitch-dark. We felt our way as best we could.

I took Patience's hand to help her. It would be very easy to slip and fall over the edge to unknown depths. She seemd glad of the assistance.

Captain Gregory led us about a hundred feet along this ledge when a dim light from ahead made going easier. We came to another semicircular chamber in the rock and the light was from a doorway hewn in the far wall.

"That door leads to Allatambour's stone

house—I showed him how to build it," Captain Gregory told us, proudly adding the last.

This entry was the place from which we could expect the big black to come. Captain Standish made for across the lava-strewn floor. I started. Mother Zuribar backed against the wall. Captain Gregory stood looking on seemingly at a loss what to do after he had guided us.

"Alonzo!" Patience whispered, clinging to my hand tightly. She sensed our intent to fight by the narrow passage to the stone house where only one opponent could come through at a time. "You have no weapons," she said.

She was right. We had nothing but our bare hands.

"But it is our only chance," I told her. Suddenly she threw her arms around my neck, her head nestled on my shoulder for a brief, exquisite moment, and her lips sought mine. I pressed her to me. I forgot all danger, I had Patience in my arms.

"Wow! Ha! Ha! Ha!" a piercing scream and a rasping laugh came resounding through the cavern.

Startled, I looked up.

Again the fearsome screech. Then I recognized the voice.

Urido was coming along the passage from below and beyond the chamber in which we stood. He was out of sight around a corner.

To the left of the door to the stone house the black shadow of an opening joined the ragged edge of the chasm. This was where Urido would come into the chamber. The inky void bordering the floor of this room was the chasm, ever beside us, like a stern reminder of the probable fate of a loser in the fight to come.

Another sound came to us and it made me quickly realize our position. It was from the stone house. A guttural voice was barking orders in the native tongue.

Quickly, but gently, I pushed Patience, unwilling but reasonable to a place by Mother Zuribar. Then I jumped to join Captain Standish, who stood by the right side of the lighted doorway waiting expectantly, prepared to hit the first head that showed with a jagged chunk of lava. He had utilized what was at hand, the rock chips from the hewn doorway which were scattered about at our feet.

At these signs of action Captain Gregory came to and hobbled eagerly forward, apparently anxious to take part in the fray.

I found another fragment of rock and, hefting it to get the feel and balance, took up a position near Captain Standish, but closer to the brink of the chasm.

The first at least who came through the door would be harshly received.

Another grating laugh pealed through the dark vault and Urido was nearing us. I hoped that he had the sword.

CHAPTER XIV.

LONG LIVE THE KING.

THEN a burly black soldier jumped through the doorway. He came so unexpectedly and fast that Captain Standish missed his head with the lava. But I got him. As he fell his body pitched over the edge of the rock floor and only his last cry remained with us. He was out of the way in the stream below. And I wished he had not taken his bolo with him. I could make good use of it.

Another guard came through the door. Captain Standish did well that time and I only had to shove the dazed, falling man to send him after the first. How tenaciously they did cling to their weapons.

Then two came. We were busy. But we had the advantage for the darkness, to which our eyes were accustomed, blinded these attackers who came from the mild daylight of the stone house. Everything would have been all right if the next pair had only stayed back a moment more, but they closely followed the two we engaged.

I ducked low and as the guard I fought made a blind lunge at my head, he supposed I was standing, I caught his ankles and jerked him from his feet. Then I rolled him. He joined the first two, yet holding his machete.

Coming back to the fight I found Captain Standish holding off three active fighters and astride a fourth, who was downed.

I cracked one's skull with my rock, then

again dropping to the floor I caught a second by the ankles as I had done before and threw him so heavily that he was out. Another came through the door. I downed him before he was well in by simply kneeling on the floor in his path.

Captain Standish had his man out on the ground and ready to meet the next entry. My man on the rocks was not content to quit and I had him by the throat with one hand while I held the wrist of his bolo arm with my other. It was a case of main strength and endurance who should be there when the fight was over.

Captain Standish, in his attempt to crown the incoming man with the lava rock, stumbled over me on the floor and, falling forward, he dropped his stone.

The light-blinded guard he was after, not seeing us struggling at his feet, lunged forward at a possible opponent standing and, catching his foot under us, went down atop of the captain.

We were in one great big pile. Each of us squirmed for an advantage. The new man flayed with his bolo. I ducked my head and the man I held got the knife in his shoulder. Then Captain Standish caught the kicking black, who was so wildly striking about, by the heels and started with him toward the gapping pit in which his fellows had fallen.

All of us yelled. The blacks screamed. Above the din came the ear-piercing: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Allatambour let's hear you howl," of Urido—now right hard by.

Then a shadow suddenly fell over all.

I looked up. I could do nothing else. My every muscle was straining to hold the athletic figure under me who would like nothing better than to bury his heavy bolo in my skull.

I saw the bulky frame of Allatambour filling the doorway. The light from behind set off his powerful, muscular form to a great advantage. His head-piece was rubbing the roof of the cavern chamber. He held in his hand a bolo twice the size of any carried by his fighting men. The darkness was too much for his eyes. His head was bent forward. He listened intently. He tried by ear to place the combatants.

If I could only quiet the man I held and go at the chief. But the man under me had a say. He struggled hard. I should hate to have him on top of me. He was a strong brute.

And I realized that we were up against bad odds. Captain Standish was busy with the feet of his antagonist and if he let go he would have a more formidable part of the man to deal with. He couldn't let go.

I remembered Captain Gregory. I felt a qualm of conscience that we had got this man in for a lot of trouble. I wondered at my concern about him, but could not help it. For some reason I had taken a great liking for him and I did not want to see him suffer more.

I looked about to see where he was, halfway expecting to see his shadowy shape with those of the two women where they crouched in the half light against the rocky wall farthest from us. But he was not there. Then a movement on the floor attracted my attention and I saw Captain Gregory. He was doing his bit. Stooping low he was rolling the body of a downed black across the floor and he shoved it off the edge of the chasm.

Straightening up again he turned—and he took in the situation at a glance. I could see him fairly well, for what light came past the massive chief in the doorway fell upon the old man.

I believe the excitement of a fight was getting in his blood and overcoming the torture imposed acceptance of conditions as Allatambour dictated them. For I saw the stooped shoulders suddenly thrown back. He seemed to take a deep breath. He was throwing off the yoke. I could imagine the fire of battle coming into his stern, heavy browed eyes. And I exulted at the change. Again he was a captain.

"Aha!" he yelled — a full-throated, heavy-lunged shout it was, and I could well appreciate how a mutinous crew would stop and consider before gainsaying the commanding tone. We were all startled by the suddenness of it. "Allatambour, you black deck-swab, drop that knife before I brain you with this holystone—drop it, I say." The walls of the dimly lit cavern echoed the ringing voice. Captain Gregory in his excitement must have imagined himself in

the cabin of his ship cowing a mutinous steward. He quickly picked up a fragment of lava from the floor and, hauling back, hurled it with all his might at the surprised chief.

The missle went hard. But the old man's eye was not as true as in his youth and only a glancing blow was registered on the chief's head. It took off the glorious, kingly hat. It seemed to me good omen. The uncrowning of a monarch.

Allatambour, bald but angry, tried to see his assailant. The rock had come from the dark. He was silhouetted in the door. Where the hat had been pasted to his bare head a ring of the adhesive mud clung like a thin, gray crown.

But Captain Gregory was not to be satisfied simply standing off like a little boy throwing rocks. He followed the jagged lava and before the blood showed in the shallow crease his stone had left on the chief's scalp he was tackling the big black's knees.

I held my breath in apprehension. Would the brutal chief spit him on his bolo? I wanted to help Captain Gregory.

Allatambour reached down and such was the strength of the man that with his left hand he hooked under Captain Gregory's middle and as if the old man were only a light hindering thing he tore loose the grasp from around his stalwart legs and tossed him against the dripping rock wall.

With a sickening thud Captain Gregory struck, rolled over, lay still. My gorge rose up. Seemingly my strength doubled. A frenzy controlled me at the sight.

Quickly letting go my opponent's arms and before he could use the liberty of hands I had given him I smashed his head down hard against the floor.

I was free to get up. I wanted to get at Allatambour. The chief stepped inside the cave. I edged around to make a more effective assault.

"Ha! Ha!" A screeching laugh sounded right in my ear. Urido was at hand. He had seen Allatambour. He wanted to get at him.

In the crazy Chimoro's hand the large sword of Allatambour flashed. I was pushed aside.

Urido rushed.

He aimed a blow. The chief was now more accustomed to the darkness. Up went his bolo. Urido swung down. Allatambour ducked. He came back with a full arm swing. Urido slipped. He fell. The bolo hit. And the top of Urido's head flew in the air. "Done for," I thought. Clatter; bang! The sword flew from the Chimoro's grasp and rolled over the stone floor. Eagerly I clutched for it. But it was out of my reach.

Then Allatambour saw me and I had to drop on all fours to escape the savage lunge he made at me. He edged close to the wall. He was more of a strategist than I had thought. He was trying to get me between him and the light. Again he struck out. I side-stepped, but felt the cold swish of steel passing my shoulder. I watched him. I felt out with my foot for some weapon. None was there.

My only chance was to rush him, I thought. I waited my opportunity, dodging and ducking his fearful blows.

He crowded me fast. I felt a helplessness. He was so agile and strong. I had no weapon. Then I felt something being pushed into my hand. Instinctively I clutched it—anything to fight with. It was the haft of a sword. I cast a quick glance back. Patience was handing me the sword Urido had dropped. The ray of light from the door shone on her. She smiled encouragement. But she was biting her lip hard and strained lines showed on her forehead. Allatambour saw her.

"Uh!" he grunted. "White girl!" And he made as if to get around me. I grasped the sword tight. It was a heavy weapon.

Then, trying to remember all the tricks in the science of saber exercise as taught me by Captain Jack, of the Guam Constabulary, I went at Allatambour.

He made an overhand crack at my head. I caught it on the crooked blade of my sword and returned with a slash at his left calf. I felt the steel grate against the bone.

"Ugh!" he grunted, surprised. He limped. He lunged straight out with the point of his heavy weapon direct at my heart. I stepped aside and caught his left shoulder. He stumbled, and with my left

hand I punched his face. But he caught himself and I felt a sting in my left side. He had caught me with an upward slash. Then he backed away. But he was back in a flash at my outstretched leg. I barely had time to withdraw it. As I did, my body turned a bit and I was faced toward the door. I saw four more men making their way in. Help for Allatambour was at hand. Like a flash an old trick came to me. Allatambour was at the extreme of his plunge forward to get my leg. I had an opening at his head. Instinctively I remembered to withdraw my foot. I raised the sword high. A feeling of exultation swept over me. I had the big black. Putting every ounce of weight I could into the blow I brought the stanch steel blade down on his skull. A crunch of parting bone, a fall. I stepped over the prostrate figure into the doorway to meet the new arrivals. The light now shone full on me. Captain Standish stepped to my side. He had been watching the fight.

And the soldiers I expected to fight fell on their faces before me. They had seen the dripping sword I held. I couldn't kill them on the ground. I returned to the cavern.

Mother Zuribar was holding Captain Gregory's head in her lap, dashing cold water in his face from a little pool of drip on the floor.

"Is he alive?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, and she smiled in a strange way as if my question pleased her. "But he's knocked out," she added.

Then I stepped over to where Patience bent over Urido.

She hadn't seen me come back. I touched her shoulder. She straightened up.

"I'm so proud of you, Alonzo," she said. Our eyes met.

A few moments later she told me that Urido seemed to be all right—only scalped. He was stunned by the blow he received.

"Come, Captain Standish," I called as he stood by the door seemingly dazed. I did not understand why he should be so until later, when Mother Zuribar told us her story. "Let's get these men out in the daylight of the stone house, where we can tend their wounds."

He responded with alacrity.

To our surprise as we started to raise Captain Gregory the four negroes who had been prostrate on the ground without the door, noiselessly slid in and objected.

Thinking they might show fight Captain Standish and I stood back ready. But, no! The blacks took the wounded and gently carried them out, laying them on the floor of the stone house.

They lifted Captain Gregory and Urido first. They bowed in obeisance to me as they passed in and out through the door. When they came in the second time they took Allatambour and the man I had bumped on the floor. The rest of the bodies were cleared by simply shoving them over the edge of the chasm.

Then Captain Standish and I went out, followed by the girls. We passed through the rough hewn doorway in the rock wall into the well-lighted room of the stone house.

Before the door by which we entered was a large upright slab of lava crudely rectangular. It was so placed as to effectually conceal the doorway to any not well up in that end of the room. Beyond this was a bare hall some hundred feet long. The rough stone of the outer walls was decorated by gruesome heads, which I learned were taken personally by Allatambour in battle and otherwise. The inner wall was a part of a cliff undercut by ages of erosion, and this wall formed half the roof as well, sloping to the center high over our heads. Along it were hung utensils of war, bolos, shields of shark-skin, belts of hanging shell and fish-bones, spears of burnt bamboo and throwing-machetes. The other half of the sloping roof was made of slabs of rock laid on giant bamboo rafters.

Against the stone slab by the inner door facing the bare room was a chair—Allatambour's throne. It was made of human bones, with a grinning skull at each side above and two on the dirt floor as if for foot-rests. A wide door led out to the plateau at the far end of the hall—it was the one through which we had seen Allatambour and his guards go in and out.

We turned to the wounded.

Captain Gregory was muttering as if re-

gaining consciousness. In the light I could see a bad bruise on the side of his head opposite the vicious scar. He had received an awful jolt for a man of his years.

Urido's head was not bleeding badly, so we looked at Allatambour.

The carriers had gently laid him down as if even for all his brutality they yet retained a respect for him. Captain Standish and I examined him closely. The captain laid his ear against the black chest by the flaming red tattooed sword and listened for a heart beat. He shook his head, raised the chief's eyelid, touched the ball of the eye, then standing up he turned to me and said: "The king is dead — long live the king!" and he grasped my hand.

"What do you mean?" I asked, surprised by his action.

"Mother Zuribar will tell you shortly," he evaded.

CHAPTER XV.

MOTHER ZURIBAR SPEAKS.

"WHAT 're we goin' to do now?" I asked. "We have Allatambour's body, and have killed the most of his guards, but that ambitious new captain of the army with about a couple hundred soldiers and I don't know how many natives, stands ready to do for us as soon as we poke our heads out of this house."

"Don't you believe it, Alonzo!" Captain Standish exclaimed. "You saw how these devils fell for the spell of superstition around that sword—well, don't let go of it and show it to all the people and you'll not be harmed."

"That's all right," I half-heartedly agreed. But I thought, "I'm the one that has to face the mob with this weapon," and I didn't relish the job. Then I thought of Patience and Mother Zuribar, and I looked their way. They were industriously bustling about the wounded men trying in every way our limited equipment would allow to make them comfortable.

"Very well!" I said, deciding suddenly. "I'm going out and see what happens. You stay here with the women."

After calling four of the blacks and showing them that I wanted their late chief lifted and carried out, I followed.

Patience saw me walking across the hall after the blacks and came running to my side.

"Where you going, Alonzo?" she asked.

"Out to see what's coming to us from the islanders," I told her.

She trembled with concern.

"Don't go!" she begged.

"I've got to some time, dear," I said, "so now's as good as any, and 'll save us a lot of suspense."

"Oh!" she sobbed, then quickly kissing me she valiantly stood back, bit her lip to keep the tears from showing, and said: "Go ahead—but do be careful."

And I had to smile as I said: "I will," and hurried to catch up with the procession I had started.

As there was no way to see out of the house except through the door, I could not tell just what we might expect from the people outside. And as I neared the exit, murmurs of unrest came to my ears. The crowd were becoming impatient at the delay.

I had the natives go first, carrying their dead chief. One was at each leg and one at each shoulder of the man.

Slowly they marched out. It was, indeed, a funeral procession.

I stepped through the door. The ocean spread out far below in a beautiful, calm expanse. Away in the distance a dim blur on the horizon showed. I knew it to be Guam—home. I wondered if I should ever see it again.

Then I took a hasty glance over the crowded plateau. The people were all standing. The soldiers kept them back so a clear way extended from the stone house tothe eminence before the waterfall.

The commander of the army was pacing nervously up and down not far away, anxiously eying the door through which his chief had disappeared.

He spied the cortège, then me. He stood stock-still a moment, utterly surprised. Then custom got the best of him. He shouted an order.

The pallbearers stopped in their tracks

and waited expectantly. Not knowing anything better to do, I stopped, too, and awaited developments.

The soldiers who had lined the way to the throne-eminence fell forward flat on their faces, and others came running at the commander's call to fill the gaps.

A roadway of humans was formed all the way from the dead chief to the mound.

The black carriers, realizing the importance of their position, squared their shoulders and took on a dignified bearing suitable to the occasion. Then they marched heavily over the prostrate men to place their dead chief in state.

The people stood with bowed heads.

When the body was at rest the commander of the army came toward me. He very successfully hid any surprise he might have felt at my holding the emblem of the king and saluted me by falling on his face before me.

I motioned to him to rise. He got up, and standing to one side, signed me to advance over the live roadway to a place of honor on the little hillock.

Gingerly I walked over the giving flesh of the soldiers. Not a squirm from one of them gave me intimation of any discomfort or reluctance on their part to serve as paving to my pathway.

The commander came along close at my heels. He stood respectfully at the base of the mound until I should have mounted to the top beside the dead chief. Then he turned to the people.

"Allatambour!" he yelled. And a dismal chant was started. The natives were giving voice to their sorrow at the death of the chief.

The chant quieted.

"Allatambour!" again the commander yelled, but with an enthusiasm that bespoke the living.

The multitude fell on their faces, and a responding shout of "Allatambour" rose from them. They were proclaiming me their king.

It was all so easy—so simple that I was afraid to believe what I heard and saw. I feared some treachery.

The commander, turning to me again, fell flat on his face in homage.

"Get up!" I commanded, "and tell all the people to go home."

He got up, and finally I made him understand my desire by waving my arms.

The crowd obediently left. The commander of the army caused the soldiers to go also. Then he came to me again.

This time he came right up to me and gently he took the sword from my hand, and stepping to the center of the mound upon which we stood, he placed the sword upright, handle down, in a little hole evidently meant for it. And he made me feel that my secure position as king was firmly established by the planting of that sword. I was to be a fixture.

Saluting me, he bowed his way off the plateau.

I went back to my friends in the stone house.

Patience was standing in the doorway. She had been there all the time watching anxiously.

"Oh! I'm so glad," she said. And I heartily agreed with her, for we both felt a happiness at the peaceful turn events had taken, and for other reasons strictly our own.

"How's Captain Gregory?" I asked.

"He seems to be out of his head," she answered. "He keeps muttering something about 'My poor little girl—our poor little baby.' I can't make him out at all; but Mother Zuribar seems to understand him perfectly, and keeps trying to reassure him."

"There's a story about his having been taken from his bride as their child was born and subjected to Allatambour's torture until his reason gave away; but let's ask Mother Zuribar to give us the straight of it," I said.

We were walking along the hall in the stone house when Captain Standish met us. He had been nervously running from Patience at the door to Mother Zuribar with the wounded, not certain just what he could do, and full of concern for me outside as well as his own helplessness if all should not go well with me.

Now he was all cheerful greeting, and I believe he would have embraced me if I had shown any inclination to submit.

"Come — let's hear Mother Zuribar's story—she won't tell it until you're there to hear, Alonzo—so come on," he finally burst forth. He was as anxious as I to get at the real facts of the mysterious happenings of the last twenty-four hours. We both acted more or less like little boys seeking a bedtime story, for when we got to where Mother Zuribar sat on the dirt floor beside the gray-haired, muttering old man, we both made a demand for the story.

"All right," she agreed. "First, however, I'm going to congratulate my son for his brave stand, and as the new king of Allatambours—I'm proud of you, Alonzo," and she came to where I squatted beside Patience and kissed me.

"Old Hoculotus said you would do it, and the old medicine-man was right!"

We all sat up straight at that. I turned in surprise and looked at Patience. She startled, looked at me. We both sought dumb information from Captain Standish. He was nodding his head for Mother Zuribar to go on for all the world as if that part of the tale were an old story to him.

Patience and I burst forth in chorus, "Old Hoculotus said it!"

"Hush, children!" Mother Zuribar motioned us to be quiet and she smiled at our amazement.

"Yes, Old Hoculotus said you would, Alonzo. And I have dreaded the time when you should show any desire to come to these islands ever since I carried you—a wee bundle of babyishness—in my arms.

"I was companion to Mrs. Gregory—the captain's wife — on the Saucy Belle, and we sailed from Guam all happy and well. Mrs. Gregory expected to be confined to the cabin within the month, and wanted me to go along to also act as nurse.

"I loved her from the start. As I have told you Alonzo, she was as fair as any girl I have ever seen, with the possible exception of Patience here. And she treated me, a Chimoro girl, with such consideration that I would have gladly given a hand to save her any pain.

"We arrived at a point off these islands just at dusk, and Captain Gregory had all made secure for the night. As we were in a calm, and unsuspecting any danger, he took advantage of the quiet weather to be with his family, and turned in early to get a good sleep.

"It was about midnight when we were awakened by a scuffling on the deck above, and screams of men in pain. Captain Gregory, clad as he was for bed, ran to the deck, grabbing a revolver as he went. Mrs. Gregory and I crouched fearfully by the cabin table all through the next half hour of agonized cries and stumbling falling bodies. We could hear the guttural shouts of savages and curses of the white crew.

"Finally Captain Gregory came to the cabin hatch. We could look right up to the sky until he blocked the way. He was fighting off a host of blacks. Then he suddenly turned, jumped the whole ladder of six steps, and running to us, moaned:

"'We're done for—the men are all dead. But you sha'n't be taken alive, honey!' he cried as he quickly thrust his revolver in his wife's face and pulled the trigger. It did not go off. Harmlessly he pulled the trigger time after time, and the hammer snapped viciously. I held my hands over my ears, and was too stunned and horrified by my thoughts to turn away. But the shells in the gun had all been shot, though he thought he had saved one.

"'It's all right, Miles — don't worry!' Mrs. Gregory reassured him.

"Then the blacks came. Allatambour, a young man then, at the head of them. Captain Gregory tried to fight them off, but we were overwhelmed by numbers in only a moment.

"Fortunately I was allowed to stay with Mrs. Gregory. She was in need of me.

"Allatambour was attracted by her fairness from the very first, and would not let her be out of his sight at any time until we were placed in the little hut you can see from here down in the plaza inside the village square.

"A boy was born that night. And by some kindly freakish trick of his brain, Allatambour allowed Captain Gregory to be brought to the hut to help. The captain was given the blankets off his own bunk, and Allatambour had my mistress's bed and the baby's basket brought from the ship intact. The bed was a bamboo af-

fair that Captain Gregory had picked up somewhere in his travels."

I glanced at Captain Standish as she described the furniture, and he nodded recognition of what we had seen in the hut.

"The baby was dark like his father, and Captain Gregory was very pleased. In the morning Allatambour, carrying that sword which you have held, Alonzo, came to the hut with a guard for Captain Gregory.

"I remember well the dignified attitude of the captain until Allatambour touched his wife with his black hand, then it was all the guards could do to hold him, and those black, bristling brows of his lowered in anger until even Allatambour seemed deeply impressed by the scowl. He left Mrs. Gregory alone.

"Captain Gregory was marched away. A while later Allatambour came back. He had yet the sword in hand. A funny little old black man came with him, he looked like a monkey, and kept wrinkling up his face into grotesque grins. One would expect him to chatter whenever the wrinkles came. This was the tribal medicine-man, Hoculotus. He was small but shrewd.

"He looked us all over and nodded his head sadly when he examined my mistress with the sharp eyes he had. He saw that she was very weak. The shock had been too much. She was failing.

"Then Allatambour showed by every sign his intent to kill the baby and take the mother. Hoculotus remonstrated. Allatambour became angry, but Hoculotus would not give in one bit. Allatambour was afraid of this medicine-man. He did not openly thwart him, but a crafty idea came into his mind, and I knew from the way he gesticulated that he intended setting the baby adrift in a boat—then, if it died—and an expressive motion of Allatambour's hands showed that he felt it would be the baby's own fault.

"Hoculotus became angered, and in active pantomime with few but apparently forceful words he showed the dire result of such action upon Allatambour.

"He acted out how the baby, man grown, would return, and with Allatambour's own sword, kill him.

"And you did it, Alonzo!"

"What do you mean, mother?" I stammered.

"You are Captain Gregory's son, boy!" she said, and tears of exulting happiness ran down her cheeks at being able to finally tell me.

"I am Captain Gregory's son?" I exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Where's my baby?" a voice came to us from the ground. Captain Gregory had regained consciousness. We had forgotten him for a moment.

"Here, father!" I said timidly, at Mother Zuribar's solicitation.

"Liar!" the old man roared at me. "Are you another of the devil's own satellites sent to torture me more? Hasn't that black fiend of Satan any heart at all that he sends me a full grown man as a son who is really not yet twenty-four hours old, and after the devil dropped me in his damned water hole at that. Get out of my sight!" I stood away.

Then his eyes fell on Mother Zuribar.

"Where's Mrs. Gregory, Maria; but stay, what's happened to you; did the night's awfulness affect you as hard as all that—to age you so?"

"It's not just a night, captain," she answered, smiling. "It is twenty-four years instead of hours since you were thrown into the water hole, and your son was born. This is he," she said, taking my hand and leading me to my father.

"No! No! Are you, too, crazy, or what has upset things so—is Mrs. Gregory all right?"

"She's dead, captain."

"Dead! Thank God she's beyond the torture at the hands of the black fiend," and tears coursed down the old man's cheeks.

"Hello—who's this?" he exclaimed on first seeing Captain Standish.

"I'm Efram Standish," Patience's father said simply.

"I—!" Captain Gregory started to say the same he had to me, but he had raised his hand and saw his own arm and wrist all wrinkled and shrunken from his emaciated condition as well as age.

"Well, this is a howdy-do!" he exclaimed, getting hold of his beard and raising the end to where he could see the whiteness of his hair.

"I'm a liar!" he said. "Efram, I believe you—you have all the earmarks of a Standish. And for that youth there—is he my son?"

"I believe he is," Captain Standish said.

"Come here, boy," my father said. I stepped up close. He gazed intently into my face. "You've the look of your mother," he finally said; "but my hair and eyes—shake!" Gladly I grasped his hand. The emotion he had been under was too much for him, and as the bruise on the left side of his head was starting to bleed afresh, I asked him to lay quiet and rest.

Then I asked Mother Zuribar how she had managed to get away from Allatambour's grasp.

"When the men came to take you away I was with your mother. She knew something was to happen, but did not become the least bit excited; she said:

"'Maria, take care of my baby boy—I'm not long here, and I have a contented feeling. They are taking him away. You follow and watch over him—I trust you, Maria!' and I knew she spoke the truth about herself. I promised to do all I could for you, Alonzo, and when the black fellows were gone, I went out. Your mother could not concieve of anything so brutal as what Allatambour planned for you. She did not think they would do anything harmful to her baby, but I would do all I could to watch over you.

"The plaza was deserted. I climbed to the plateau, and from there I saw a big canoe of savages paddling out to sea, from the swamp where we landed, and they had a small boat in tow. I knew you were in the smaller boat. About a mile out beyond the reef the natives left the little boat adrift and returned to land, coming back through the reef as they had gone out. I didn't go back to your mother, for I knew I could do nothing for her, but hid in the jungle on the mountainside.

"While I was up there I could see the village and all that went on. I was watching, Captain Gregory, when you came out of the cleft in the mountain and scared the natives nearly to death who were collected on the dry land, where we camped, Alonzo. Captain Gregory, you came back after being dropped into the water hole in the other mountain. The savages had just set your son adrift, and I believe they possibly felt guilty, and that you were a revengeful spirit.

"The blacks all ran screaming across the swamp, and you followed them. I saw Allatambour lead you up to this stone house and you both entered. Later I saw your mother carried out of the little hut Alonzo, and I knew she needed me no more.

"The little canoe, like a sea-gull at rest, drifted peacefully on the heaving bosom of the ocean.

"That night I crept to the swamp and crossed it. I found a small native boat on the mud bank near the iron wood rampart at the stream's mouth and succeeded in getting through the reef and away while it was dark. Not until daylight, however, did I find you in your little boat. Then I just happened to hear your infant cry above the lapping of the waves during a lull in the screeching of the bosun birds and sea-gulls. I paddled hard for that cry. I found you, and taking you in my boat I steered by memory for Guam and home.

"And you have grown up as my boy. Some have wondered—some have lost faith in me, and some have kept a righteous silence, but to none have I told your true story until this day—you are a Gregory, Alonzo."

My father patted my hand in affection. Patience eyed me lovingly, and Captain Standish smiled complacently.

One month later.

Patience and I were married by Captain Standish. My father and Mother Zuribar stood sponsor. The black fellows looked on with great curiosity and laughed and cheered with glee when we told them the ceremony was over.

These blacks are very loyal now. We are showing them how to be industrious, and they are willing to learn.

My father has recovered entirely and is much stronger, so he can materially help in the education of our people here. He has a great influence over them, for the older ones remember his coming back from the trip through the water hole.

Captain Standish has Urido fully recovered and in his right mind. We learned that Urido was given a different treatment of torture than others. He came among these blacks a peaceful adventurer, and they fell upon him, bound him, then lashed him to the basin rim where the waters from the fall poured over his head for a night. He got loose and returned to Guam, demented by the experience. He now works as first mate aboard the Patience Standish, which is all in good repair and ready when a crew of blacks is well enough trained to take her to sea and Guam.

We are all in fine health and spirits, and have overcome our suspicious fears of the black fellows.

Seemingly democracy agrees with them, and we are serving it in small doses.

Patience takes the girls and women in classes to teach domestic work, while I take the soldiers into the jungles to clear for rice fields and start systematic development of their natural resources.

We'll have quite a valuable cargo ready for Captain Standish to take away in a short while.

And I am named Alonzo Porter Gregory —out of regard for Mother Zuribar's selection and from my mother's maiden name.

The stone hut we have refinished into a chapel in commemoration to my mother. Father holds services there every Sunday.

(The end.)

The Gift of Ulu

by Maryland Allen

SHE sat nearest the door of the great manager's inner office. This was enough to bring down upon her the enmity of the crowded room, and had something, perhaps, to do with making the large gap in her damp left shoe that exposed a stockingless portion of reddened flesh the object of many scornful glances. All of the gorgeous goddesses waiting with unconcealed disgust for her to take her turn knew she had only one meal a day and wondered audibly why such creatures were admitted. At last her name was called, and she remained immovable, stolidly calm. There was also some excuse for this. She had taken the name only a few minutes before from the gaudy cover of a magazine at the corner news-stand. The guardian of the inner sanctuary repeated the name and grinned. He was diabolically experienced. Perhaps he guessed her late christening.

"Mlle. Fifine Fontainebleau."

Jen McTeague arose. But not hurriedly, she was too clever for that. With her head

up, her face set in the same stolid calm, her bare toes working through the break in her shoe, her shoulder-blades weirdly apparent under the threadbare jacket, she entered the inner office, and the grinning guardian closed the door.

Meier Blumauer looked at her politely. He was always patient and never rude. He believed that nothing worth while could be accomplished in a hurry.

"You advertised for a dancer," said Jen. She took his glance for a question, and wisely, too.

Blumauer shifted his cigar to the left corner of his mouth and sighed. "What can you do?"

"I can dance."

Meier leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. He was a Jew; which is to say he was a shrewd reader of character, had imagination and sympathy—in short, was wonderfully human. Then, he had come from the same horrid swamp, was the child of the same wretched life that had spawned Jen McTeague Fifine Fontainebleau. He knew the urge that had always supported her and brought her, an emaciated, poverty-bitten scarecrow, to demand a hearing of the most able theatrical manager of two continents. He stared at her openly, and into his big, rather prominent blue eyes there crept an honest regret.

If that divine fire had kept her alive, it had not nourished her. Bad food, bad habits, no ventilation, the extremes of heat and cold, intense physical effort on nothing but will-power—and the deadly disease of hope deferred—all had left their cruel imprint upon the thin face and the stunted, undeveloped figure across from him.

"Have you ever danced in public?"

"All the time at Bennie Limbo's place."

It was a longshoremen's resort of vilest repute. But it was not this statement that prejudiced Meier Blumauer. He looked at her feeble, ill-nourished frame, recognized the unpreparedness for any prolonged physical strain in the sickly pallor of her weary, sophisticated face.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three. I'm a pupil of the great dancing teacher. I've been dancing ever since I could walk."

"Yes," thought Meier, "and drinking and smoking, and not eating, and not bathing, and—and lying on a dung-heap at the bottom of a dark hole." A sudden spasm of sickness smote him. He knew. Good God, how well he knew! And she was twenty-three. Too late!

"You had better go back to Bennie Limbo's place," he said gently.

Then he waited for a profane outburst of denunciation and boastful defiance. But her lips remained immovable, her big, gray eyes empty. Jen McTeague had long since passed the high-water mark of discouragement. Much experience had taught her it was best to breast the swift, treacherous currents of life with immovable calm. At least, life as it was exploited in the tenements and at Bennie Limbo's place, which was the only life she knew. She had no strength to expend in the emotional orgy that masquerades under the names of artistic temperament and heroic resolve. It all went into dancing and the fierce, white-hot struggle to survive. And she had come to a point where she could not stop. Long and stupendous effort had only brought her the necessity of keeping on trying, for the inglorious reason that she could not stop. And so she thought, looking with blind, stupid exhaustion into Blumauer's heavy, clean-shaven face.

"I'll tell you what," he said. He spoke to the unquenchable flame his own genius was quick to recognize and do homage to while sorrowing for the dwelling-place it had chosen. "If you could go away—Australia, for choice—and dance for, say, a year, and then come back here, I might be able to talk to you. But—I am not advertising for what you are—now."

"Is that your advice?" asked Jen McTeague.

"Why—yes." He could not but show surprise at the way she took it all. "Unless—you decide to remain at Bennie Limbo's place. His face expressed plainly the thought that she would.

"I have to leave Bennie Limbo's place."

"Why?" With the pitiless eye of experience Blumauer saw many wretched reasons why, and wondered which one she'd give, or what lie in its place.

"Because—" Her lean, ungloved hand went up to her breastbone and she choked. "Because I must," she whispered.

The fire in her soul leaped up clear and strong and the light burned in her eyes. Under the influence of its brightness Meier Blumauer put his hand in his pocket.

"Here," he said, "is the price of a steerage-ticket to Sydney and ten dollars more to find yourself."

He knew the price bitterly well. And the extra ten dollars was exactly ten dollars more than he had owned when he stood in almost the same place on the ladder in much the same shoes. Only—only his mother had fed him.

"Now, damn—" thought Meier Blumauer, and stopped.

"Here you are," he said, and put the money in her hand. "Come to see me if you get back."

There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that she would return to Bennie Limbo's place and die there. Still, he had done what he could. He turned away, as a sign the interview was over, and in an hour he had forgotten the incident.

Meanwhile Jen McTeague, helpless in the clutches of the determination that had dragged her through twenty-three years of sordid vice and grilling effort to the elegant inner office of the great Meier Blumauer, said farewell to Bennie Limbo and the patrons of the place, packed her sorry belongings in a shabby rattan bag, and went up the gangplank of a steamer with a steerage-ticket to Sydney in her hand.

The ship was one that struck a sunken reef where the makers of charts solemnly swore and declared no reef could be. It was late at night, and Jen McTeague was not in her berth. She had crept into the first cabin unseen but by one or two stewards that grinned and passed on. Thus encouraged, she continued her explorations. Through the door of a drawing-room so magnificent it made her gasp, she advanced slowly, pinching her skinny arm with a spare thumb and forefinger to be sure she was awake. Then she saw a victrola, and it drew her swiftly as a magnet does a steel shaving. She wanted to make it play, to set the unquenchable flame to leaping in her miserable, unlovely body, to dance and dance and dance.

Suddenly she was thrown violently forward, and the sharp corner of the lovely, shiny joy-box cut like a knife across her left eye. From out the vast storehouse of her experience Jen grasped two essential facts. Some one had knocked her down, and she would have a black eye in the morning. True to her training, she staggered up instantly and glared around for her assailant. The room was empty, and the ship, that a moment before had been shooting ahead like a live thing, was strangely, sickeningly still. As Jen stared bewildered, the steward, that had grinned at her some ten minutes before, darted by the door. Shouting something, he threw two life-belts in her direction, and ran on.

It was not easy to walk the floor canted so to one side, but Jen picked up one of the things. Mechanically she obeyed the instructions printed in staring black letters upon the white canvas and buckled it about her thin frame. She concluded it was the thing to do. She knew precious little of ships, nothing at all of the doings of the saloon passengers. Only it tickled her to be taken for one.

This operation finished, she hesitated, looked at the victrola, and took the other life-belt from the almost perpendicular floor. There was a great trampling upon deck, shouts, and piercing screams. But Jen McTeague was busy in the gorgeous drawing-room buckling the life-belt about the polished sides of the victrola, while she talked to it in whispers with subdued giggles, and wondered if it was one of the steward's nightly duties, and he had taken the opportunity to press her into service. She locked the door on the records, pondered if she dare steal the key, if the captain would put her off in a small boat.

"All out! All out!" roared a voice.

Jen started violently and dropped the key into her pocket.

"My Gawd!" cried the steward from the doorway. "C'm' 'ere, yer barmy tart!"

He caught her arm and propelled her violently up the brass-bound stairway to the promenade-deck.

"It's come," thought Jen; "the captain's that mean he won't wait till morning." She was calm because she couldn't be anything else.

It *had* come. A heavy detonation sounded deep down in the ship, and a crashing roar much closer at hand. Jen felt the cool, salt spray upon her face and heard a woman scream. Followed a frightful explosion, a rending of the whole calm universe of sea and sky. Through it all Jen could hear the same woman screaming and screaming. Then, quite suddenly, she heard no more.

She was aware of a violent pain in her eyes and a strong glare upon the closed lids that all the years of her slum-bound existence could not help her to explain. She tried to open her eyes. The strange glare pressed the lids heavily down. She felt about feebly with her hands. Her fingers touched some yielding substance that was foreign, though not so painful to feel as the glare upon her face. She tried to sit up, and succeeded. Cautiously she opened her eyes, and knew it was the sun beating down upon her. Small wonder she did not recognize it before.

She sat upon a white, sandy beach, lapped gently by little waves from a placid lake of palest green water. A circle of breakers fringed the lake like a white, ruffled collar of foam; beyond them the sea ran in great billows to the bright, still line of the sky.

Jen McTeague staggered feebly to her feet and looked the other way. She saw trees with long, slim brown stems and huge, fan-shaped leaves bunched tightly at the top. "Giraffe-trees," she explained, and looked about alarmed. Beyond were others of a lower and more friendly proportion, and all with thick foliage of a marvelous, vivid green. In among the slim-stemmed coconuts that formed a fringe to the denser jungle-growth stood a little, thatch-roofed house with walls of split bamboo, and directly before it a raised, broad platform some twelve feet square. On the other side of the house a stream of bright water ran out of the green thicket, and down in a soft, gurgling rush to the lagoon. Stuck in the sand beside this stream was a victrola. Salt drops from the life-belt that encircled it trickled like glittering, reluctant tears down its polished sides.

Jen recognized it with a scream of rapture that died in the frightened clutch of her thin fingers to her lips. She stared at the little house in nervous expectancy. But no one came forth. The river fleeted murmuringly to the lagoon, the breakers roared and thundered on the reef, the palm-fronds clashed in the trades with a whistling, silvery note. There was no other sound.

Jen went up to the victrola. Beside it lay a handsome leather trunk. But she had no eyes for that. The key to the music-cabinet was still in her pocket. Feverish investigation proved the precious disks snugly in place and all unharmed. Reserving the examination of the trunk, she skirted the smooth, square platform, went straight to the little house, and looked in the doorless doorway.

The sand floor of the one small room was covered with matting. There was a comfortable-looking cot in one corner on a raised platform similar to the one outside, with a gaudy patchwork quilt folded up at the foot. A low bench held some white bowls and plates, a well-smoked frying-pan, and two granite sauce-pans in a row upon it. On a shelf above the bed was an American dollar clock, two books with mildewed bindings, and a two-pound baking-powder can with the gaudy label half-gone.

Jen walked boldly in. An ax, the head thickly smeared with grease, lay in the middle of the cot.

"That settles it," she said aloud. "There's no one here." She drew a deep breath of relief.

Then she went back to the trunk and had difficulty. She knew the ax as a weapon, not as a useful instrument. But at last the wrinkled cover was lifted, and she groaned in ecstasy. Not even the windows of the most costly, exclusive shops had ever presented to her famished gaze such exquisite perfection of feminine raiment as lay before her now. The water had only leaked in at the corners, and all the dainty lingerie, the lacy, shimmering negligees were practically unharmed.

Jen dragged the trunk to the platform. With many luxurious ohs! and ahs! she laid

the clothes out in piles. The trades caught up one filmy thing, and she raced away after it down the beach. She caught it at the edge of the water, and discovered most of the tinned delicacies reserved for the saloon passengers in that steamer she was already beginning to forget, strewn thickly just above water-line in the white sand. She kicked off her uncomfortable, salt-shrunken shoes, threw away her cheap, coarse stockings, and capered wildly.

"Eats, eats!" she shouted.

She carried food to the little house until she was worn out. Then she ate, and habit made her choose from all that luxurious abundance the cheapest and poorest. She dragged the trunk into the house, selected a night-gown, and, covered with the patch-work quilt, the greasy ax at her side, slept until the sun rose again.

That morning she explored the island. But first she dressed herself carefully in the shrunken, salty garments in which she had been washed ashore. Except the shoes and stockings. These she had definitely abandoned.

It did not take her long to make a circle of the beach. The island was smaller than some of the smallest parks in her native city. Next she walked straight through the jungly interior. She found what she concluded to be green bananas, though she always thought they happened before. She was astonished at the sight of oranges on trees. She had been bred up to the belief that they belonged in carts pushed exclusively by Italians. Laid there, perchance, by some species of dago hen. But she did not see a living creature. And when, hot and panting, she emerged once more on the wind-cooled beach, she saw something bobbing in the lagoon, quite close to the white sand. It proved to be a heavy canvas sack securely bound to two life-belts. Jen poured the contents of the sack upon the platform in front of the house and separated the shining heap of little piles.

"My God," she said in awed tones, "if I did put a life-belt on the victrola, I put one on myself, too. But this guy he put both on his money, so—I got it."

She poured the gold coin back into the sack, went into the house, stepped up on the bed, and lifted it with both hands to the little shelf. Then she examined the books, reading each title aloud.

"Ho-ly Bible. 'V-anity Fair.' I bet I read 'em. William Makepeace Thackeray. Who wrote this Holy Bible stuff?"

She gave up trying to find out, wound the clock, and set it at seven, that being the hour in the morning when she was free to leave Bennie Limbo's place and creep off to bed. She watched the minute-hand go around once, and then set the clock at two, the time for her lesson with the great dancing-teacher, paid for by going without two meals each day, but nevertheless an hour of transcendent happiness; with a grimace over her shoulder at the open doorway, she gingerly lifted the baking-powder can and pulled off the lid. It was full of matches.

Jen stepped down from the cot to the matting-covered floor. For the first time since she had opened her aching eyes upon the beach the possibilities of her strange situation came home to her. She jerked off her cheap clothing, soaked in salt water and dried in a hideous deformity of wrinkles, and threw them out of the door. She selected from the trunk an envelope chemise of exquisite daintiness. It was quite as much clothing as she had ever worn at Bennie Limbo's place, and infinitely more beautiful. She went out, made a critical selection from the cabinet, started the victrola, and stepped up on the platform.

A moment she stood poised there. The water boomed on the reef; the sea, the palms, the bright little river all sang together. The sun kissed her; the sweet, wholesome breath of the trades cooled the kisses, blew her bobbed hair, fluttered the scant, shimmering chemise about her bony frame. She raised her face to the blue sky, and an awed, tremulous little smile hovered about her parted lips.

"My God, you are good to me!" said Jen McTeague, and glided away across the platform to the music of the victrola.

At the end of a year, Mote, king of Attahooroo, having returned from Papeete, where he was acquitted of a very horrid accusation of murder, decided to pay a

visit to the small, uninhabited island of Ulu, five days' sail from Attahooroo. He had inherited it from his mother, and built a small lodge on the beach to which he sometimes retired for solitude and meditation. He felt the need of both when he returned from Papeete. So he set out in the royal gas schooner Suzanne with four Attahooroo boys and his friend and adviser, Sam Annan, an American adventurer well known as Uncle Sam all through the South Pacific. They left the schooner at the anchorage in a tiny bay and strolled along the beach in the direction of the house, conversing in the aimless, desultory way of old and congenial friends. Suddenly Annan stopped.

"I hear music!" he exclaimed.

"What a jolly stiff you are, Uncle Sam." King Mote had been through Rugby and Oxford. "Come on along."

Annan grinned, advanced a few steps, and stopped again. "Shucks," he protested, "listen! There! What d'ye know, eh?"

Mote stared, and his dark face went a shade lighter. It was music, and it came from the direction of his lodge, that was still hidden by the trees.

"Rubenstein's 'Melody in F'!" he half whispered. "I say, here's a go! Mermaids?" He looked at his friend in all seriousness. He was a brown islander first, a sojourner at Rugby and Oxford after that.

Annan shook his head. He never dreamed of smiling. "Not with white m—European music. Come this way."

They left the beach for the jungle and made their way carefully. Annan, who was a little ahead, halted suddenly, dropped to his knees and stared.

"Mote," he whispered hoarsely, "come here quick, for God's sake!" And Mote sank noiselessly down at his side.

The music came from a tall, four-sided box that stood beside the sleeping platform before the house. Upon the platform was a white woman clad in some scanty garment that left her arms and legs bare and a portion of beautifully rounded bosom. Her flowing black hair was crowned with flowers. Now she hung motionless, poised upon the very tips of her bare, rosy toes; now she darted off, swift, sure, easy as a bird; now she drifted with head thrown back and dimpled arms outspread like foam blown from the reef. With the music of movement she made the music from the box seem a poor attempt indeed. She was the Melody in F.

Sam Annan breathed hard. "My—my God!" he choked.

"It *is* a mermaid," murmured Mote; "we have to go away from here, Uncle Sam."

"Not I!" cried the white man. He laughed aloud and Jen McTeague stopped dancing.

She pushed a lever in the box and the music ceased. Composedly she stepped to the edge of the platform and looked at the screen of trees from whence the sound had come. She was very beautiful and not at all afraid.

"Who is there?" she called.

As if at a command, two men came out. For height and bigness there was no choice between them. They were both giants. Neither was there any distinguishing mark in their attire. Both were barefooted; both wore white duck trousers rolled to the knee, white shirts open at the neck and rolled to the elbow; both had on exquisitely woven bamboo hats turned up on one side with a pearl. Both were handsome, with the same strong, steady gaze, the same trustworthy frankness of bearing. But one man was white and very fair, with a sort of laughing fairness, as if he knew the sun and wind had tried their utmost and he still gaily defied them. The other man was very dark.

"Wait a minute," said Jen McTeague. She saw more than the first two faces she had gazed upon in a year. They were men. She saw twenty-three unspeakable years all the darker in contrast to the one she had just passed. It did not enter her head to expect any different treatment from what she had experienced. Holy Bible and "Vanity Fair" held other views, to be sure. But, then, she had found the books at Ulu, and life on the island was not regular life at all. These were men; they belonged to the life that she knew and both were to be met quietly. She flashed into the

bamboo house, and a second later emerged attired in a lovely negligee. She sat down on the edge of the platform and regarded the two men with frank friendliness.

"Mlle. Fifine Fontainebleau of the Follies Theater, New York." The arrival of these men meant that her holiday was over. Life had taught her to be prepared. "Now, let me hear you speak."

"Sam Annan of the United States and the South Seas," the white man lifted his hat.

"Mote, king of Attahooroo," the dark one bowed with much more distinguished grace.

Jen clapped her rosy little hands together and burst out laughing. It was great to hear her laugh. There was sunshine in it, the music of the trades and the sea and the joy of living.

"First talk I've heard but my own and canned stuff for a year," she cried.

"Where in the name of God did you come from?" burst out Sam Annan.

"There was a ship called the Huahine went down about here somewhere a year ago," said Jen.

"Yes, but it was reported all the survivors were picked up by the Taluna."

"Not all," protested Jen demurely.

"Har-ardly," drawled King Mote with the most impressive Oxford drawl.

Jen laughed again and bit her lip. She was getting too friendly with them and this in the face of all her experience. She thought of the canvas sack on the shelf above the bed and other things. The contents of the sack played a strong part in the future she had mapped out for herself, danced gaily for all day, and dreamed of happily at night. These men had no part in that plan, not even as far as stealing the bag of money. She rose resolutely. She had faced worse men than these, by their looks, could be, when she was every bit as much alone.

"Now," she said, "if you gentlemen 'll give me a lift to some place where I can catch a steamer I'll be awful obliged. I must go back right away."

"Back?" cried Annan. "Back where?"

"Why, the only place any one ever wants to go back to—New York."

"Fancy that now!" drawled Mote. "I never found New York anything to write home about."

She glanced at him quickly.

"I belong down here, you see," he said quietly.

Jen blushed and looked lovelier. "I understand what you mean," she said. She thought she did. Later she acknowledged she did not—then. "But I must go back right away."

"If we start immediately," said Sam Annan, "we can make it to Papeete just in time for the northbound steamer."

Mote looked aside. He was for the serenity of Ulu and the song of the sea and the trades there. He had no stomach, right then, for a return trip to Papeete. But he was too generous and kind-hearted not to allow himself to be overruled. Neither was it compatible with his idea of courtesy to allow his friend and the stranger to go alone. In an hour the Suzanne spread her wings for the island capital, and Jen McTeague leaned against the deckhouse and watched her refuge recede and sink into the sea.

The canvas bag was snugly tucked in the leather trunk. Neither of her rescuers had evinced the least interest in her belongings, and to this strange act of kindness she remained cynically indifferent. She did not intend to be caught off her guard. In ten days she would be in Papeete where she could purchase some clothes. In twelve she would be in San Francisco, in five New York, and Meier Blumauer had told her to come to see him when she returned. It would be a very different visit from the first. It was astonishing how much confidence the full canvas sack supplied. Then she could dance, she was in radiant health, and the mirror in the cabin Mote had so kindly vacated for her told her she was beautiful. And both men had behaved well—so far. She was determined to elude them, to neither quarrel nor make terms. If they demanded pay for bringing her from Ulu she would give it them in money with the dignity acquired from her year of life there in company with the Holy Bible, "Vanity Fair," and the victrola.

What she never even remotely reckoned on was the thing that happened.

In all Sam Annan's wanderings a fastidious dislike for brown women had kept him free from amorous entanglements. But the sight of Jen McTeague on the sleeping platform at Ulu changed the world for him. Here was a woman of his own color and race and fashioned most sweetly after his own heart. He had never wanted much in his life, but the things he had hankered for he had never allowed himself to be denied. And he had never wanted anything quite so much as he desired Jen McTeague to be his wife. He had ten days to win her in—only ten. He courted ardently, humbly, respectfully, never dreaming that by doing so he afforded her a glimpse into a world unknown to her before.

"Don't go back," he urged. "We can be married in Papeete and—oh, look here, I know we will be happy. How could it be otherwise?"

"I must go back," said Jer. She would not even think of what he was saying. It had no part in her dreams, the thing for which she had sacrificed, slaved, and starved, and that was so soon to come true.

"But look what I have to offer," persisted Annan. "The islands, the sea, the moonlight nights and—my love."

"I tell you I must go back," said Jen. She knew men. Suppose she said yes, now. Then he would sing another tune. Perhaps he had seen her put the sack into the leather trunk.

But Annan did not change except to become more importunate in his pleading, and a strange, piteous wonder began to soften the hard lump of suspicion which life had fostered in her breast.

"Fifine, Fifine," Annan cried, "say you will be my wife, say—"

"My name is Jen McTeague," she broke in, trembling. "It is only fair that you should know about me." She told him steadily and honestly all there was of the past.

Annan laughed. "Good God, girl! Why, take a look at me. I've done about everything but commit murder, and I've wanted to do that heaps o' times, but somehow at the pinch my stomach's gone back on me. Come now, if you loved me would that knowledge hold you back from making me your husband?"

"No, no, no!" cried Jen, and caught herself. "I must go back and dance. Listen!"

She told him how she had come to herself on the beach at Ulu, the finding of the money, her resolve, and how she had danced herself to beauty and health there. For what?

"To go back and dance. Don't you understand? It's what I've striven all my life for, starved and—everything. Oh, that little island of Ulu, what it has given me!"

"It has given you the only thing in life worth having!" cried Annan. "If you'd just see it the right way. It has given you love. It has given me a wife and you a husband. Oh, dance for me!"

But she ran away from him and wept until she was exhausted, she did not know why. It was not until morning when they came through the reef into Papeete harbor that she remembered having told him of the canvas bag and realized she had passed the night without barricading her cabin door.

The steamer northbound from Sydney to San Francisco was in, and Jen took a ticket in the saloon and kept her story to herself.

"It's the best way," she said to Annan. She wondered why she felt so safe with him, so free to speak without watchful reservations. "It's not the kind of advertising I want. Do you think so?"

"No," said he, "you don't want any advertising at all, Jen. Come with me up to the mayor—" But she had gone to thank Mote and tell him good-by.

In the light of her strange discoveries with Annan, she did it very well. She told him she hoped he would keep the victrola at Ulu. He said he would until she returned, and was rewarded by seeing her blush. Jen was cross with herself over that blush. To be sure, these men were different from any she had ever seen, but—but nothing had happened to alter her determination.

"If you change your mind, Jen," said Sam Annan, "don't write, don't wonder; come back. Love of my heart, sweetest of all sweet women, come back to me. Won't you—won't you kiss me good-by?"

"No," said Jen. "I don't want to have anything to do with kisses. I am going back and dance."

Annan sighed impatiently. "All right," he said; "have it that way. But if you ever do want to have to do with kisses and a husband that 'll give you plenty, come back to me, Jen—come back."

It was half past nine in the evening when her loveliness carried her past the doorkeeper and she walked straight up to the closed door of Meier Blumauer's inner office and turned the knob.

"It is Fifine Fontainebleau," she said as she entered and closed the door.

Meier Blumauer turned round from his desk, stared, stared harder, and his hands gripped the arms of his chair. He was baffled beyond measure at her appearance.

"Great God of Israel!" he gasped. "Is it—it *is*—you! And can you dance—too?"

Jen McTeague laughed the laugh that Ulu had taught her, and Blumauer thrilled strangely. He did not know he was hearing the music of the sunlight upon the island, the song of the sea about it, the trade winds in its palms, and a belief in all mankind one man had brought her there.

"Can I dance?" she repeated. "Can I breathe?"

She lifted her arms, glided back from him a space and hung poised, an unheard melody. Then she came and stood before him and smiled.

"Will you try me?" she said.

Meier Blumauer seized her arm and raced her to the outer office door.

"Listen," he cried, "do you hear that sound?"

Jen heard a roaring like the water on the reef at Ulu at low tide and the music of the orchestra beating through it as she had heard it from the victrola so many times.

"The show is on," said Blumauer, "and the dancer they have all come to see has eloped with a bogus prince. I am going to introduce you. You are the queen of them all. Here is a tryout fit for royalty to witness."

And soon she stood, in familiar scanty attire, awaiting the right moment as she had often stood in the sunshine and salt, sweet sea wind on the corner of King Mote's sleeping platform at Ulu. The moment came and she glided away.

The victrola played and played. She felt the wind in her unlifted face, heard the high, silvery song of the palms, the gay, gurgling laughter of the little river. Bending over her she saw the strong, fair face of Annan and heard his tender, pleading voice:

"Dance for me, Jen, dance for me. Sweetest woman, dance for me and take your pay in kisses."

And she did dance for him in an uprush of wild, exhilarating happiness. She danced the future of their life together. For she was going to be his wife—she, the poor waif of the slums, the despised dancer at Bennie Limbo's place. This was what she had striven for, this was her greatest triumph: to be a loved and respected wife, to mother children for the one man that would hold her to his heart forever. The mounting flame in her soul burned through the hard shackles of her old ambition; they fell, and her nimble feet spurned them far away. Sunshine and freedom, love and motherhood, Sam Annan and the green island of Ulu where her life had begun. She danced on and on.

The music stopped and she paused, a muted love-song. "Dog-gone that victrola," she thought, looking back over her shoulder and smiling. "How Sam will laugh at the idea."

But he was not laughing; he was clapping his hands—Jen McTeague stood upon her two feet and shivered as if with cold. The sunshine was gone and the island and Sam Annan and love. She was on the stage in Meier Blumauer's theater where she had prayed and hoped and sworn to be. She faced the glare of footlights and an audience upon its feet. Thunderous waves of applause broke on the stage and beat high

about her where she stood so white and still. She did not bow, she did not smile. Only lifted one hand to her head as if dizzy and confused.

The leader of the orchestra took it for a signal. He raised his baton, the music began once more, and the applause died down to hushed expectancy. But the dancer did not move. The audience was patiently awaiting the outcome of the action.

Blumauer, weeping ecstatically in the wings, made a signal, and the curtain went down. He rushed to embrace his latest marvel, but she drew away and looked at him strangely. Not at all set back, he led her out before the curtain, an honor many a star had struggled for in vain. After the ovation, he took her back to a dressing-room and held the door against reporters eager for news.

"She has a contract with me," he said. "Yes. Five years. How much? Ten thousand a week. Yes. Could I offer her less?"

He rushed her to her modest hotel in his limousine determined to go over the terms of that contract and have it signed before he slept. It was his own bread he had cast upon the waters. None but himself should profit by the miraculous return. He was all fire and eagerness, and set her lack of interest down to the inevitable reaction and fatigue.

"Ten thousand a week," he said. "Bet you weren't getting that in Sydney."

"Do you smell wild lime in here?" she asked thoughtfully.

Blumauer stared. Then he recalled their interview of more than a year ago and her almost unnatural calm.

"She has the artistic temperament, after all," he thought. "She's overdoing it now, though. Well—if it's nothing worse than this!"

Already he had prepared a contract for her, and now he spread it temptingly out on the table.

"You sign right here," he said aloud, putting his broad finger down on the crisp paper.

Jen did not seem to hear him at first. Her eyes were deep, unfathomable; they seemed focused on other worlds.

"Yes— Come to-morrow morning, will you?" she said at last.

She rose, crossed the room, pulled up the curtain and stared down into the brightly lighted chasm of the street.

"You mean—you won't sign now?" Blumauer gasped. He waited several minutes and repeated the question.

"What did you say?"

"You mean you won't sign now?" This was artistic temperament enough for even her great talent.

"Yes," she said gently. "You have been very kind and I will always be grateful. But—I am tired now."

At the door he hesitated and was about to speak. But she was still standing with her shoulder to him, and he saw that she was miles away.

"What has she found lacking?" thought Blumauer shrewdly. "What can she want after such a triumph as she had to-night at my theater here in New York?" He shut the door softly and came away thinking hard.

Apparently nothing that could be found there. For, though he was early the next morning, she had gone, leaving no address. Mlle. Fifine Fontainebleau, the most famous dancer of her time, had no desire for money and was satisfied with the ovation her initial appearance evoked. These things must have been so, for she was never heard of again.

But down in the far reaches of the South Pacific they tell the story of a Kanaka king and a white man that is his friend and the wife that white man married. They say she is as beautiful as an island at sunrise, as sweet and healthy as the trade winds, as happy as the sunlight on the sea. They say, too, she dances as no mortal woman can, and the crew of this king's gas schooner are ready to swear she is the same as the mermaid their master and his white friend discovered on the island of Ulu and carried in captivity to Papeete several years ago.

It is well this story circulates only in the South Seas. If it came to New York and Meier Blumauer were tempted, in the name of art, to look up this paragon, he would be a very sad man indeed.

Palos of the Dog Star Pack

by J. U. Giesy

Author of "Mimi," "The Blue Bomb," "House of the Hawk," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JASON CROFT from childhood had been trained in the knowledge of the occult. From a Hindu tutor he had learned the mysteries of the Orient, and when he came to settle with a widowed housekeeper in his ancestral home, he had personally visited all the wise men of the East.

A time came when he decided he could, by the sheer power of mind, by will alone, leave his mortal body and with his astral body ride the highways of all space.

He would leave his mortal body on his couch for several days at a time, and wander at will through the planetary countries of the farthest heavens.

In this way he had come to Palos, one of the planetary bodies of the sun, Sirius, one of the Dog Star pack. Interested but not confounded by the beautiful country, its tropical vegetation and the highly civilized life of its cities, what left him all unstrung and sent him quickly back to earth was the discovery, in the royal city of Aphur, of his soul-mate, his counterpart, his twin.

In Naia, Princess of Aphur, his soul recognized its destiny; he could not rest until he found his better half. But before he returned to earth to plan a way of reaching her, he found that her father and the king, for state reasons, were planning to betroth her to the lecherous Prince of Cathur. A princely feast was held, at which this man, Prince Kyphallos, had declared before the nobles he was prepared to make the Princess of Aphur the Queen of Cathur.

Croft must lose no time. Within a month the thing was to be ratified. He then determined to acquire a physical life in Palos. He remembered the handsome lad, Jasor of Nodhur, whose feeble brain could not keep health in his big body. Again he left his body in his house on earth, and his consciousness took up its residence in Jasor when that lad's frail spirit left.

Now a Tamarizian himself, to all outward intents and purposes, he laid his plans to thwart the Crown Prince of Cathur and to win Naia for himself.

Through the high priest of Aphur he gained an audience with the king. Jadgor and his son, Robur, whole-heartedly embraced his scheme to advance the power and prestige of Tamarizia. When, with the resources of the whole state at his command, he produced his motor, the king made him a knight, and raised him to a social equality with Naia.

He now had won her favor and the recognition of her father, for on the morning of the day he drove his car with Prince Robur into the country, to the stupefied wonder of the whole countryside, the gnuppas (horses) attached to the car with Naia and her father took fright, and the car and the occupants were on the point of being precipitated into a gorge when Croft rescued them from their danger.

At the gorgeous banquet which witnessed the formal betrothal Croft sat on the dais with the princely party, and when Naia put the symbolic cup of wine to her lips to drink simultaneously with her betrothed, the eye of Jasor caught and held the eye of Naia, and in that moment he felt she knew. He did not need her reminder:

"Forget not our invitation of this morning, or that house in the mountains which is ours."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAN'S DEMAND.

TOWARD that end and what it should finally bring about, Croft now made his plans. Kyphallos he learned would leave on the morrow for Scira, and as he knew would very shortly thereafter make that promised journey to Niera, where he would once more come under the attraction of the Zollarian Magnet — that tawny Kalamita who had attended the feast on Anthra before he started south.

On the following day therefore, he asked audience of Jadgor, took Robur with him

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when he appeared before the king and suggested the use of a spy on Cathur's heir; telling so much, as he felt he dared, to support his plea.

At first Jadgor was amazed. "How know you these things Lord Jasor!" he cried.

"I have heard things in the north," Croft replied without naming the location, letting Jadgor suppose it was during his days in Scira if he would.

And it seemed that Jadgor did that very thing, since after a time he asked exactly what Jasor would propose.

Croft suggested a consultation with Magur—and the sending of word to Abbu in the name of both Jasor and the Chief Priest of Himyra to watch what Kyphallos did. That there was reason for his suggestion the very next day brought proof. A sailor from a Cathurian galley, was found concealed in the shop where the new engines were being made. This following hard on the heels of Kyphallos's departure, Croft held suspicious indeed. He smiled in a rather grim way when Robur told him of the occurrence, rushing into the room where he sat engaged in the drawing of some further plans. But he took no steps save to have the sailor taken back to his ship and his captain cautioned to keep him out of harm's way, and to recommend that Robur place a guard about the shop. Indeed he was not greatly worried as he knew of one way in which he could watch Kyphallos and learn what he planned.

On the sixth day, having seen the work on the engines well under way, he took the car, filled its tank with spirits and drove out the north road toward that white palace in the mountains where he had been bidden as a guest.

He had sent no word of his coming, yet he felt assured that a welcome would be his. There was a smile on his lips and a pæan of joy in his heart as he stormed up the mountain grades and out across those gorges the road crossed on massive arches of stone.

So at last he stopped before the steps leading up to the doors of the white Aphurian mansion, and sprang down. He mounted the steps and found once more the blue servant he had seen on another occasion, watching in awed expectancy just inside. To him he gave his title and asked for Naia herself.

The blue man bowed. "She lies yonder, Lord," he replied. "I shall lead you to her."

Following the servant, Croft came about a cluster of flowering bushes to find the hostess he sought.

She lay upon a wine-red wood divan, while beside her sat the blue girl Maia, her supple body swinging in easy rhythm as she waved a fan for the comfort of the woman she served.

By now, Croft was fully accustomed to the disregard of clothing displayed by the Tamarizian servants and even the nobles themselves in their more private life.

Hence he was not disturbed by the fact that Maia's well-turned torso swayed before him unclothed, or surprised that since she knew not of his coming, no more than a tissue so sheer that the flesh beneath it lent it color, draped Naia's perfect form as she rose, to stand before him and stretch forth her hands.

"My Lord, Jasor," she exclaimed. "Your coming is as unexpected as welcome. Would you feel flattered were I to confess that I was thinking of you ere you appeared?"

"Nay, not flattered, but filled with a delight beyond words and a fear lest I deserved less than that!" Croft smiled, as he took her warm flesh in his hands and gazing down into her eyes, found in their wide opened purple depths no surprise or startled question, but only pleasure as it seemed to him then.

Hupor the great houndlike beast who had been lying beside the two women, rose and lifting himself upon his massive haunches laid his forepaws on Croft's shoulder and stared into his face.

"Ah, Hupor gives you his favor, granted to few. Remove your cuirass and rest," Naia said resuming her seat and signing the Mazzerian to assist her guest. Then as he slipped out of the metal harness and stood in the soft shirt beneath it, she invited him to a place at her side and directed both servants to withdraw.

"You are come for the promised visit?" she began when they sat alone.

"If the time fits in with your convenience," Croft replied.

Naia looked down at her sandalless feet, high arched and pink of nail. "I will be frank," she went on. "I have been piqued because you delayed your coming." She glanced up with a little laugh.

"And I that I could not come the sooner," Croft blended his laughter with hers.

"You came in your car?"

"Aye."

"Tell me," she said, and laid a hand on his arm. "My father declares that Jadgor thinks you inspired of Zitu to make Tamarizia great. Tell me, about these moturs and your work."

Next to his love, these things were first in Croft's mind. For an hour he talked to the girl at his side. And he talked well. Her presence fired him, loosened his tongue. He painted for her a picture of Aphurian transportation transformed, of motors filling the highways, of motor-driven ships on river and sea, and swept on by his own conceptions spoke of motors as possible things of the air.

"Zitu!" she cried. "My lord would dare what none save the birds dare now?"

"Even so," said Croft. "So shall Aphur become strong — stronger than any other State of Tamarizia — strong enough to guard the western gate without another's aid."

He had made the remark of deliberate purpose, and now he heard the girl beside him catch her breath, and glancing toward her found her scarcely-covered bust swollen with the inhaled air, her eyes wide and very, very dark, with a strange light in their depths. "You—my Lord Jasor, you can do this thing?"

"And will," he declared.

He saw Naia of Aphur quiver. "One who did that might ask what he would, and receive it of the State," she said slowly, and then, once more her fingers touched his arm and he found them icy cold. "My lord does Zitu answer prayers?"

Croft's mind leaped swiftly from her words to a night when he had seen her kneeling before the figure of Azil in this selfsame house—when he had heard her plea, lifted out of an anguished spirit—to the One Eternal Source. "What mean you?" he asked.

"If one—in sore trouble—one with a spirit which rebelled at a task to which it was set, should cry for aid, would Zitu give heed?"

O girl of gold, sang the heart in Croft's breast—oh wonder-woman of all the universe of life! How well he knew her meaning. How well he sensed that in his words of promise for a future strength in her nation which would render needless her living immolation on the altar of patriotic duty, she saw a possible answer to that prayer she had lifted to Zitu, and Ga, and Azil the Giver of Life. And, how he longed to turn and sweep her supple form into his arms, crush it against his breast and speak to her soul the words which should assure her that he stood even now between her and the coming fate she loathed.

As it was he sought to reassure by his reply. "Aye, Naia of Aphur, I think that indeed Zitu hears a troubled spirit's prayer. As for the form his answer may take—what man knows?"

Her lips parted. Again her body filled with incaught air. "Aye who knows," she repeated. "How long a time shall it require to bring these things to pass?"

"They shall be Aphur's ere a cycle has run out," said Croft.

"Zitu! Then — then Aphur shall be strong beyond Jadgor's dreams ere—ere so short a time is gone!"

Again Croft's heart pounded in his breast. Almost she had said ere—she was forced into hated wedlock with Kyphallos he thought. He inclined his head.

"But why," Naia went on more calmly, "being of Nodhur, did you come with these plans to Aphur, my lord?"

"You have said it." Croft turned to face her fully.

"I?" She drew herself a trifle back as in surprise.

"Aye. Because I am *your* lord." Croft did not hesitate now.

And suddenly he saw once more that strange, startled look of half recognition

which had leaped at him over the rim of the silver goblet the night of the betrothal feast. "*My* lord?" Naia began and faltered and came to a pause.

"Aye—yours." Croft bent toward her. "Because I knew of you—and so knowing, knew you the one woman in all Tamarizia, or in all the worlds Zitu has made, whom I wished to possess as wife. Because I love you Naia, Princess of Aphur. Because you are mine, and I yours, and have been since Zitu himself sent our two souls to dwell in the flesh. Because your flesh cries to mine, your soul calls to mine, your spirit seeks to be one with mine, as mine with yours. Therefore forgetting caste and all else, came I to Aphur and to you. Caste I have overridden and risen above. Think you I shall let Cathur stand between me and the heaven of your lips, the soft prison of your arms?"

For one wild instant while he spoke he thought her about to answer word for word. For she smiled. The thing started in her eyes and spread in a slow, divine wonder to her lips. Then, she sprang swiftly to her feet and faced him tensely erect, both voice and figure vibrant as she cried: "Stop! Jasor of Nodhur, you forget yourself. Think you so lightly of my plighted word, that you dare to address me thus? To Cathur I am pledged. To a maid of Tamarizia—or a woman of my house, and to all the courts of our nation that promise is sacred, not to be broken or *put aside, save by an act of Zitu himself*—save it be broken by death."

Croft had risen, too. "An act of Zitu," he said as she paused. "And may not my coming to Aphur in itself be an answer to your prayer for deliverance from the embraces of Cathur's unworthy heir?"

"My prayer?" Some of the resentful tension left Naia's form. "What know you—"

"I know much," Croft cut her short. "Am I dull of comprehension not to sense the name of her who prayed to Zitu in her travail. And what should wring such prayers from your flower-sweet breast, save that defilement it is planned to bring about, to add to Aphur's strength."

Once more she flamed before him. "Were I to speak your words to Lakkon or to Jadgor, it would mean your death," she hissed.

"Then speak them—if you wish, beloved." Croft smiled.

As quickly as she had threatened, she drooped now at his words. Something akin to fear came into her eyes. "Who are you—" she began in the voice of a child.

"One who loves you," said Croft. "Who has loved you always—who always will. One whom you love—"

"Hold!" Once more she checked him.

But he shook his head. "What need of the sacrifice—when I shall give Aphur and all Tamarizia that strength they would purchase now with you."

"Yet for that strength your price would be the same."

"Nay—" Croft denied, "unless it were paid gladly.

"And if not?"

"Still would I give Tamarizia strength."

Suddenly Naia of Aphur smiled. To Croft it seemed that she was well pleased with his answer. But barely had her lips parted as though for some further reply, than the Mazzerian passed toward the outer doors of the court.

The princess's whole expression altered. "My father comes. I cannot speak further concerning this matter now. Did he dream of our discussion, there would be no bounds to his wrath. Did he know that *I could consider such things, Zitu himself might not quench his rage.*"

"Yet will you consider them, my Naia. You will give me an answer."

"Later," she told him quickly. "I—*we may not discuss it further now—my* lord."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WOMAN'S ANSWER.

HOURS later Croft looked from the windows of his room. The evening had been spent in a far more formal fashion that the late afternoon. Lakkon had come in. He had welcomed his guest. Naia had gone to her rooms to dress for the

evening meal. They had dined. Over the meal Croft had described again his plans, to the flattering attention of his host. Naia had lingered with them for a time, now and then meeting Croft's glance with a smile of her crimson lips ere she had gone to her room.

Now as he leaned from his window he found all the garden beneath him, the mountain valley, the lake flooded in the light of the Palosian moons. The night called to him, and his heart was too full, his brain too busy with thought, to feel the spell of sleep. Drawing back he left his apartment, passed down the balcony corridor to the small door giving onto the garden stair and ran quickly down.

The breath of flowering shrubs was about him. Light and shadow filled the place with a quiet beauty. Choosing a path which ran off before him he strolled along. So by degrees he approached the white walls of the garden bath, doubly white now in the night. And having approached them he paused. The sound of a gentle splashing came from within.

Croft smiled. Another had felt the call of the outside world beside himself, and subtly he felt that he knew who that one was. "Princess," he called softly, from beside the entrance screen.

"Aye." The word came as soft as his own and was followed by a gentle laugh. "Wait, Jasor of Nodhur." There came a louder sound of movement, followed by a silence, and then. "And now my lord you may come."

Croft passed the screen. The maiden stood before him. Her fair hair was coiled about her head. Her shoulder and arms showed glistening in the moonlight from the moisture of her skin.

"Naia," said the man.

"My lord." She smiled.

"Nay—call me Jasor at least," he returned.

"Jasor," said she.

They were alone—a man and a maid. The white walls of the bath shut them in from all prying eyes. The pool lay silvered by the moonlight beneath them.

And suddenly, Croft reached out toward her and swept her into his arms. That bold spirit which was his brooked no longer delay. He drew her to him. His arms sensed the lithe coolness of her figure as its dampness struck through the single garment, hastily donned at his call. So he held her and sensed all her maddening presence. "Mine!" he cried, pressing her close in the circle of his arms. "Mine! Woman whom Zitu himself has made for me."

"Hush." Her hand fell over his lips, and he felt her tremble. "Jasor, how knew you I was here?"

"I knew not until the night called me into the garden and I heard the sound of the water," he replied. "Then your presence told me of itself and I spoke your name."

There was a stone seat at one end of the pool. She led him there and seated herself at his side. "You are bold," she said speaking quickly. "Jasor, I came here to think—as I have thought ever since we spoke together to-day."

"And having thought, will you give me my answer now?"

She lifted her eyes, dark in the silver night. "Can you truly do those things you spoke of?" she questioned him again as she had questioned before.

"Do you doubt it?" he questioned in reply.

"Nay, I think not. You would do all you say—for me?"

"All and more, for you, or to save you a sorrow," Croft replied.

"Think you," said she, "that Kyphallos of Aphur is aught to me?"

"Nay," Croft laughed. "I know you hate him, Princess—name him the beast he is."

"You know much," she said in response and her voice was vibrant with a tone he had never heard her use before. "Yet things there may be you know not of. Listen, my lord. My lips touched not the wine in the silver goblet the night of the betrothal feast."

"Naia!" Croft came to his feet.

Naia of Aphur rose also. Her eyes were stars in the night. She stood before him a slender, swaying shape. She put forth her hands. "My eyes looked into yours

above the goblet," she said softly, still in that strange new tone. "They forbade my lips to drink. Hence, Jasor, this is my answer: I am yours can you win me in time."

And now she came into his arms of her own volition. Croft found her upon his breast, clinging to him with her slender hands, looking up into his face. Some way his face sank to meet her. Some way his mouth found her lips.

Then she had torn her mouth away. "Zitu, what have I done?" she cried. "No maid of Aphur may touch the lips of a man not of her blood, unless she is his bride. But—but—this thing is stronger than I. Days span the time since I have known you, yet Zitu knows it seems I have known you always—have waited for you to come, and knew it not, until that night when your glance met mine and told me I was yours. Jasor of Nodhur, you *must* save me—win me—now."

"Aye, I shall win you." Once more Croft claimed her lips and she did not resist. A mad exaltation filled him. He had won—Naia of Aphur. She lay in his arms. She had given him more than a maid of her race had any right to give according to convention's code. No question then but that her heart which beat so wildly against his breast, beat with the pulse of love. He had won—and he would win, not only this, but all that she could give.

"Swear it," she panted when once more her lips were free. "O Zitu, swear I shall be wholly yours. Think you I could yield to Kyphallos now? Nay—I had rather die."

"I swear," said Croft. "And to-morrow I shall return to Himyra and my work."

"To-morrow." Disappointment rang in her tones. "When I have counted each day until you should come."

"Himyra is not far in the car already made," Croft said ignoring her ingenuous confession. "I shall come to you again—aye, again and again."

"Yet must we be discreet," Naia exclaimed. "You must come—I *must* see you—but we must keep this secret in our hearts. Did Lakkon dream that Naia had dared to break her spoken pledge—" She paused. A tremor shook her as she leaned against him with his arm about her waist.

"You must return to your room," he urged. "Fear not. Yet when you pray, ask of Zitu that he give me speed and knowledge in my work. And should you not see or hear from me for a time, be sure that all I do is for you, that you are ever in my thoughts."

"As you will be in mine." Once more she turned to face him. "Yet before I go in now, my lord, give me again your lips."

"Beloved!" Croft held her a final moment and saw her depart.

Himself he lingered by the pool. His soul was on fire. He had won! Naia of Aphur in her soul was his. The soft warmth of her lips still tingled upon his own. Aye, he had won—her surrender to himself. That final kiss showed how complete that surrender was. So complete was it, that she had overstepped all the code of her nation and caste in order to give it expression, had placed herself where, should her act be learned, she would stand before her people disgraced. Nor was his love less than hers. It was a great love, which had brought him to this time—so great, so all compelling, he felt now that even in his student days in India it had drawn him in a strange, subconscious fashion not then understood—so great that for it he had dared the unknown, to find the feminine complement of his spirit, whom to-night he had held within his arms.

No mere lure of the flesh was his divine passion, which had drawn him and fired him now to a resolution to work, work for it and it alone, until he had won not only Naia's love, but Naia as well. She had said the thing was stronger than herself. Croft knew it was stronger than himself as he sat beside the moon-lit pool. It was one of those great loves, which have made history ere this and will again. Hence to-morrow he would go back to Himyra, and there he would work and plan.

And, thought Croft, he must spy upon Cathur's prince, in the way only he could compass so far as he knew. Kyphallos must be in Scira now, unless he had gone back

to Anthra. Kyphallos must be watched. There was that trip to Niera he had promised Kalamita to make. Would he tell the tawny siren what had occurred in Himyra? And if so, what would Zollaria's Magnet of white flesh do? That she felt any emotion for Kyphallos other than as a tool to her hand, Croft did not believe. He knew her type, and frankly he believed her an agent of her nation set to ensnare the heir of Cathur and further Zollaria's plans. He nodded his head and rose. He would find this Cathurian prince and see what he did, and where at present he was.

Quickly he went back to his own apartment and laid himself on his couch. Naia he fancied was lying so even now in that room where Azil lifted his carved white wings beside her mirror pool. He smiled. Some day he promised his heart, his empty arms, they should lie not apart, but together, on a moon-lit Palosian night.

Then he put all that out of his mind and fixed its full power on his task. Swiftly that conscious entity which was the real man flitted across the Central Sea, and found itself in the palace of Scythys, the Cathurian king. About it he prowled, invisible and unseen by the nodding palace guards. And in it he found no sign of Scythys's son. Once more he flitted free. To Abbu he went and found the monk asleep in a room of the Scira pyramid. And from there he flashed to Anthra, and found the gilded galley of the fickle youth tied up in the harbor basin, and Kyphallos lost in dalliance with a slender and beautiful dancer. He turned away with disgust; yet not before he had learned that Kyphallos went to Niera to-morrow, as he had promised Kalamita he would do more than a month before.

Back to his chamber and the body of Jasor of Nodhur went Croft. At least now he was satisfied that he could watch Kyphallos and mark his every move. Then let Kyphallos beware. He gave a final glance to the moon-flooded night and slept.

And in the morning he entered the motor and ran back to Himyra before the heat of the day. Work—work. That was to be his motto for the golden days to come. But first he must again return to earth.

That day, therefore, he spent in coaching Robur toward keeping the work moving on the engines. Also he requested that he have a great shop erected beyond the one they were using to expedite the work, and drew for him the plans for a sort of dock, wherein the motors might be installed in a number of ships.

"Why give these to me?" Robur asked after Croft had explained.

"Since, that to-night, Rob, I shall fall into the sleep of which I have told you," Croft replied.

"Zitu! You feel it upon you?" Robur half started back.

"Aye."

"And it will last for how long a time?"

"I know not," said Croft. "It shall endure until I am possessed of the next means for making Aphur strong. Do you remember your promise to guard my body well?"

"It shall be well guarded, my strange friend," Robur promised again.

Yet that night a sudden panic seized upon Croft. What, he asked himself, if some unknown peril should threaten Naia while he was studying munition-making on earth. He considered that for a time, before he saw a way around. And then he sought out Gaya, and finding her alone as luck would have it, explained to her as he had explained to Robur before the nature of his coming sleep.

She heard him wide-eyed, and before she could break forth in comment Croft went on. "But Gaya, wife of my friend, should any peril or danger threaten Naia, daughter of Lakkon, the cousin of your lord, and I be still asleep— come quickly to me and bend to whisper, 'Naia needs you' and I promise I shall awake."

Gaya gave him a wide-eyed, startled glance. "Her name will rouse you from this sleep of deathlike seeming?" she exclaimed.

"Aye," Croft smiled. Gaya's expression had told him in a flash that she understood. "Wife of my friend, I think her name might wake me from death itself."

"Jasor!" Gaya cried. "My lord—can this thing be?"

"That my heart lies at her pink nailed feet?" Croft retorted. "Aye."

"Yet is she pledged to Cathur." Gaya grew swiftly pale. "Jasor, my good lord—and you love her, speak not concerning it to any other save myself. I swear by Zitu to keep your words in my heart. Do you control your tongue."

Croft smiled into her troubled face again. "My tongue I may control," he declared. "But my heart can I not curb in its mad passion for the maid, nor make it less a rebel against this plighted troth."

"Robur approves not of it, nor I," Gaya told him softly. "Love brought Milidhur and Aphur together. But—this—this of—of other design." And suddenly she knit her well-formed brows. "Jasor," said she speaking very quickly; "you are strong—you have thoughts above other men, and something tells me the maid would lie happy in your arms."

Croft sprang to his feet. "You would approve it, Gaya, my sweet friend?" he exclaimed with flashing eyes.

"I am a woman," she replied in almost breathless fashion. "Naia loathes this Cathurian prince."

"And a cycle lies before us, ere he claims her for his own," Croft smiled.

"What mean you?" Gaya half rose. Her hand lifted to her breast.

"Nay." Croft shook his head. "I cannot tell you. Yet, as you say, I am strong, and I shall make Aphur and Tamarizia strong as myself and stronger a thousand fold. Remember, therefore, the words I have told you to speak, and say them close in my ear, in case any need should arise."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TEUTONS IN THE SKY.

NAIA! Naia of Aphur would lie happy in his arms. And by Zitu! Some day she should. This was for her. Croft laid himself on his couch and fell into that deathlike sleep of the body, he had learned so well to produce.

But his spirit fled north across the Central Sea to Niera, willing itself into the presence of Cathur's heir wherever he might be.

He found him in the room of a red stone palace overlooking the sea from the terraced side of the shore on which it stood. He lay on a copper couch, covered with silken cloth of a clear pure yellow, and he wore an expression of sullen pique upon his face.

For he was not alone. Nor was this his private apartment as Croft understood in a glance. It was the suite of Kalamita herself. And the tawny beauty was present in quite shameless fashion, plainly preparing herself for some coming function as it appeared from the litter of feminine articles of the toilet which lay on the red wood table at which she sat.

"Nay—think you I have no other source of information beyond your own rosy lips, good Kyphallos," she broke forth in an almost taunting voice; "or that I know not men for what they are. This flower of Aphur is pretty as I have heard, as Bzad who has disguised himself and journeyed to Himyra as a common sailor and seen her, tells me of his own knowledge. Also it comes to my ears that you drank too deeply of the Aphurian wine. A drunkard and a pretty fleshly toy. Zitemque himself never fashioned a stronger design for the making of trouble and fools. Think you I cannot understand."

Kyphallos frowned. "One would think you Gayana," he grumbled as Kalamita paused.

She shrugged. "Nay, I am no priestess of Ga, nor a virgin as you know. Nor do I ask that you look on no lesser clay. What are your pastimes with dancers and women of the people to me. Yet Kalamita gives not herself to be cast aside for a woman of Aphur's choosing—or a woman of equal rank."

So that was it, thought Croft. Kyphallos was in this woman's power indeed. And now Kyphallos quitted his couch and crossed to her side. He caught her and raised her in his arms. "You are the fool!" he cried. "Yet by Zitu, I delight to see you heated, by word of another than yourself. Listen — and this time believe. I found myself in a trap of Jadgor's devising, as I have said. Had I refused this rite of betrothal, how think you he would

have looked upon my act. Could I allay all suspicion of those things which shall bring you queen to Zitra's throne in better fashion than to accept. Think not all the wisdom of mankind lies wrapped in your beauteous head. Kyphallos, of Cathur, is no more a fool than another. Hence I stand pledged to Naia, of Aphur, whom Bzad himself may have for a toy, should he wish, so long as I keep Kalamita in my arms. Thus have I gained the time of a cycle for the further perfecting of my plans."

"This is the truth?" A flash of selfish satisfaction crept into the woman's eyes.

"Aye—as I tell you. Small need of your spies in Aphur to bring you word. Myself, I left a spy to find out the secret of this new car which runs itself, as I told you. Aye—Cathur, too, knows how to plan."

Croft felt a thrill of humor at the words. He knew well what had happened to Cathur's spy. He watched while Kalamita freed herself from Kyphallos's embrace and began loading herself with jewels.

"And how does Cathur plan when the cycle is run out?" she inquired at length. "What of this pledge with Aphur, then?"

"Zollaria will be ready—then," Kyphallos said.

Zollaria would be ready. The thing was plotted, then arranged. There was a full understanding between Kyphallos and the nation which had used this beautiful vampire to bait its trap.

"And if not?" she said.

"The pledge can be forsworn — and Aphur can do what she likes."

"Your father?"

"Knows not his own mind from day to day, as you yourself know. Even now he speaks of giving me the throne."

Kalamita smiled. "Yet Bzad says Naia is very fair." She narrowed her eyes.

"Bzad speaks truth, yet have I not flown straight to you as I said on my return?"

"Aye. Good then my lord. To-night let us speak as one of this journey to the south. Myself, I shall seem as one who knows and understands, and am satisfied in all that has occurred. Do you maintain your action solely to gain time and allay all suspicion in Aphur's mind. To-night shall you know Zollaria's final plans which shall bring you to Zitra's throne." She rose and stood before him. "Do you love me indeed, my lord?"

"Aye, by Zitu!" Kyphallos's voice was thickened. He reached out eager hands.

But Kalamita laughed. "Not Kyphallos alone may pledge himself for reasons of state," she taunted, drawing back. "I also have given my troth to another since you left."

"You!" For an instant the Cathurian seemed bereft of further power of speech. He grew deadly pale. Then the red blood surged back into his face. It grew dark, with a deadly passion. He sprang toward her and seized her by her jewel-banded arms, holding her in a grip she might not resist. "What mean you? Say quickly your words are a jest, or, by Zitu and Azil, you shall find no time before I crush in your unfaithful breast!"

It came over Croft that the Cathurian loved her—with such love as a man of his type could give; that for her he was ready to sacrifice honor and country and all a true man would hold sacred; that this explained all he had so far heard. And it came into his mind that the woman was in danger.

But she smiled in mockery into the threatening face. "For reasons of State, my lord," she said.

"What?" Kyphallos caught a breath.

Kalamita loosened his grip on her arms, carried his arms downward beside her and drew them about her form. "Plans have gone forward since you departed for the south. When all is ready you shall invite me to Anthra—and once in your power you shall refuse to permit my return. Zollaria, and he to whom I am pledged, shall demand it, and still shall you refuse. Then shall Zollaria wage war on Cathur and Cathur shall appeal to Tamarizia for aid. And since Cathur guards the gate to the Central Sea and her loss would spell the downfall of a thousand cycles of power that aid may not be refused."

The rape of Helen—the siege of Troy. Woman—woman—the source of life and the cause of so much death. Croft felt his

senses swirl as he saw the subtle way in which nothing less than a war of conquest had been planned and practically assured.

Kyphallos spoke. "And Cathur's unprepared army, thanks to Tamhys's thoughts of peace, and of others before him, shall scarcely stop the armies Zollaria has trained and armed and taught for fifty years. Then shall Kyphallos and Kalamita mount the throne at Zitra, and—"

"Naia!" Once more the woman taunted with a smile.

"Bzad can have her, if he takes her," Kyphallos cried.

Bzad—the blue Mazzerian chief! Naia to a savage! Croft's spirit quivered and shook with a righteous rage. The last vestige of any compunction he might have held against leading the girl to declare her passion for himself disappeared.

"Not an impossible fate," he heard Kalamita speaking and noted a crafty light creep into her yellow eyes. "Come, then. Let us descend. Play your part strongly, my lord, and all I think shall be well."

Croft followed them down the stairs to the court where a table was spread. Save Kalamita herself the guests were wholly men. He recognized Bandhor, her brother, and the Mazzerian Bzad. The others, plainly Zollarians and men of Mazzer by their appearance and speech, were as yet unknown to him.

The appearance of the Zollarian Magnet and her captive victim was the signal for all to take their seats. Thereafter, as the meal progressed, Croft learned the final details of the plan.

It was mainly such as he had already conceived save that the Mazzerian nation was to aid Zollaria in the war of annexation she planned. For this Mazzeria was to be given a seaport on the Central Sea and free use of a river leading from it through the state of Bithur, as well as the eastern half of Bithur itself. War would be made by Mazzeria on the eastern frontier, while Zollaria threw her main force against Cathur and crushed her smaller army by sheer weight.

"Thus," said one of the party, a man unknown to Croft, yet one, he felt, could be no less than a representative of the Zollarian ruler himself from the deference paid him by the others, "shall Zollaria make good that freedom of the seas she has long desired, and prove her good faith and her friendship for our Mazzerian allies to the east. Thus shall Zollaria and Tamarizia become one nation, with Cathur to rule the southern half. As for the fashion in which our good Prince Kyphallos met Aphur's plans it is well. For since war is to be the outcome of all our planning, what matters one pledge broken more or less."

This was Zollarian statecraft, Croft thought. This was the weight of Zollaria's word. This was the right of might. To take what she wished, to trick, betray, seduce, that she might gain her ends thereby. Nothing which mankind held sacred was sacred to her, it appeared. She sent a royal woman of easy morals to lure Cathur into a snare. She would make this tawny enchantress her final excuse for war. She was callous, overbearing, greedy of power, gross save for a surface seeming of culture she used as a mask—behind which lurked the true nature which inspired her plans and acts. To her Kyphallos would sell his birthright, his state, his nation, for the favor of the wanton beside him and a place upon a secondary throne.

And it was Kyphallos who spoke now. "And thus shall Kalamita be queen at Zitra when all is done! A toast to Kalamita now!"

"To Kalamita, queen of women now. Queen of Zitra later!" the unknown noble cried and lifted a goblet brimming with wine.

"To Kalamita!" the party drank.

"And now," said the unknown, rising and lifting the goblet above his head, "another toast, my friends. To those things we have planned and their fruition. To—the day—whenever it shall be!"

"To the day!" They drank it standing.

Bandhor, in whose palace Croft judged the conference had occurred, clapped his hands sharply and a band of dancers trooped in.

Croft left. He had learned all he had hoped and more. He knew now what Tamarizia faced—war. And he knew more. He knew that Naia, of Aphur, was his! He

knew that Cathur meant to foreswear her—that there would be no need on his part to win her other than by winning this war. His part now to arm Aphur, Nodhur, Milidhur—so much of Tamarizia as he could in the space of a year. His part to bring disaster to these carefully laid plans of a greedy nation and a traitor prince. That was his work. It was best he should be about it. To do what he must the time was painfully short. Turning his mind upon the first step which should lead him to its completion, he focused his mind upon it with all his power and left Palos for the earth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"ARMS AND THE MAN."

TWO weeks went by before he once more opened the eyes of Jasor's body and found himself in a guarded room in the palace of Aphur's king.

He had spent them on earth in the study of firearms and munitions and the various devices required for making the same. Now he returned with a consciousness full of designs and an urgent desire to attempt their carrying out.

He sat up. "List, soldier, I would drink!" he announced.

The guard inside the door of his chamber started, shot a quick glance toward his bed, and approached none too swiftly, Croft thought. The man actually seemed afraid. "Wine!" he snapped, seeking to overcome the first shock induced by his words.

"Aye, my lord." The guard turned to the door and set it open. "Wine!" he bawled. "The Lord Jasor awakes!"

"My clothes." Croft left his couch.

Ten minutes later a rap fell on the door. Robur appeared. Word of Croft's waking had spread. The prince himself came with a page bringing wine. Croft drank. "I would see Jadgor at once," he declared.

"He sleeps," Prince Robur began.

"Then wake him. All Tamarizia totters to a fall unless we be ready in less than a single cycle, Rob."

"Zitu!" Robur stared. "Say you truly. How know you this, Jasor, my friend?"

Croft turned and pointed toward his couch. "I was told while my body lay there," he said quickly. "You call on Zitu in vain unless you give heed to my words!"

"Nay, not so. Come," replied Aphur's prince. "I myself shall take you to my father without delay."

That was a strange night in Himyra of Aphur, pregnant with the destinies of a nation—and nothing less. Jadgor, no king in seeming now, but a stern-faced man in a simple garment sat upon his couch while Croft revealed his knowledge of what Zollaria planned.

"By Zitu!" he roared at the end, "would Cathur dare this thing?"

"Aye—for the woman and Zitra's throne," said Croft.

"To forswear his pledge to Aphur?"

"Aye."

"To surrender his state?"

"Aye—that too, Jadgor the king."

And suddenly Jadgor was king indeed despite the disadvantage of position and clothes. "Then let Zilla the Destroyer take me unless we meet them, spear to spear and sword to sword! Jasor of Nodhur, I understand you not—nor yet in how your knowledge is obtained save Zitu speaks through you as mouthpiece for his own designs. Yet know I that what you say falls out. Wherefore I shall once more heed your words. This falls on Aphur, Nodhur, Milidhur, I think, with Tamhys, man of peace on Zitra's throne. Yet shall Aphur, Nodhur, and Milidhur prepare. Inside a cycle, should we work together, we should have a very horde of ready spears and swords."

"Nay, scarcely that," said Croft.

"What else?" Jadgor stared.

"Stronger weapons than those, for which I bring the plans. If made in time, a thousand men instructed in their use, can end this war almost before it starts. Let Aphur, Milidhur, and Nodhur plan together, that these weapons may be produced, some in Himyra and some in Ladhra. The work is vast. Yet shall the final end be sure if this is done before Zollaria strikes. Robur and I shall undertake the carrying out of my designs, if Jadgor gives the word."

"Then Jadgor gives it," said the king.

"On Nodhur will I call and Milidhur. No man may say that Aphur failed to think of Tamarizia's good. For though I see that should you do this thing your name will stand above all others in the state—I love my nation more than I love either fame or rank. Hence, Nodhur, make your weapons for this coming trial of strength, and I shall give you moneys, metals, men—all things you may require."

Croft's heart swelled in his breast. Had he ever doubted Jadgor's patriotic motives for a moment, those doubts died now as he heard him lay aside those dreams of imperial rank he knew had once been his. And in that moment there was born within his brain the plan he was fated to carry out—a plan which would make Tamhys the last emperor of Tamarizia, and after him no other ever again. "Then," he accepted the king's assurance, "Robur and I shall plan that this work may start at once. Aphur, I crave your pardon for having broken your sleep."

That was the beginning of Croft's real work. Oddly enough, on a planet where he had come upon seeming peace, his first tasks outside the original motor was in preparing for war: and even the motor entered largely into that.

At once he plunged into a very frenzy of action, almost appalled himself by the amount to be done inside a year. That first night he spent with Robur drafting to his attentive ears those things which they must do—the finishing of the motors—their installation in ships.

"The structure for that end is well-nigh completed," Robur said.

"Good!" Croft cried, and went on swiftly to demand the construction or appropriation of buildings for the making of arms. As to the nature of the latter, he held back the details for the time, and spoke of preparing a fleet of swift motor-driven galleys in which to transport the troops they would raise across the Central Sea when the need should arrive.

Robur's eyes sparkled at that. "We shall come upon them ere they dream we can arrive. Jasor, my friend, your name shall be greatest among Tamarizia's men."

"No greater than that of Jadgor," Croft replied. "Rob, your father is a man above other men. None save a man of noble spirit forgets himself to assure his nation's good."

In the month which followed Croft did many things. He began the training of a number of men in assembling the motors, choosing only such as seemed peculiarly adapted to the work. He installed a motor in a galley and drove the craft through Himyra along the Na at a speed which had never been seen in a ship on Palos before. In this, with Jadgor himself and Lakkon, whom he persuaded to bring Naia along, he journeyed on up the river to make his long-promised visit to Jasor's parents at Ladhra and enlist Belzor, King of Nodhur, in their plans.

Sinon and Mellia scarcely knew how to take him they thought their son.

"By Zitu! You have done it!" Sinon cried as he rode the galley across the Na's yellow flood.

Later, loaded with honors, both by Jadgor and Belzor himself, he grew abashed. "That my son should raise me to noble station," he faltered to Mellia at his side. "Strange days are coming to Tamarizia, wife of my heart, when he who was a dullard sits in the council of kings."

For Croft had appeared before Belzor inside the first day after Ladhra was reached. And Belzor, startled by the fact of a galley which ran up the turgid current of the mighty river without oars or sails, had listened to him and Jadgor and joined his support to their plans. That settled, he arranged with Sinon to send several galleys to Himyra to be equipped with motors, and returning to that city for a few days, dropped down stream, entered the Central Sea, and sailed to the capital city of Milidhur.

On this trip Gaya made one of their party, and though Croft perforce acted as engineer, he managed more than one word with Naia during the course of the voyage, and once the fleeting bliss of a stolen kiss.

In Milidhur, Gaya's voice helped to turn the tide to Jadgor and Croft. A princess of the state, she brought all her influence to bear. And since Milidhur was asked only to form a part of the army, to be

equipped before Zollaria struck, the matter was soon arranged.

Back in Himyra at length, Croft found the work on the motors progressing swiftly under Robur's direction and at once began the actual construction of machines for the fashioning of arms. Now and then he stole away for an evening and drove out to Lakkon's mountain palace for a meal. Not only did he find a pleasure in the going, but Naia pleaded for the all too short hours they managed to spend together, and to Croft it seemed that each time he brought back from her presence a freshened and driving energy to his work.

That work progressed. Of that progress he spoke to her from time to time. And always she spurred him on with eyes and lips through the task at the end of which she herself was the waiting and willing prize.

Day and night the fire of creation flared in Himyra, and so soon as work was started, and he had shown Robur how to keep busy the many men Jadgor had furnished for their needs, Croft put some of the new motors into commission between Himyra and Ladhra and started other work there, in a mighty building set apart by Belzor for his use. Those necessary bits of machinery first installed in the Himyra shops he had made, like the motor parts were now made, in numbers. Sinon's first galley up the Na carried as its cargo partly assembled engines of queer design to a Palosian mind, which should when set up in the shops at Ladhra fulfil their portion of Croft's plan. Thereafter the fires of the new era flared in Ladhra, too, and Croft spent his time between the two shops, motoring back and forth mainly at night, regardless of the loss of sleep until he should have everything running smoothly.

Twenty of the hundred cars which were gradually taking shape he set apart, however, after they were tested—and these he had equipped with all-metal wheels carrying cross-bars on their tires like short, strong teeth. He put workmen to the task of making metal walls to bolt upon each chassis. And these walls were pierced with slots. Thus he arranged for twenty armored cars and had them set aside. Likewise he speeded the construction of numbers of flat-bottomed power-boats capable of speed, yet having floor space enough to transport no small number of men.

A month passed, two months, three. Always the fires in Ladhra and Himyra flared. Men toiled day and night. Croft's plans were drawn for each part of the arm he intended to make. Machines were assembled and set up—motors were harnessed to them to Robur's amaze. Croft found the Tamarizians apt of comprehension and willing to work. Each man employed was sworn to fealty to the State. Each knew himself a member of an army working for the safety of the nation. At the end of three months he found himself the supreme captain of a picked corps. And at the end of a month he was ready to begin the actual making of arms.

Now and then he went back to his earthly body, not only to renew its physical life, but to gain help in the work he was carrying on by learning fresh details on each trip. He gave up any intention of manufacturing machine guns as a thing requiring too much time. On an average he spent two days of every week on earth. His sleeps on Palos had become too frequent to cause any further comment when they occurred. Thus a fourth month passed.

In it Croft accomplished several things. He did not stop motor production with the first hundred. He continued their building and began selling the output of the shops to private owners. The things became a not too unusual sight on the Himyra streets, and the first motor caravan was organized and crossed the inland desert to Milidhur with success. One special car Croft had built. On it he lavished all his present ability of refinement. And when it was done he drove it to Lakkon's mountain mansion in the twilight of a busy day. It was for Naia, and himself he gave it to her, and after the evening meal when the three moons rose he placed her in it and taught her how to drive.

Far down the mountain road and out upon the desert between the foot of the hills and Himyra they went. They were alone in the soft light which turned the dun plain to silver. Far off the red fires in

Croft's workshops flared over Himyra's walls.

Croft stopped the car and pointed to that red reflection in the lesser light. Suddenly it seemed to him that in all the world there were just they two—that they were alone—that nothing else mattered. His heart swelled.

"For you!" he said, and drew Naia into his arms, and against his breast. "For you!" He kissed her on eyes and lips. "To free you and give you to me always. Those fires are burning away all need of your sacrifice. In the end they shall make you mine."

"Yours." Naia sighed in his arms as one content. "Here in the desert you preserved my life. Why should it not belong to you?"

"Your work progresses well?" she went on after a time.

"Beyond my hopes," Croft assured her. "Have no fear. All shall be ready—in time."

"My lord," she whispered.

"Aye—*your* lord, beloved," said Croft.

"Beloved," she repeated.

For a time Croft simply held her, ere he turned the car and drove back up the mountain road.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SUMMONS FROM ZITRA.

AT the end of the fourth month the first rifle was done. It was an odd-appearing affair. Tempered copper took the place of earthly steel in barrel and other metal parts. Copper formed the shell for the ammunition, over which Croft had experienced more trouble than in anything else. Lead was very scarce on Palos. But there were vast quantities of gold. That explained the enormous use made of it in draperies and the common trades as he had learned. Yet it was with some compunction due to the opposite conditions on earth and their life-long effect on his brain that he finally hit on an alloy from which the bullets were made. Powder had troubled him, too—though in the end he managed to make it. And for the fulminating centers of his cartridge complete, he was compelled to spend several days on earth.

In the end, however, he held the first completed weapon in his hands, and gloated over its finished lines. Taking Robur in a car, he drove out along the south road to a place where he knew vast flocks of water-fowl were wont to frequent the Na. As a boy he had been a good shot, until such time as he waked in his soul a repugnance for killing the natural creatures the One Great Source had made, save as necessity arose, and had so forsaken that slaughter which lesser souls still call "sport." Now, however, as he stopped the car he felt that a necessity presented. The death of a living thing was required to prove the power of the thing he had made.

He gestured to the wild fowl floating on the yellow water more than a bow-shot away. "Now watch, Rob," he said, and took the rifle in his hands.

Vaguely by now Prince Robur understood the design of the new instrument of destruction. Yet it was hard for him to comprehend fully a thing such as he had never dreamed before Croft put it into his mind. He smiled. "Had we not better draw a little closer, Jasor, my friend?" he inquired.

"Nay." On the word Croft fired. Nor did he fire blindly into the flock. He chose a bird swimming to one side. And hard on the sound of his shot that bird jerked in the spasmodic fashion of a sorely stricken thing, struggled for an instant and floated away, half sunk in the yellow tide.

The entire flock rose at the new strange sound on the silent air. They swarmed across the sky. Pumping up a fresh cartridge, Croft lifted his rifle swiftly, chanced another hit—and scored. One of the flying creatures checked its rapid course, slanted drunkedly downward and then spun dizzily over and over to fall not far from where the two men stood in the car.

"Zitu! Zitu!" Robur exclaimed, springing from the machine to retrieve the fallen bird. Croft watched him run toward it in very unprincelike haste. Then he was coming back with the dead thing in his hands, staring wide-eyed at the drops of blood on its feathers, lifting his face with a

strange expression to Croft, as he climbed back to his seat.

"Are you convinced, Rob?" Croft laid the rifle aside.

"I am convinced Zitu himself but uses you as his agent. These things came never from a mortal brain alone," the Prince of Aphur replied.

"Man comes by Zitu's will, why should not Zitu use man for the things it pleases him to do?" said Croft.

"You do not deny it?" Robur spoke in almost startled fashion.

"Nay. Have I not already said that all I did was by Zitu's grace?" There were times when Croft found it hard to avoid a direct avowal of the actual state which was his, times when he hungered to make some human soul a confidant concerning all that had occurred. And he loved the strong young man by his side.

Now, however, Robur laughed in a somewhat unsteady way. "There are times when you cause me to stand in awe of your power, Jasor my friend," he said.

"Think you not Zollaria will stand in awe of our weapons when they are in the hands of our men, on foot or mounted in the cars I have armored and pierced with holes for the barrels of the rifles?" Croft asked.

"Aye, by Zitu!" Robur shouted. "Turn around Jasor—and 'let her out.' We must return to our work."

But that night Croft drove out to the mountains, taking his rifle along. Others were being assembled now, and he had seen Jadgor himself and arranged for the beginning of the army they must raise. The thing would be started by a public demonstration, at which Croft should show the power of the new weapon. The men of Aphur, and Nodhur, and Milidhur would be invited to join. To each who did so a rifle would be given wholly as his property for all time to come, and a certain wage would be given also while they were being trained.

Fired by the thought, Croft had asked for a copy of the Tamarizian alphabet, found it not unlike the ancient Maya inscriptions in Central America and had taken it to the shop and set his pattern-makers to forming molds for the making of type. He intended printing proclamations of the coming call for volunteers and posting them about the streets, where those who knew how to read might understand and impart the knowledge to their fellows. Thus to his inventions he added the printing-press, crude, and for large work only at first, but printing none the less. He had taken all this up with Jadgor, and advised waiting another month, until many rifles were finished or being made, since the civic and royal guards would form the nucleus of the army and must be armed before a call for volunteers. Jadgor had listened to all he said, gazing at the dead water-fowl Robur had insisted on lugging into the palace. He examined the wound made by the bullet and agreed to all his son and Croft had asked. Now at the end of the day Croft was speeding forth to show to the woman he loved the thing which should win for them their heart's desire, and wreck Zollaria's plans.

Lakkon himself met him as he descended at the door. Despite his resolve Croft's visits were growing more and more frequent and Lakkon was not a fool.

"My lord," he said, giving his hand, "what brings you again thus soon?"

Croft drew himself up. "Success," he returned. "I came but to prove to you the power of the first of the new weapons we have made. And having done so I shall return to Himyra so soon as I may."

"Nay." A troubled expression waked in Lakkon's eyes. "Take not my words amiss." He seemed suddenly abashed. "The weapon does all you said?"

"Aye. I shall show you and the princess, if I may."

Lakkon's eyes flashed. The meaning of this wonder-worker's statement if proved, which he did not doubt, swept all else out of his mind for the time. "What do you require?" he asked in a tense tone.

Croft glanced about. Below him near the lake in a mountain meadow were some of the strange sheeplike cattle, knee deep in grass. He gestured toward them with his hand. "Permission to slay one of those."

"Granted, so be you can do it," Lakkon smiled. The distance was twice the range of any bow.

Croft reflected the smile as he made answer. "If the princess may be summoned." He turned and took the rifle from the car.

Lakkon eyed it with unconcealed interest. He called the Mazzerian from within the door and directed that Naia be bidden to appear.

While they waited, Croft opened the magazine and extracted a bullet. He was explaining it to Lakkon when Naia hurried forth. "A powder within the shell furnishes the power to propel the ball in the end," he finished in time to greet her. "And now Prince Lakkon, to take you at your word." He lifted the shining barrel.

"What would you do?" Naia exclaimed.

"Behold," said Croft and fired.

Far below in the meadow one of the woolly creatures appeared to stumble, to stagger a pace or two forward before it sank into the grass.

"Zitu!" came Lakkon's voice.

Croft smiled.

Naia approached. Her face was devoid of color—as white as though the bullet had pierced her heart instead of the body of the unknowing sacrifice to developing science, now lying in swift dissolution beside the lake. Slowly she put forth a finger and touched the shining thing in Croft's hands. "This is the new weapon?" she said in a sibilant whisper, and lifted her face to his.

"Aye. And having shown Lakkon its power, I must return to Himyra." Croft turned toward the car. He hoped she would understand his abruptness, since after Lakkon's words he was afraid to meet the glance of her eyes.

"Return?" she cried protestingly. "Must you go so soon, my lord?"

"The need presses," Lakkon cut in. "Lord Jasor came but to show us the last fruits of his wonderful knowledge. I called you to witness the test. You need not remain."

"You see," he went on as Naia turned with a quivering lip and slowly mounted the stairs.

"What?" Croft met him eye to eye.

"That my daughter is a woman, Jasor of Nodhur, and that your name is a word on every tongue in Aphur, and that the princess is pledged to Cathur."

"Who will forswear his pledge?" Croft interrupted, knowing Jadgor must have told the counselor of what they had discussed.

"If your words be true?"

"You doubt them?"

"Nay—yet Lakkon is a name of honor, and a pledge is a pledge until broken indeed."

"And should it be so broken?" Croft leaned a trifle toward him from the hips.

"Aphur would refuse you nothing," Prince Lakkon said.

Croft laughed as he sprang into his seat. "Forget not those words, Prince Lakkon," he flung back as he started the car.

He drove to Himyra in a rage. Before him floated a vision of Naia's purple eyes gone black with hurt misunderstanding, of her quivering crimson lips. But his rage was as much with himself as with Lakkon, to tell the truth. He had been indiscreet after promising discretion. He had gone to the mountains too often. He had let eye and voice speak too plainly those things in his soul. Lakkon had been blind not to see what was ripening under his nose. And Lakkon was a man of honor according to his code.

He drove to the palace, found Gaya, and told her the whole thing from beginning to end.

"You mean that the maiden loves you?" she cried.

"Aye," Croft said.

"You have told her of your love?" Gaya seemed a bit breathless as she paused.

"Aye." Croft inclined his head.

"You are mad!"

"Nay—I am in love. It comes to the same thing." Croft smiled.

"Ga and Azil help you both," Gaya returned. "I can do nothing. And—you must not imperil her honor, my lord. But—I shall make it my task to see her and explain the manner of your return to-night, and," her color deepened swiftly, "to assure her of your love."

"Thank you, sweet Gaya." Croft rose. "You are a blessed hypocrite—and a true woman." He bent and gripped her hand.

And Gaya smiled upon him because he was a strong man and she was a woman indeed.

For the rest as the days and weeks dragged away, Croft sought to drown himself in attention to his work. All day he toiled and oftentimes far into the night. Jasor's splendid physique stood him in good stead during the months of preparation.

There were no labor troubles in Aphur. The state fixed the scale of wages, and those who would not work were summarily sent to the mines to dig the metals needed by their more energetic fellow citizens. Thus the fifth month passed.

Rifles were being turned forth in a glittering array at Himyra and Ladhra and stored with their ammunition for the time of need. Croft finished his printing-press and struck from it the first bulletins which should appeal to the men of three states to come to their country's need.

"Citizens of Tamarizia," Croft wrote. "Shall Tamarizia weaken or grow strong? Recall the heritage your forbears left. Yours is the Central Sea. Yours is a government of the people, for the people, under liberal heads of state, who express the people's will as set forth once in a cycle by the state assemblies you by your votes elect. But a government by the people is strong only as the people themselves shall make it. Citizens make Tamarizia strong as never before. Let each man step to the fore and agree to serve as a soldier for one year. To each shall be given a weapon which he may keep. Ponder on this. If each year each man of good health and a certain age shall for one year win his weapon and learn concerning its use, how long before Tamarizia shall be so strong in the strength of her men that she shall be safe in the possession of the proud station those brave men your forefathers left to you in trust? Ask of your civic captains concerning this. Enroll yourself as citizens of Tamarizia under them."

These bulletins were posted in Aphur, Nodhur and Milidhur, and in the capital of each state a public demonstration of the new army weapon was held by a picked squad of Jadgor's royal guards whom Croft had taught to shoot. At each a herd of taburs was slaughtered, singly and in troops. All southwest Tamarizia gasped. The word flew from mouth to mouth. The stories fired men's hearts. They flocked to the captains of the city guards. Croft began teaching the royal guard and the guard of Himyra, the school of the company and squad, marksmanship and a simple manual of arms. They learned quickly and inside a month he sent many of them as special instructors to all Aphur and the other southern states. Thus far things had progressed to the end of the ninth month, when the imperial throne at Zitra interfered. A messenger arrived, commanding Jadgor and all others responsible for the warlike activity in Aphur and Nodhur to appear before Tamhys with the least possible delay.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN THE EMPEROR HEDGED.

THE thing was not unexpected to Croft. From the start he had feared some such event. Hence, without offering explanation to Jadgor he had taken steps to convince Magur of Himyra of the death-like stupor in which his body lay at such times as he was absent from it. He had gone on one occasion to the pyramid and deliberately left Jasor's form sitting in a chair, while he projected himself to Scira and found out Abbu, now for some months engaged in keeping watch on the moves of Cathur's prince. Returning to find Magur standing above him in something like awe, he had told exactly what Abbu was doing at the time, and requested Magur to verify his words in any fashion he chose.

Now faced by the imperial interference with all his plans, he called Magur to his aid. He took him to Zitra, with Jadgor, Lakkon and himself, making the journey quickly in a motor-driven craft and taking the messenger along.

Croft marveled at Zitra, despite all he had seen of Tamarizian architecture before. It rose crystal and silver and white, save that the temple of Zitu, surmounting a pyramid twice the size of that at Himyra was of an azure-blue stone—the color of the highest priesthood as he was to learn. The palace of Tamhys was a marvel to the eye—vaster than Himyra's mighty white

structure, built wholly of white and crystal and roofed with burnished silver, paved with alternate squares of silver, and crystal, and gold. The thing was unbelievable, Croft felt. He moved as in a dream. This was the central city of empire, impregnable to any weapon then known on Palosian soil. Its walls rose sheer from the sea on the side which they approached. The harbor was within them. Sea gates closed the entrance with leaves of copper, covered by silver faces. The walls themselves were white. Darting through the gates their galley entered the gulf of a harbor smooth as glass wherein were mirrored the quays and structures along the water's edge. The cool green of trees banked the terraces and relieved the well-nigh blinding radiance created by the sun upon the glistening white. He forgot everything in the beauty of the vision and exclaimed aloud.

Magur watched him, well pleased. His pleasure grew as Croft turned and faced the monstrous pile of the pyramid and the pure blue temple on the top. They landed, and while the wharfmen were unloading a motor which Croft had brought as a present for Tamhys, and the messenger hurried to the palace to announce their arrival, he led Croft to one side.

"I would have you meet Zud, High Priest of all Tamarizia," he said. "We who keep alive the love of Zitu in the hearts of the nation are not devoid of all material power, my friend."

Croft inclined his head. He had hoped for something of this sort; had planned for it, indeed. "I also serve Zitu in my way," he declared. "I should be honored to enter the presence of him he has seen fit to exalt to so high a degree."

An armed guard appeared, escorting a number of gnuppa-drawn chariots. At the invitation of a noble in glistening cuirass and helmet, the party from Himyra entered the cars and drove toward the palace through streets paved in broad, flat stones. Croft, however, insisted on driving the motor he had brought, and with him went Magur, the priest. Tamhys would grant them audience that evening, it appeared.

Magur smiled. He beckoned the noble to his side. "Then will Jasor of Nodhur, who sits before me, visit first on Zud," he announced. "Say this to Tamhys, when you reach the palace with Lakkon of Aphur and Jadgor, Aphur's king."

The man saluted and withdrew without question. Once more Magur smiled. Croft started the engine and moved off in the wake of the gnuppas that he might not frighten them out of their wits. "Turn here," said Magur after a time. Inside ten minutes they stopped in front of the main approach to the mighty pyramid.

Magur told of what he had seen and of what he had heard. The High Priest eyed him at the end. "Magur believes these things?" he inquired.

"Aye, as in Zitu I believe." Magur inclined his head.

"That these things are of Zitu, through Jasor of Nodhur's mind?"

"Aye, Zud, servant of Zitu, so I believe."

Zud turned his eyes from the priest to Croft and back. "First came he to you, at Himyra, from Abbu the brother at Scira," he recited Magur's words.

"Aye."

"As a servant of Zitu's undreamed designs to come."

"Zud speaks the words present in my mind."

"Before the audience my request to be present shall reach Tamhys," Zud decided. "And now, Jasor of Nodhur, how come you by the knowledge of things undreamed?"

Croft told him so much as he dared. "My body lies as dead. In truth my spirit leaves it. And, while absent, acquires the knowledge with which it returns."

"As a voice?" said Zud.

"Nay, as something shown to me, together with the manner in which it may be made."

Zud rose and lifted his hands. "Who may understand Zitu?" he intoned in a voice of amazement. Croft felt he was convinced.

Hence when he stood that night before the white-haired Tamhys, he felt a quiet assurance born of the belief that Magur and Zud, both present, were his friends, and the friends of his cause.

"Jadgor of Aphur," Tamhys began, "I have now summoned you before me,

since for some time I have had you beneath my eye. You have married your son to a princess of Milidhur, and within half a cycle you have betrothed your sister's child to Cathur, and Belzor of Nodhur and yourself are friends. Thus only Bithur seems not swayed in more or less degree by those wishes which are yours, and you wax strong in power. Why have you done these things?"

"Tamhys of Tamarizia," Jadgor replied; "these things I do not deny. Robur of Aphur wedded the Princess Gaya for love. Nodhur's interest are one with Aphur, since both possess the Na within their lines. Naia has plighted her troth to Kyphallos of Aphur at my wish to make strong the guard of the western gate and assure to Tamarizia those things she holds." He spoke boldly and faced the emperor of his nation with an unflinching eye.

But Tamhys frowned. "This is not all," he said. "It has come to my ear that you have in Himyra a man—Jasor of Nodhur—who stands now before me—a man who works new marvels undreamed of before—that some of them are weapons, designed for the work of war—that Aphur and Nodhur and Milidhur increase the men in their guards to an unwarranted degree. What say you to this?"

"That you have heard truth, O Tamhys," Jadgor again replied. "These things have been made. The guards have been increased. These things also have I done to make Tamarizia strong."

The lines of Tamhys's countenance contracted further. His features grew dark and he clenched a hand. "You are a man of power, Jadgor of Aphur," he cried. "Power is the breath of your nostrils. Hence you dream of war. Yet is war not of my creed, nor shall be. For fifty cycles has Tamarizia known peace—"

"Aye—and fifty cycles past lost she the State of Mazhur, because she knew not the art of war—as she knows it not now," Jadgor flared into interruption. Strong man that he was and crafty, he knew not the diplomatic speech. "Is she to lose Cathur now as well?" he rushed on, and paused.

Tamhys smiled as one might at a child. "Jadgor of Aphur, the warning I have received concerning your aims comes to me from the loyal house of Cathur itself. Cathur thinks your eyes turn toward the throne. To me that is of little consequence. Yet you hesitate to see one mount the throne of Zitra to plunge our nation in war. You think, perhaps, to win Mazhur back."

"And if I should—should I make Tamarizia whole again!" Jadgor's voice rose with a fervid fire of patriotic feeling.

As for Croft, he felt assured he understood the situation better now. Cathur's spies had carried word of what was forward as he had felt assured they would. Cathur of Zollaria's prompting thus sought through the peace-loving Tamhys to tie the hands of Tamarizia while she made ready for the blow she expected to strike ere long. He said as much to Magur, who repeated it to Zud.

Tamhys smiled again. "Should you attempt it, you would send our sons to death for a little ground. Let be Jadgor. Hold we not the western gate as always? Are the wails of dying men and the sobs of women things grown sweet to your ears?"

"Nay; but if Cathur falls—if Zollaria makes war and we cannot defend what yet remains of our ground?" Jadgor's voice shook as he saw the end of his dream of strength in view.

"Would Zollaria have waited fifty years to make war had she it in mind?" Tamhys asked.

"Then what does Tamhys wish?" Jadgor inquired, with a sigh. He was no traitor, and under the law he must heed the emperor's word.

"That you cease those unwise undertakings—that you send the men from the shops of their making back to their fathers' trades; that you cease to dream of war and pursue the ways of peace in which we have prospered in the past. That you turn Jasor of Nodhur's mind to other things than the making of the instruments of destruction. I have heard he has builded chariots which run seemingly of themselves, and galleys which propel themselves up rivers and across the seas. Those things

are well. Jadgor, I command that you forsake--"

"Hold, Tamhys!" It was Zud, the High Priest, who spoke. "Truth you have been told, yet not all the truth as it appears. None know the plans of Zitu save Zitu himself. A priest, I am as yourself, a man of peace. Yet Zitu himself may send a war at times to, like a sorrow, purge the soul of a nation and recall it to him, even as a grief may turn the soul of a man to higher things. Jasor of Nodhur was a dullard till Zitu opened his mind. He died as his physician declares, yet now he lives again, and speaks with a mind inspired. Himself he says these things are delivered unto him while his body lies as dead. This I have from Magur of Himyra who has seen him in such a sleep, and Magur has the account of his changing from Abbu of Scira who administered to him the last rites of life, ere he seemingly died. Hence Zitu's hand appears in this to the minds of Magur and myself. Shall Tamhys seek to interfere when Zitu directs?"

For the first time the emperor wavered in his course. Man of peace and believer in the State religion, the priest's words had a powerful effect upon his mind.

"If he comes as an agent of Zitu, why came he not first to Zitra?" he questioned at length.

Zud smiled. "Zitu acts many times through the means at hand. It were easier to convince the mind of Jadgor perhaps than to persuade Tamhys," he replied.

The emperor winced, and turned to Jadgor again. "Swear to me by Zitu that your acts were meant for Tamarizia's welfare and for no advancement of self through an increase of your power," he required.

Jadgor's face set into lines of a swift resentment. His color mounted, but he controlled his voice. "I swear it, O Tamhys," he said.

"These weapons are for Tamarizia's defense alone?"

"As Zitu sees my heart."

Tamhys chose a middle course. "Keep, then, what you have," he decreed; "yet fashion not any more. Nor urge your men to look for war, when peace is in their land. I have heard of strange writings posted on walls, inviting men to join your guards."

Jadgor's face was dark, but he bowed in submission to the emperor's command. "What of the men who stand pledged at present?" he asked. "I have promised them a stated wage for a cycle. It is understood. My word has passed."

"At the end of the cycle, let them be dismissed," said Tamhys after some thought.

Again Jadgor bowed.

Yet Croft found himself not unduly cast down, and he thought he caught a smile in Lakkon's eyes. Suspecting some such event as had just transpired, he had instructed Robur to speed the assembling of all rifles both at Himyra and at Ladhra, before leaving for Zitra himself. Tamhys's decision regarding such weapons as already existed he determined to accept in its broadest sense of application, and as for the dismissal of the guards now in process of training at the end of a cycle, he knew full well that they would probably not be needed after that time, or so hotly engaged that even Tamhys would rescind his decree. Hence he felt that things had not turned out so badly as they might, and he fancied Lakkon's view of the matter was practically the same. In fact, his feeling was now as all along—a wonder that Tamhys had not interfered before as he had oftentimes feared he would. That he understood better now, having seen the man. He was old—wedded to a theory, rather than of practical type. His very begging of the issue as shown by his final ruling showed this. He carried his desire for peace even into this conference to which he had called the men before him, and reached--a useless compromise which, while nominally affecting the end at which he aimed, yet literally made small difference to Croft's plans, and, as he suddenly saw, would, when reported to Cathur and by Cathur given to other ears, result in no more than a determination on Zollaria's part to carry out her intent, since now, as she would in all likelihood believe, she had tied Jadgor's hands by stopping the manufacture of the weapon Croft had devised. He said as much to Jadgor and

Lakkon once they were alone, and for the first time Jadgor appeared pleased.

"Nor," said Croft, "has Tamhys forbidden the construction of *other* weapons, my friends."

"Hai!" Jadgor's tight lips relaxed. He gave Lakkon a glance. "By Zitu! So he did not. Jasor—you have other things in mind."

Croft nodded. It had occurred to him that, with powder and plenty of metal, it would not be impossible to construct some very effective forms of grenades. He explained, and Jadgor's eyes flashed fire.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

Valentine West Secret Agent

by Percy James Brebner

THE MAN WITH THE CARNATION

"YOU'RE a bit of a Bohemian, West."

"Most men are," was the answer spoken somewhat boisterously.

"I mean a bit added to the average," said Lauderdale. "I've found a place in Soho where they give you an excellent dinner at a ridiculous price, where you can rub shoulders with genius as yet unrecognized, and look at beauty, the real thing, not the kind that must wear an expensive frock to get it into the beauty class at all. Will you dine there with me to-night?"

"It sounds attractive," West said.

"Paris without the trouble of crossing the channel. Meet me at the Criterion, that will be handy for you. Seven o'clock."

"Right."

They had met in Whitehall. Lauderdale was in the War-Office, and was returning from lunch; West had just left that building and was not in the best of tempers. Officialdom had become annoyed that he had not performed a miracle. A night off would do him good.

The place in Soho called itself Le Chien Rouge, and was not quite up to Lauderdale's eulogy. The genius was of the long-haired and rather dilapidated sort, and might never receive recognition nor deserve it, while the beauty was a little vulgar and unreserved. Other men had discovered the place as well as Lauderdale, and had found it a very good start to an evening's frolic. Certainly the dinner was excellent, the entertainers above the average, and the sense of relaxation was rather pleasant.

"It will soon be spoiled," said Lauderdale; "but at present I like it. And it is rather amusing to speculate what the history of some of these people is."

"Most of them would be delighted to tell you if you asked, I fancy," said West. "Not the truth, perhaps, but something, probably, with a romantic note in it."

"I dare say; but I should back my imagination. Genius often travels a sordid road, and beauty, well, the way is fairly thorny for beauty as a rule."

"Didn't know you were a philosopher, Lauderdale."

"Live and learn, my dear chap. Now, that girl at the table in the corner yonder, what's her history?"

"By the way she has been watching us I should say she would willingly change her place at the present moment."

"Fed up with her present company, eh. I don't wonder; still, I don't feel like that sort of entertainment this evening, do you?"

"Not a bit. I seldom do."

"We are birds of a feather, West. I like to watch the passing show and keep aloof from the crowd. This is the kind of place to meet some of the beggars you are always after."

"You've been reading sensational fiction, Lauderdale."

"Not I. Life is quite sensational enough without that. We are full of it at the War-Office occasionally. We are at the present moment. There is a rumor going about that some plans of a quick-firing gun have disappeared. Heard anything about it?"

He had lowered his voice, but West glanced quickly round him.

"Not quite the place to talk about it, is it?"

"No, I suppose not; but my word, West, you give yourself away. It is evidently not only in fiction that such places as this are of interest to hunters of your game."

They lingered over their coffee and liqueurs, talking art, which was Lauderdale's hobby. The girl from the table in the corner smiled at them as she passed out with her companions. The room was emptying.

"I was speaking of prints just now," said Lauderdale. "If you are not keen on going to a show, what do you say to coming to my rooms and looking at some prints of mine. I have got a quiet little hole over a shop off Oxford Street. It is really rather jolly, and suits my pocket."

"Certainly I'll come. Theaters and music-halls are off just now. I have been having a round of them."

They helped each other on with their overcoats in the vestibule—Le Chien Rouge was deficient in service of this kind—and, going out, hailed a passing taxi.

Lauderdale's hole off Oxford Street was cozy enough, but somewhat bizarre. The shop below sold second-hand furniture, and his sitting-room suggested that some of the pieces for sale had been stored here. There was no scheme or arrangement worth mentioning. The walls were covered with prints, mostly bad ones, West thought, but he was not quite certain enough of his knowledge to stop his companion's enthusiasm.

"A drink won't hurt us," said Lauderdale, "and you'll find those cigars quite good. There is a fellow in the city gets them for me, and the price I pay suggests humbug somewhere. I don't believe they've paid duty."

"Very wrong, but it shall not prevent my sampling them," said West.

"See if that is to your liking," and Lauderdale passed him a whisky and soda. "And going back to the rumor of that quick-firing gun—by the way, you didn't say whether you had heard anything about it."

"No. Forgive me, but shop is the one thing I never allow myself to talk about."

"Quite right; but it is not my shop exactly, and I have a theory about the business. I said it was a rumor, but you can take it from me, the plans have been stolen."

"And what is your theory?"

As it was with regard to the finding of these plans that the War-Office seemed to expect Valentine West to work a miracle, he was inclined to listen to any theory.

"I get you interested, do I?" laughed Lauderdale. "That tells tales. My theory

is this. Some fellow in the War-Office, having made up papers to look like the plans, watched for and got his opportunity of putting the sham in the place of the real."

"That is not a theory, that is the obvious."

"You have been thinking about it, then. What should you say if I could put my hand on the man?"

"Offer you a partnership in my job."

"The reward is not big enough," said Lauderdale. "You think I am guessing; well, look here."

From an inner pocket he took an envelope, sealed and official looking.

"Those are the plans, West. I am the man who took them."

"Is this a jest."

"No, just fact. More, I know you are after those plans, and should not be very surprised to hear that you have been talked to severely for not having put your hand on them before this. Look at the packet. It is sealed in a special way you will notice. You will know that it is genuine."

He threw it on the table and West took it up. The most casual glance convinced him that they were the lost plans. They were in a special envelope, specially sealed. He continued to examine the packet carefully, not because he had any doubt, but to have time to think.

"I am rather pleased with my cleverness," Lauderdale went on. "They consider themselves so abnormally smart in my place that it has been excellent sport opening their eyes to their fallibility. It took some doing. It was a brainy idea. The sham duplicate has deceived them for a day or two, now they are pulling every string they know to get that packet back, and Valentine West is on the job. It makes me laugh."

"A joke of this kind is no laughing matter, Lauderdale."

"That is because you lack imagination. I am out to explain the whole business to you. You will understand that packet would be a dangerous thing to leave about, I thought that point out carefully, and also the possibility of a search being made in my rooms, so for safety I have had a special pocket made in my coats. That was a good idea, not new, perhaps, but not one generally adopted by fellows in the War-Office. Confess, now, you never suspected me, West."

"I never talk shop to any one."

"That is a way out quite unworthy of you," Lauderdale laughed. "Be a sportsman and admit you have been done for once; that you have come up against a man as smart as you are yourself. You can afford the confession because you have had a long run of success."

"I always admit my failures," said West. "We have not got to the end of this business yet."

"Very nearly we have. Bluff won't do; I happen to know the facts."

"Tell me what you are expecting me to do," said West. "You say this affair is not a jest, so I imagine you have repented and want me to shield you as much as I can."

"No, that is not the idea at all. I am going to sell those plans. You may wonder why I didn't get rid of them at once; well, the purchasers have only arrived in London to-day. The sale takes place to-night."

West was debating whether the man was a fool or a maniac, but did not jump to any hasty conclusion. The theft had shown great cunning and resource; perhaps a madman's cunning. Lauderdale's present action seemed to be mere egotistical folly, but it was not safe to take this for granted.

"You see, West, my tastes are expensive, and in paying me for my services the government has not taken this fact into consideration," Lauderdale went on. "That is one point. Then this is another little fact which it would not have paid me to insist upon. I am Irish on my mother's side, closely connected with the Filligan family. You will remember the name. Some of them have suffered badly for expressing their opinions, so I am not very friendly with England on their account. I am out to get a little bit of the family's own back. That is why those plans are going to be sold to-night."

"I do not think they are," said West, putting the envelope in his pocket.

Lauderdale laughed.

"And I am going now."

Still laughing, Lauderdale put himself between the door and his companion, and a moment later was looking down a revolver-barrel. Still he laughed.

"My dear West, I should have thought you would have been convinced by now that I am not a fool. That is an excellent revolver, but it is not the one you put into your pocket when you left home to-night. I made the exchange when I helped you on with your coat at Le Chien Rouge. Sleight-of-hand tricks have been a hobby with me for years—I often do a turn in the cause of charity at suburban concerts. That revolver is loaded in every chamber, but with dud cartridges."

"Shooting is not the only way," said West, springing upon his companion.

Lauderdale was a powerful man, and he was not taken by surprise.

"I think I should get the best of it in a rough and tumble," he said; "but I have sufficient respect for you not to take any chances."

He whistled. From an inner room came three men, the three who had been the companions of the girl at Le Chien Rouge.

"You are an observant fellow, West, so I need not introduce you," said Lauderdale. "I see you recognize my friends. The lady is not here. I am meeting her a little later for supper when our business is finished."

Valentine West snapped open the revolver to make sure that Lauderdale had spoken the truth. He had. They were dud cartridges right enough, and he tossed the weapon on to the table. He was up against a tough proposition; tougher than he knew. He had never suspected Lauderdale. He had not told Amos Free where he was dining, nor with whom. These men would certainly do their best to keep him silent and inactive until they had made good their escape. Like an utter fool he had walked into a trap, and there was irony in the thought that the stolen plans were at this moment in his possession. Could he defend them? Could he keep them? In spite of the odds against him, could he win out of this dilemma?

"I'll trouble you for the packet, West," said Lauderdale. "It is something that you have been allowed to handle it."

Lauderdale appeared to have read his thoughts. For a moment West hesitated, then very slowly he took out the packet and put it on the table.

"I yield to superior force," he said.

Lauderdale took it up and handed it to one of the men.

"Examine it, *monsieur*."

He might have been a Frenchman, but he had Spanish blood in his veins, West thought. He appeared to be the leader of the trio, and was a sinister, cold-blooded-looking individual. His companions were more blatant villains, more like paid desperadoes than master criminals. To what government were these plans being sold. To know this would be worth something, and in watching the man as he examined the envelopes and seals, he forgot his own position for the moment. The man was businesslike. It was not the first time he had handled stolen documents.

"Good," he said. "We have done business together before, Mr. Lauderdale, and it was very satisfactory."

"You will be making West curious," was the answer. "He never talks shop. I will follow his example and not mention my past enterprises."

"There is the money, Mr. Lauderdale, in notes. It is not necessary to count it. If there should be a mistake it can be rectified."

Lauderdale took the bundle of notes and thrust it into his pocket.

"Into the inner secret pocket, West," he said. "It is quite safe. I suppose you are feeling pretty bad over this affair."

"I am sorry for you."

"Oh, drop that," was the answer with sudden savagery. "Bluff is no good with me. Under any circumstances you're the kind of man it does one good to get the better of. You're an American and too cocksure of yourself, and you annoy me. You are so fond of springing surprises on the people who employ you, and think yourself so darned clever, that you take mighty good care not to give yourself away before-

hand. If you have ever suspected me, which I do not believe, I know perfectly well you wouldn't mention it. I know your methods. I have made it my business to study them rather closely. I shall turn up at Whitehall to-morrow without any fear. That surprises you, eh?"

"It does rather," and West spoke no more than the truth. He was beginning to have some respect for the completeness of this madman's scheme.

"I have sold the plans to the representatives of a continental syndicate," Lauderdale went on. "Later no doubt the syndicate will sell them to the highest bidder which, seeing this country's interest in the gun, may be Britain. The syndicate is cosmopolitan, neutral, whatever you like to call it. It has no favorite among the nations. It is out to buy secrets and to crush any one who is dangerous to its enterprises. Once or twice you have come near to spoiling its business. You are clever enough to be wanted out of the way. That is why I shall turn up in Whitehall to-morrow without fear."

"It is an interesting plot," said West, speaking calmly but realizing his danger.

"Worked out in detail," was the answer. "I don't know whether you have tumbled to the fact that these are not my rooms. They are just hired for this purpose by the syndicate. There is no one in the shop below, to-morrow there will be no one in these rooms either."

"No one alive you mean," said West. He knew he was in a desperate strait, but he could lose nothing by facing the peril courageously. "There is one thing I should like to know, Lauderdale. You are evidently convinced that I had no suspicion of you—"

"I am dead sure of that or you wouldn't have entered the trap so easily."

"Then why should you be so anxious to make an end of me? It cannot be because I happen to be an American."

"Were you not instrumental in bringing a Filligan to the gallows? This is the payment. I haven't a shadow of regret. I go to supper, you—"

"Ah, speculation on that point puzzles you," said West. "I am glad I have the full explanation. In exchange I will give you one piece of advice. Don't go to Whitehall to-morrow, you will regret it if you do."

"Bluff to the last."

"No," said West. "If you are foolish enough to go, beware of the man with the carnation."

"Oh, go to the devil."

"I hope to take another road," was the quiet retort.

Lauderdale went out, and as he did so one of the men went quickly toward the door to prevent West making an attempt at escape. The Frenchman with the packet still in his hand stood by the table.

"You are no coward, I'm sure, M. West. I regret that your death is necessary. Unfortunately I have no alternative. I am acting under instructions. The interests of the syndicate must be considered, and the promise given to Mr. Lauderdale is binding. Your death is part of the payment for these plans."

He produced a revolver and examined it.

"You evidently trust Mr. Lauderdale," said West.

"Implicitly. He has already been very useful."

"I fancy the thought of meeting a man with a carnation to-morrow will give him an uneasy night."

West fervently hoped so. Furious with himself for being so easily trapped; he had tried to frighten his trapper. There was no such person as the man with a carnation. He wished there was. The bluff was poor satisfaction even if it did make Lauderdale uneasy.

"I think not," said the Frenchman. "He seems to have beaten you altogether. I am rather surprised. I thought you were a much more difficult man to deal with. Your bluff—is that what you call it?—will not make him afraid of you."

"But it may help to make him afraid of you," said West.

"Of me?"

"I suppose the syndicate would be fairly mad if it paid money for worthless paper?"

"It hasn't."

"Lauderdale has beaten me or I should not be here, but he has beaten you too, I

fancy. He has your money, you have that envelope. You have not opened it to see you have got what you paid for."

"A little more bluff, eh, M. West? It does not move me. I know by the official mark and seals what I have bought and so do you. You recognized it the moment Mr. Lauderdale showed it to you. I was listening and heard from the room yonder."

"*Monsieur,* I would remind you of something else Lauderdale said. The sham packet had deceived the War-Office. I should advise you to break the seals and examine those papers. If you know where Lauderdale is supping to-night you may have time to catch him before he has finished, and get your money back."

The Frenchman hesitated. He looked keenly at West, glanced sharply at his companions to assure himself they were on the alert to prevent trickery and escape, then he broke the seals. He was deliberate as he drew the papers from the envelope. He opened the first slowly, the others quickly, and let the lot fall on to the table.

They were all blank paper.

"Tricked!" he cried with a savage oath.

"Both of us," said West quickly.

The man standing by the door had started forward a pace. His attitude had a crouch in it, like an animal ready to spring. Lauderdale could be dealt with later; it did not alter the purpose concerning the man who was in their power now, it merely emphasized the need for quick action. The man was ready expecting the Frenchman's signal.

Valentine West knew his peril. The man's attitude convinced him that murder was intended to be silent, strangulation or the knife. It had not been intended to run the risk of interruption from the street by using firearms. These two were no more than hired assassins, experts at their work. He knew a false move must prove fatal. There was just one chance of salvation and only one. He stood perfectly still, calculating distance and time in small fractions. At the moment he moved he knew the attack would come. He must make no mistake.

Suddenly he sprang forward, his arm shot out across the table and he had the revolver the Frenchman had put down when he opened the envelope.

"If your men move I shoot you," said West.

The Frenchman, stunned by Lauderdale's trickery, was wholly taken by surprise.

The man by the door moved, and in a moment had reeled back against the wall with a cry of pain, a bullet through his right arm.

It was no time to take chances, no moment for words.

"Hands up! Every one of you!" West cried.

Then with his left hand he seized from the table the revolver containing the dud cartridges and, without turning around, hurled it at the window behind him. The blind stopped it from going through into the street below, but the glass was smashed, falling on the pavement.

Some one passing in the street shouted excitedly.

"Police! Police!" West called at the top of his voice, paused a moment, then called again.

For the three men the position had suddenly become desperate. The Frenchman made a pretense of raising his hands, but instead of doing so caught the edge of the table to turn it over upon his assailant to confuse him and to shield himself at the same time.

At that same instant the other man sprang to the attack. He was the more dangerous of the two, and West fired again. His enemy stopped as if he had struck some invisible wall in his forward rush, stood erect for a moment, and then pitched backward over a chair.

"Get to the wall," West warned the Frenchman, crouching behind the upturned table. "I'll give you five seconds."

He obeyed.

He had ample evidence that he was not dealing with a man of words.

"M. West, you are entirely too precipitate," he said as he took his place beside the wounded man against the wall. "We are both deceived as you said, and a word of explanation—"

"You can give that later," was the sharp answer. "Stand still and keep quiet, that is all I want of you now."

A crowd was evidently gathering in the street below.

"Break open the door now," West shouted.

A few minutes later two constables with half a dozen other men entered the room. Neither of the constables knew West, but a whispered word made them take prompt action, and twenty minutes later West got into a taxi in Oxford Street.

There were officials to interview without delay.

Next morning Valentine West walked to the War-Office, and on his way he did an unusual thing, he bought a flower for his buttonhole—a carnation, and he smiled to himself as the girl fastened it in place.

The same high official who had been rather short with him yesterday was exceedingly gracious this morning.

"You must accept congratulations and thanks, Mr. West."

He accepted both modestly, but did not suggest that he had small claim to them nor speak of any chance in the success he had achieved. He did not confess that he had been completely deceived by Lauderdale, that he had walked blindly into a trap, and that he had only retrieved his mistake at the eleventh hour. It was not good for the official mind to be told too much.

"Has Lauderdale come as usual?" he asked.

"Yes. There was nothing to alarm him in the papers. As we arranged last night they merely stated that a man unknown had been found dead in a house off Oxford Street."

"Who he believes is me," said West with a smile. "Perhaps you would send for Mr. Lauderdale. I think he will have the surprise of his life."

In answer to the summons Lauderdale came into the room a few minutes later, expecting to receive some business instructions from his chief. He did not see West, who had slipped into a recess and was out of his line of vision as he entered. Lauderdale said good morning, and his chief, not without a sense of the dramatic, pointed to the recess.

Lauderdale turned and then fell back with a cry of consternation.

"You! West!"

"The man with the carnation," was the quiet answer. "I told you to beware of him. The dead man found is one of your confederates. That is a surprise to you, but it may even surprise you more to know that the two who are alive are thirsting for your destruction. They were tricked last night. They handed you money for nothing. When they opened the envelope it contained only blank paper."

"I—"

"You can hardly believe it, that is natural since you had arranged every detail so carefully. You forgot one thing. You are not the only person who has thought of a secret pocket. I have one. It was into that pocket I slipped your packet, and when it was demanded from me I took out of an ordinary inside pocket the sham packet which I have carried ever since the theft was discovered. You had made up the sham one so well that you yourself were deceived by it. Incidentally you have done your country a great service by explaining to me some of the activities of the continental syndicate. I dare say you will be induced to speak of your other enterprises later."

That evening the papers were full of the affair in the house off Oxford Street, and Valentine West sat in his room in Bruton Street and congratulated himself on his escape. He had never expected to play the man with the carnation, and was thankful he had been able to do so. But what annoyed him more than anything which happened to him for a long time past was the fact that a man like Lauderdale should have tricked him so easily.

"Amos."

The man paused in the act of removing the crumbs from the table-cloth.

"Amos, next time I tell you I am going out to dinner demand to know where and with whom. Don't forget."

"Very well, sir," and Amos Free went on with his work.

The Mahogany Hoodoo

by Boice Du Bois

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARBLE PEDESTAL.

AS my eyes searched the room to determine what part Miss Verlaine had taken in my capture, I discovered that she was crouching in terror, at the far side of the room. She was the most woful, frightened mite of humanity imaginable.

A thrill of satisfaction swept through me, as I realized that she was in no way responsible for what had occurred. It would have been impossible for her to counterfeit the look of abhorrence that was stamped upon her countenance.

As my mind grasped the contributing factors, which had dovetailed for my undoing, I saw it all. From the moment I left Van Kleek's, this fellow had shadowed me. Had seen me enter the Saint Germaine —and followed.

The maid had admitted him to the small reception hall, and from there he had found it easy, as free access to the rear rooms, without observation from the drawing-room, was possible.

After a final inspection of his work, he stepped back a few paces, and I saw that there was a revolver in his hand. In spite of the pain I was in, I chuckled—his extreme caution amused me. To wink an eye was about all the freedom he had left me.

Miss Verlaine was recovering from the shock of what had occurred. She had stepped to his side, and was wringing her hands in nervous apprehension.

"Oh, why did you do this?" she exclaimed.

"Because he's been to Van Kleek's and knows all—that's why."

"Release him—do you hear me? I tell you I am sick of all this deception and violence. This is my apartment—do as I tell you."

"Sit down," he commanded.

She made no attempt to obey him, whereupon he deliberately leveled his wicked-looking revolver at her. Then I raged at my helplessness, and had the cords which bound me carried a single weak strand, I am sure I would have broken it. As it was—I again heard the creak of the old chair's right hand arm-rest, so great was my struggle for freedom.

As might have been expected, this brutal demonstration on his part completely cowed her, and with every trace of color gone from her face, she dropped into a near-by chair, as directed.

"Now you are becoming sensible," he remarked.

Then he called to the maid, who was evidently in sympathy with all he had done.

"Bring out her wraps; the sooner I get her away from here, the better I will like it."

The maid entered with Miss Verlaine's coat and hat, and in passing my chair, shot a venomous glance, as if proud of the small part she had played in assisting to bind me.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 13.

"Get your own things also—I want you to go with her. Don't let her weaken—remember, she is not to speak to any one. Go to Madison Street and stay until it is all over. I will stick to this gent, and make sure that he keeps his nose out of it."

As he mentioned Madison Street, I grew sick with disgust. Blake and Berritt were to meet me at seven o'clock; to wait for me. It was liable to be a tiresome wait.

In a very few minutes, the two women were ready to go, and as they passed out, I realized that Miss Verlaine would be powerless to render any assistance.

A clock somewhere in the rear had just struck four, and the earliest I could possibly expect to be released was eleven—at least so I reasoned.

After their departure, he carefully locked the door leading from the reception-room into the hall. Then he drew aside the draperies behind me, and shoved the chair I was bound to, through the wide opening into the little room, from which I had been trapped.

This was a matter of precaution on his part, as it would be easy to hide me, by again drawing the curtains, if by chance any one had to be admitted to the rooms.

Seating himself in a large easy-chair, in the center of the spacious drawing-room, he laid his revolver on a table near him, and lighted a cigarette. A dozen failed to satiate his cravings.

I realized that my chances of escape were less than nothing. Bound, gagged, and under fire. *Some* chance, I thought.

There was nothing to do but think. His gaze was fixed and continuous. About all I could do was to stare back at him.

This annoyed his highness. He came into the back room, and twisted my chair at right angles, so that my side was toward him.

"Your face bothers me—I don't like it," he said, by way of explanation.

For the first time I saw the side of the room toward which my face was turned. There was a window opening into a court. I could see the lights in the hotel rooms beyond. Standing near this window, there was a marble column, with a heavy metal ornament upon it.

Almost before I thought such a thing possible—the clock struck again. This time I counted five.

The air was reeking with the stench of cigarette smoke, and now for the first time I noted that as often as he lighted a fresh one he went to his coat for matches. It hung over a chair, near one of the windows, facing the street.

Then I wondered was there any way I could take advantage of this, but not a thought came to me. I could scarcely credit my sense of hearing when the clock struck six. Was there nothing I could do? Did I have to remain right there, without making any effort to escape?

In my despair, I idly gazed at the marble column, and noted its distance from the window.

At that moment, he arose from his chair, for the purpose of securing another match. There would be one precious moment in which his back was turned. I stretched out my right foot and found that I could touch the marble column.

With the contact—a thought came—the one I had been waiting for. I would tip the column, and send the ornament crashing through the window into the yard below. Surely this would bring some one to my rescue.

Before I knew it, the half-hour was chimed by my little friend in the rear. It was six thirty.

He was getting up for another match. This was my chance.

Slowly I saw the heavy metal ornament tip toward the window. Then there was a crash of splintering glass, followed by a thud on the stone pavement below.

With a most horrible oath, he rushed to my chair, and I felt the cold muzzle of his gun against my temple. At the same time, I could feel it tremble and knew that he was frightened. It gave me courage.

The necessity for quick thinking was now his. Windows were being raised on every floor, and voices could be heard in the courtyard below. Thrusting his weapon in a pocket, he sprang for the electric button and pressed it. We were in darkness, except for the light that struggled in from the court.

Out in the hall was the sound of hurried walking. They were moving from floor to floor, in an effort to locate the room in which the disturbance had occurred.

Then some one knocked at our door. They knocked again. The deep nervous breathing of my jailer was the only response. He was waiting for them to pass on.

As near as I could judge, several people were outside.

"It can't be in this room," said one.

"Why not?"

"Because she went out with her maid, about two hours ago."

Then they moved on down the hall, and —my chance was gone.

Once more the messenger-boy hung over my chair.

"Another break of that kind, and I'll take a chance and blow your brains out," he hissed.

He groped his way to the rear rooms, and produced more rope, for the purpose of binding my legs to the chair, and was kneeling on the floor in front of me.

My mind reeled with the possibilities of the thought that came to me.

That loose arm-rest—it was on the right-hand side. If I could wrench it from the post and frame—what a weapon.

Heaven had once before answered my prayer when hard pressed by this same villain. I tried to recall it. Then I muttered something—all I remember is that it was short and fervent.

With it every ounce of strength in my body was exerted in one supreme effort.

There was a splintering of wood, as it broke from the ancient fastenings, then I brought it down with a sledge-hammer blow upon his head.

He crumpled up with a moan that chilled my blood, but sympathy was out of the question. He might regain consciousness any moment, and if he did—my end was in sight.

By moving my right arm over so that the fingers of my left hand could come in contact with the rope fastenings, I gradually gained my freedom.

The first thing I did was to draw all the shades, then I turned on the lights and removed the revolver from his hip-pocket. He had remained in the position in which he fell.

An ugly blue lump was to be seen where I had struck him. It was about the size of an egg.

My next move was to lift him into the chair. Then I roped him, precisely as I had been tied, except that I pushed him down in the chair low enough to tie his hands by passing the cords underneath the seat.

As if to congratulate me, the cheerful little timepiece struck seven.

Blake and Berritt were waiting for me at Chatham Square.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

LEAVING him in darkness and alone with his thoughts, if perchance they found it convenient to return, I stepped out into the hall. It was empty, and I made my way to the elevator, without encountering any one. Nor did I attract undue attention, as I passed out of the lobby into the street.

At Fifth Avenue I found a taxi, and by the judicious use of a most convenient lubricant greased the way to Chatham Square. In terms of swiftness, we qualified as a streak and a smell of gasoline.

As the taxi rolled into the square from the Bowery, Berritt's automobile entered from Park Row.

"What's up?" asked Blake, stepping to the curb.

"Can't stop for a full recital now," I answered: "but the substance is this: I found Van Kleek's house, secured an entrance, and discovered that he is the collector of those buttons. In addition to this, a crime of some sort has been committed. A body laid out for burial in Van Kleek's back parlor confirms this, and his housekeeper did not hesitate to refer to it as a murder. Just where this matter touches our problem I do not know, but I am convinced that it does, as I was made a prisoner this afternoon for the avowed purpose of keeping me away from Van Kleek's to-night."

"Sounds nice and snappy to me," said Blake. "But at the same time, you know—all due respect—where do we get a certificate to horn in on this?"

"If they remove that body to-night I shall follow to learn what disposition they make of it," was my answer.

"Nothing doing," he growled; "I'm out of it. Believe me, it's time to blow a whistle for the police."

"Oh, no, it isn't," said Berritt.

"Why not?"

"Because your evidence is weak. You will be telling something that Tommy told you the housekeeper told him."

"But I saw it with my own eyes," I argued.

"Come now—what did you see?" Berritt asked.

"I saw the casket in the back room."

"Give a description of the body that occupied it."

"Impossible, as I was not near enough to it."

"Then so far as you are concerned it might have been empty."

"Honestly, Berritt, this is folly. I have told you that I could not go into details as to what has occurred, but I am right, and I know it."

"Now, don't get excited. Your plan to watch the house is all right, and there will be nothing to prevent our following the body, if there is one, and they remove it to-night. Go ahead, Blake—Tommy needs you. I will remain right here on the Square until you want me."

"Oh, very well, chief," said Blake, saluting, and taking my arm.

Upon reaching the Madison Street house we saw that there was a dim light in the parlor, although the closely-drawn shades and closed blinds seemed reluctant to release the few yellow chinks and streaks of gaslight that filtered through.

If there was a hall lamp, it had not been lighted. The attic room, with the dormer windows, was also dark.

While we were making these observations from the opposite side of the street, Blake suddenly nudged me and pointed to four men who had stopped at the iron gate leading to the basement.

"I see," was my answer, "and unless greatly mistaken, I have had the pleasure of their acquaintance. Those are the men who tried to terminate my earthly career the night I came from Aunt Lottie's. Cross over and see if one of them is still nursing a broken head."

Blake did as directed, passing them just as the old housekeeper, who had heard the clanking of the gate, came out to admit them.

"You are right, Tommy," said Blake, upon his return; "one of them has his head swathed in bandages."

While he was speaking, a taxi drew up to the door, and three women alighted. The air of deference shown by two of them to the third member of the trio gave me a clue to their identity.

As they assisted her up the steps, there was a suggestion of infirmity that betrayed the presence of Aunt Lottie, and as Miss Verlaine had accompanied her earlier in the day, it was reasonable to assume that she was with her now. This would also account for the identity of the other woman, in the person of the maid.

Several automobiles lined the curb at various places on the block, and this gave me the idea of having Berritt take a similar position with his machine.

"Tell him to stop near the corner," I whispered to Blake, indicating the down-town end of the block.

"Just one thing more," said I before he started. "There are several pawnbroker shops on the square: go in and see if you can pick up two or three electric flashlights, as we may need them before the night is over."

Shortly after his departure an open auto-truck stopped at the door. At first I did not associate this with anything that might possibly happen during the evening, but when some one came out from the basement and talked with the chauffeur, I realized that this was part of the tragedy, if such it was to be.

"He's down near the corner," was Blake's report a few minutes later. "Got the flashlights also—two of them. What next?"

"Nothing to do but wait," I replied.

"There isn't going to be any wait—here they come," said he.

The front door had opened, and the four huskies were bearing a heavy oblong box on their shoulders.

"Tommy—you were right—here comes the procession."

As they carried their heavy burden down the steps I knew that this was the rough box I had seen the messenger-boy working on in Van Kleek's back-yard.

What evidence of a more convincing nature did we require? The very secrecy with which they were conducting the burial was enough. Besides that there was no hearse—they were actually loading the suspicious-looking box on to the waiting truck.

I wondered what had become of Berritt's theory that the casket was empty.

"Take it from me," whispered Blake, "this has got nothing to do with your old mahogany hoodoo. We are in bad."

"Are you weakening?" I asked.

"Not on your life," he answered. "This is the real thing. I'm in on this to the finish."

"Good—it's time we move."

As we started toward Berritt's waiting automobile we saw the four men climb on to the truck, and seat themselves comfortably on the heavy box.

"Down with your curtains," said I to Berritt, "and let me sit in the rear, as everything will be off if I am recognized."

The big truck whizzed by as we finished, and I realized that neither Van Kleek or any of his guests had accompanied it.

"After them," I exclaimed to Berritt.

The rear lights of the truck in front of us led down Park Row, past the City Hall, into Broadway, and then down Courtlandt Street to the Weehawken ferry.

On the boat, our automobile held a position directly behind their truck, and this gave us an opportunity to scrutinize the wicked-looking quartet more closely. As they moved about, and our headlights now and then brought out a profile of more than evil contour, I determined to avoid any second encounter with them.

Reaching the New Jersey shore, they turned north to Fort Lee, where we were about a block behind them. From this point they continued on over the meadows to Hackensack. Then we swept through several small villages that none of us could name, as the necessity of holding to the lights in front of us had made it impossible to examine any of the sign-posts along the road we were traversing.

Finally, at the top of what seemed to be an interminably long hill, Berritt brought his car to a standstill.

"I have lost their lights—can either one of you locate them?" he asked.

It was useless for us to peer into the darkness. They had completely vanished.

"Do you think that they have become suspicious and put them out?" I asked.

"Can't say, but we can proceed cautiously for a mile or so and learn what comes from it," he answered.

For the next five minutes we sat in silence, during which time Berritt had gradually increased his speed. At last he stopped.

"Let's go back," he suggested.

Blake and I assented, having no better plan to offer.

As we neared the top of the hill, from which our loss had been discovered, Berritt again slowed down.

"Boys," said he, "I'm going to take a chance and put our own lights out."

He did so, and we started again, under low speed. In this way we moved forward for possibly two hundred feet, when from the left-hand side of the road—out of what appeared to be a narrow lane—the auto-truck turned into the road ahead of us, on its way back to New York.

"Look—they have got rid of the box," said Blake under his breath.

Waiting until their lights had faded into the distance, we began an examination of the road they had emerged from.

Berritt remained with the automobile, while Blake and I pushed through the brush-choked lane.

About one hundred feet from the main road we flashed our lights on a low stone structure that stood near the center of a bleak and dreary little cemetery.

"This will be about all, until we get Berritt in here with his road-lights," whispered Blake.

"You said it," I answered in the same hoarse whisper.

Berritt responded by driving his car to within ten feet of the small receiving-vault, for this is what it proved to be.

The place fulfilled all the traditional requirements of a neglected and deserted burying-ground, as the weeds were intent on hiding the few old-fashioned marble slabs that were struggling for recognition.

Here and there one had given up the fight and laid down like the authors of their existence.

The vault was low and gloomy, and a growth of vines covered it. Some of the stones composing it had crumbled to dust and others were ready to fall if touched.

"This way with your flash-light," I commanded Blake.

I use the word "commanded" advisedly, as it was hardly a request. The necessity for some one to lead in the work I was about to undertake was apparent. It was going to be gruesome, and required at least one dominating personality to carry it through.

He sent the shaft of light through the rusty gate into the gloomy interior.

"It's in there; we have come to the right spot," he exclaimed.

His statement was correct. The rough pine box rested on a stone platform, in the center of the tomblike structure, and as our light circled the surrounding blackness we visibly recoiled from the awful shadows. Each recess appeared to be an abysmal void that sought to engulf our feeble, erratic lights, and fantom forms seemed ready to dance to their flashing meter. A sagging rafter had torn a hole in the roof, and far out in space a watchful star blinked as if surprised at our sacrilege.

Above all the silence was appalling.

A touch of ghoulishness was added by our slouching caps and the long riding-coats we wore.

As I grasped the rusty bars of the iron door a chain rattled against them; its metallic clink chilled me.

"We should have brought a heavy sledge with us," I said to Berritt.

"What are you going to do?" asked Blake.

"Open this door."

"Oh—I say, now," he chattered.

"Don't be a coward, Blake. Not over two hours ago you told me that you would see this through. If you want to quit, all right. If not, see what you can find in Berritt's tool-box."

Without protest he took one of the lights and went back to the machine-tool chest, from which he secured a heavy screw-driver.

The ancient hasp broke from the door-post with but little effort, and I swung the gate open. There was a screech from its rusty hinges that curdled my blood. It was like a protest from the dead.

Turning the light upon Blake and Berritt, I saw that the incident had startled them. They were white with fright.

"What are you going to do now?" Berritt asked in awed tones.

"Open the box," I replied.

In silence I removed the screws that held the crudely made lid in place. Out in the open I could hear the swaying of the trees, while a near-by pine echoed a low and plaintive warning. But the grim demon of defiance raged within me. I would finish this work though the very inhabitants of this small God's acre should arise to restrain me.

Then we lifted the cover.

The queer old casket was underneath.

"There's a name-plate on it," said Berritt.

We crowded forward with our lights, forgetting the menacing shadows behind us.

THOMAS COOPER VAN VELLZON

was the inscription that greeted our eyes.

"My name," I gasped.

It was my turn now to grow cold with fear and fright. The shock of reading my name on an old casket, amid the gloomy surroundings of cemetery and vault, was almost too much.

"They have beaten you at your own game, Tommy," was Berritt's comment. "Instead of your following them, they have led you; that is my opinion. They knew that you intended to come here and have given you full value for your money."

"Very well—in that case, part of their

investment appears to be still due me," I replied.

Saying which, I began to loosen the thumbscrews that held the lid.

"Wait," whispered Berritt. "In Heaven's name, wait. What was your grandfather's name?"

"Thomas Cooper Van Vellzon," I answered.

Then for a moment we gazed at one another in awed silence.

"Don't touch it, Tommy—please don't," he whispered in pleading tones.

Then my conscience smote me, and I regretted having scoffed at my cousin Edith's warnings; but for all that, the horrible desire to know was upon me.

"How about your theory that this name is but a hoax—a brutal play of comedy? I intend to act as if your first assumption was correct, and if my name has been used for the purpose of terrifying me I shall get the full benefit of whatever the old casket has in store for me."

While speaking I loosened the cover.

Once more I paused. What if I was mistaken? In my foolhardy determination, was I about to stamp my mind with a vision that would follow like a ghostly attendant to the end of my days?

As if to end the mental conflict raging within me, I quickly thrust aside the cover. The casket did not contain the withered remains of my ancestor. It was filled with Van Kleek's brass buttons.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE MAGIC METAL."

"ANYWAY, it was a nice ride," said Berritt with fine sarcasm.

"Certainly was, and besides that—I believe in trying anything once," Blake observed.

As for myself, I said nothing. Confusion was upon me, and I was through with it all.

With a revulsion of feeling that would be hard to define, I quickly adjusted the funeral properties that had entered into the staging of the mock burial, and stepped out into the cool night air.

Berritt had cranked his machine and was backing out into the highway.

"I'll be at my office in the morning," said I to Blake as we followed.

"Now we are listening to the voice of reason. Lo! a wise man hath appeared among us. A sweet little Daniel. Here—have a good cigar," he responded with evident glee.

"Shall we stop at Hackensack and see if we can get something to eat?" asked Berritt as we took our seats.

Looking at my watch, I discovered that it was eleven o'clock.

"Yes; I've had nothing since breakfast," was my answer.

As we sped along, my good intentions to stop thinking were of no avail, and I found myself indulging in a series of short expletives such as "Stung!" "Beaten!" "Baffled!"

"Hey there—cut out talking to yourself," said Blake. "You might slip a cog or something. Come out of it, I tell you."

"Bah!" was the impolite response I made.

Arriving in Hackensack, we found a hotel that was still open, and willing to serve us, but the meal was eaten in silence, as my companions were desirous of respecting my mood, knowing full well that a better frame of mind would soon prevail.

With our coffee and cigars, the gloom lifted, and Blake suggested telephoning his mother that we would reach home about one o'clock.

Leaving the dining-room, he went into the hotel office, where the booth was located, and was there but a few minutes when he returned with this report:

"Something wrong at the house; can't make out what it is, as mother is too excited to talk. Edith is there; I found that out."

"Edith at your house this time of night," exclaimed Berritt. "Then Mrs. Blake must have sent for her, and she would not do that unless something out of the ordinary had occurred."

"What else did you learn?" I asked.

"Nothing, as the connection was broken. Shall we try again?"

"No," said Berritt. "We will be wast-

ing time. How much money have you fellers got between you?"

We counted up and found that it amounted to about ninety dollars.

"All right; we may need it for fines. Climb in and say your prayers. I'm going to bust her wide open."

And he did. His car evidently possessed a mechanical something or other that corresponds to a lady's nervous temperament, as it climbed right on its rubber toes and hummed the sweetest little road ditty I have ever listened to.

I shall not give the time we made, as they might arrest us, even at this late date, but to the police official who stood at the top of the Fort Lee hill I should like to say: "It was us who whizzed by that night."

As we turned into our street, I saw that there was a taxi standing in front of the house, although it was now one thirty.

Mrs. Blake's front parlor was also ablaze with light.

Upon entering the hall, I glanced in the parlor, and a brief survey of the room was sufficient to reveal the cause of Mrs. Blake's excitement. Three people were awaiting our arrival—Miss Verlaine, Van Kleek, and Aunt Lottie. The latter had evidently collapsed in one of the big chairs, and was being supported by Miss Verlaine, who was offering her something to drink.

On the opposite side of the room sat Van Kleek, the picture of abject misery.

Miss Verlaine stepped forward as we entered the room, and I saw that there was neither hesitancy nor fear in her face. On the contrary, her big brown eyes reflected firmness and determination. Her finely modeled shoulders were thrown back as if she would square them for an unpleasant ordeal.

"Mr. Van Vellzon," she began, "I regret having disturbed your household at this time of the night, but there are certain things that must be set right before any of us sleep. Things that Miss La Reaux must tell you. Revelations that Mr. Van Kleek must make. As for my own part in this unfortunate mystery, that shall also be disclosed. All must be known. All told. It is a burden I would not carry another day, for the wealth of a king, and I accept the responsibility for compelling these old people to come here to-night.

"First of all, I must assure you of my deep regret for the violence shown you at the Saint Germaine. You were followed there by a base scoundrel, who—with the connivance of a foolish and infatuated maid—succeeded in making you a prisoner for the purpose of keeping you away from Van Kleek's. I am not acquainted with the details of your escape, as his rage upon release was beyond description. He was unable to express himself with coherence. Hastening to Madison Street, he informed Van Kleek of your escape, and showed him that in all probability you had become acquainted with every detail of the night's strange proceedings.

"This was the last straw. It convinced Van Kleek that it was a question of time only when your persistency would uncover the secret he was so anxious to keep from you. They had sent for me, and I arrived in the midst of his ravings. His threat to commit suicide convinced me that it would be folly to think of anything but a full and complete confession. We are here for that purpose. Miss La Reaux, do you feel strong enough to reveal those things you came here to tell?"

Aunt Lottie slowly lifted herself from the depth of the chair that had swallowed her.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Then I will ask you to bring the secret drawer that was found in your grandfather's desk," said Miss Verlaine, turning to me.

I went to my room for it, and then placed it on the table in front of the trembling old lady.

"Thomas," she began with quavering tones, "the paper you sought is still in this secret drawer. It was here when your father took the desk from me, and when you learn its contents you will understand why I did not dare remove this document in his presence. You will likewise appreciate the frenzied effort I made to convince you that a certain paper was still in my possession. Of course you remember the occasion I refer to?"

"I do."

"You will also recall that you flaunted an empty envelope in my face."

"Yes."

"I knew that it was empty, because the tragedy and horror of it all would have been too much for you had you known. Take your knife, Thomas, and pry off the front of the drawer."

Her instructions were simple and the front fell away without very much effort on my part.

Then I saw the cleverness with which a small piece of paper had been concealed.

Profound silence was upon us all as I removed the discolored, yellow sheet of paper, and as the old drawer gave up its secret I was not surprised at our failure to locate it.

The mahogany bottom had been morticed, and a small well, or cavity, had been cut into the wood. No one would ever dream of its existence when the front was glued into position.

"Read it, Thomas," she continued.

I spread the faded sheet out and gasped with surprise as its significance dawned upon me.

"I, Tobias Van Kleek, am alone responsible for the death of Thomas Cooper Van Vellzon. The presence of Miss Charlotte La Reaux at the time it occurred was purely accidental, and to whatever extent this free declaration will absolve her from complicity or connivance in the said death, I do most earnestly indorse it.

"June, 1852.

"(Signed) TOBIAS VAN KLEEK."

There was a deathlike stillness in the room as I finished reading. The clock in the basement was plainly heard as it clicked out the seconds. Berritt was the only one who had moved; it was just a shift of position in his chair, but I knew the message it was intended to convey: "You were right about the document, Tommy."

I saw that they were waiting for me to speak, but for my life I did not know what to say.

Miss Verlaine was quick to appreciate my position, and at the same time she took advantage of it.

"There is more to tell, Mr. Van Vellzon, but as you listen I ask you to remember that these two old people have carried this burden between them. They are now broken in spirit and in years. Give heed to this, I entreat you."

"I shall, Miss Verlaine, if for no other reason than the earnestness of their advocate."

Van Kleek had lifted his head and was striving to speak. It was scarcely a whisper, and we all leaned forward to catch every word.

"Thank Heaven it is over!" was his devout ejaculation. "Every hour of my life since that awful night has been haunted by this confession. Would that I had faced it long ago. It could have been explained then. They might have believed me. Might have believed us." He turned to Aunt Lottie.

"Yes—yes—go on—tell him all," she pleaded.

The old gentleman moistened his lips.

"Two men loved the same woman." He laid his hand on Aunt Lottie's. "Your grandfather and myself. She had assisted us to establish the firm of Van Vellzon & Van Kleek. The venture was doomed to failure before it was ever launched. I know it now, but did not at that time. Your grandfather was visionary, and believed that great wealth was to be found in the smelting of what he called the 'Magic Metal.' Our foundry was established, and a special furnace constructed according to his plans—plans that were changed a hundred times. He was never ready—we were always waiting, and at last I accused him of deception and incompetency. Words passed between us. Hard ones at that.

"It was near the end of the day, and I left him for the purpose of going to a nearby restaurant for my supper, vowing that our relations should be severed that night. When I returned he had started the furnace. The furnace that was incomplete. The flames were roaring — they leaped high above the uncapped, unfinished walls, and seemed about to consume the building itself. A wave of anger swept through me like unto the flames of the furnace when I saw that Miss La Reaux had arrived during my absence. She often did this, as we boarded with her mother, and it was her right, due to the money she had invested, but I was

jealous that she should be alone with him, and annoyed that he should have attempted an experiment we were not ready to begin.

"Again we quarreled, and I mounted to the high platform, from which we were to feed the ore into the furnace. He followed, and, coming near me, I saw that he had been drinking. This made me angrier than ever, and there on the small platform—in that dangerous position—we renewed our bitter incriminations until finally—he struck me. I returned the blow and he fell. Struggling to regain his feet he slipped, and the next instant had rolled into that seething mass of burning metal."

CHAPTER XIX.

"ASHES."

ONCE more Van Kleek paused, and the mournful tick-tick of the basement clock could be heard. Then he continued his story:

"There was a screeching moan—a cloud of vapor—and my friend was gone. There was nothing but flames that leaped and danced. Through the night we waited, sick with fear and fright, and as the dusty windows began to lighten with the coming dawn we again peered into the depth of that awful furnace. The molten metal was slowly cooling, and as if to mock us—dull streaks of crimson color were ribboned through the mass. It may have been that one versed in the chemistry of metals could have told what it was, but—oh, God—it was there!"

Again Van Kleek buried his face in his hands, and we waited.

"It was morning. Out in the street the carts rattled over the pavements; then I penned the confession you have just read."

As the significance of Van Kleek's confession dawned upon me, I wondered at my lack of resentment; asked myself why I could gaze at this old man in sorrow rather than deep abhorrence. In fact, I experienced a moment of annoyance that he had not as yet revealed that part of the story that related to the buttons, and explained the farcical burial we had witnessed that night.

Once again Miss Verlaine divined the trend of my thoughts.

"There is more to tell, Mr. Van Vellzon, but first let me explain my father's connection with the events which followed. Six months after the morning on which they crept away from those grim surroundings he purchased the experimental foundry of Van Vellzon & Van Kleek, including its metals, ores, and furnaces.

"Van Kleek had just returned from Europe, where he had fled to escape a troubled conscience, and Miss La Reaux from California, whence she had gone for the same reason. The negotiations were carried on at her home, and neither she nor Van Kleek accompanied my father when he visited the foundry for the purpose of inspecting it prior to purchase. In fact they had not entered the place after the night of the tragedy. He was a button-maker, having learned the business in the city of Birmingham, and the first thing he did was to make the big buttons, which were destined to play so important a part in the mystery you have been trying to solve."

She paused, as if to gather courage for the revelation which was to follow.

"Those buttons, Mr. Van Vellzon, were manufactured from the metal he found in the unfinished furnace."

"Wait!" exclaimed Aunt Lottie. "Let me tell him the rest, as he must fully understand the horror of what followed. Mr. Verlaine called upon me one night after his foundry was in operation, and gave me four buttons—the four you found in the secret drawer, Thomas—they were the first he had manufactured. In a moment of curiosity I asked what they were made from? Asked—though I dreaded his answer."

"From the metal I found in the unfinished furnace," was the answer.

"It requires no vivid imagination, Thomas, to picture my feelings. The very thing I had fled from was upon me, and as if to increase the mockery it had sought me in the one form above all others that filled me with dread and fright. I know that it was but an accident—a strange coincidence—but they were like great

staring eyes, and the glint of color reflected from those baneful glass orbs were like unto the crimson ribbons that had haunted us from the depth of that smoking furnace."

The old lady was visibly affected. She had buried her face in her hands, and her body shook with emotion. Then she continued:

"Just before Mr. Verlaine departed he asked: 'What disposition shall I make of the mahogany desk that is in the office? I find that it has not been included in my inventory of purchase.'

"It was Van Vellzon's desk, and I did not dare refuse to accept it. Some tribute of respect was due his memory, so I requested that it be sent to my address. A few days after its arrival I hid Van Kleek's confession in the secret drawer. I also made use of it to conceal the buttons, as the mere sight of them was sufficient to unnerve me for hours. But, alas, it required more than the secret recesses of an old mahogany desk to hide the grim tragedy. I began to see those buttons wherever I went. Those burning, wistful eyes would stare at me from every shop and store. In the windows—from the garments of my friends—I never knew just where I would encounter them. But the days went by—and I kept my secret.

"Thomas, I am an old woman now and ready to die, and as I look back across the intervening years I can truthfully say that my motive at that time was unselfish. I wanted to save this man from the awful agony of remorse I knew would follow my revelation. But he began to importune me to destroy his confession, for while it exonerated me, it also convicted him. How long I might have kept silence I do not know, for fate seemed intent upon forcing him to drain the last bitter drop. He had called one night to escort me to one of the city's gayest balls, and I was waiting for a new garment that had been made for the occasion. A great hooded cloak I was to wear for the first time.

"It came—a magnificent creation of broadcloth and satin—embellished with the latest fad in fashionable buttons. Verlaine's big buttons—that gazed at me in grim accusation. They were great staring eyes—mute with despair—grave in their questioning. Then I told him, and at the same time I pleaded with him to collect them. Told him that neither one of us would ever experience a moment of peace or rest until the very last one was respectfully interred. But listen, Thomas, I was artful. I magnified the incident—dwelt upon the impressing terror we would experience, because I was afraid to give up his confession.

"This was the commencement of my dissimulations. My motives were no longer above reproach. 'Collect them all,' I had said, 'then I will return your confession.' And in my heart I knew that he would never be able to do this so long as the four buttons remained in the secret drawer. A few weeks later your father came and demanded the desk, then I suffered the tortures of the damned! I dared not refuse his request, and to have removed the confession in his presence would have been fatal. And now my troubles began to multiply, for if I had been fearful about giving up Van Kleek's confession, it terrified me to think of some one else finding it, and I dared not tell Van Kleek that it had passed out of my keeping."

"The agony of those years will never be known, Mr. Van Vellzon," said Van Kleek as the old lady paused. "Would that our dealings had been conducted with honesty and frankness, but the memory of that night hung over us like a pall of darkness. She did not think that I could collect them, but within twenty-four hours after my promise I stood beside the open casket which was to receive them, and sought Heaven's blessing upon my efforts—vowing that, if necessary, I would make it my life's work. The years slipped by, and at last the buttons were all under my roof, with the exception of five that it seemed impossible to trace. Then, while walking in the park one morning, I was startled to find one of them staring at me from the breast of a sweet-faced miss.

"With fear and trembling I approached her and learned that she was the daughter of Andrew Verlaine. Why I should have done it I do not know, but she was interested; she was kind and sympathetic, and I felt that I could trust her. Within a few

weeks I told her the story—told her the part her father had unconsciously played in the grim button tragedy."

"And I agreed to help you find the missing four," interposed Miss Verlaine.

"Yes," he answered.

"And now I shall make known the motive which actuated me in volunteering my services," continued Miss Verlaine. "I did not credit Mr. Van Kleek's story. I felt that I was listening to the frenzied ravings of an old man, whose reason was tottering, and it was not until I had accompanied him to the home of Miss La Reaux, and heard her admit, with reluctance, that there was such a confession that I understood. Then we begged her to destroy it. Pleaded with her—but she was obdurate. What we did not realize was that it was no longer in her keeping. Finally she wavered; began to hint that she might have mislaid it, and a few days later told us that she had forgotten its hiding-place.

"Her many contradictory statements concerning so important a document impelled us to the belief that she was deliberately withholding the truth. We therefore besought her with greater importunacy to reveal all. At last she admitted that it might be in the old mahogany desk of Van Vellzon. Then I went to Shokan in the guise of a collector of the antique, where I found that you had just removed the desk to New York. Upon my return Van Kleek gave way to maddening fear—others would now learn of the crime, of which he considered himself guilty.

"In his dire extremity he made the error of seeking the aid of his unscrupulous nephew, known to you, Mr. Van Vellzon, as the messenger-boy. Sought his assistance for a money consideration, and you know the acts of violence which followed. As for myself, it would be folly to try and excuse the support I gave to his earlier plans and suggestions, but even then there was a degree of honor in our methods. We thought that we might approach you at your office on the question of purchase, but you know how miserably it failed. Of the subsequent unfair means which were employed I prefer not to speak. This is my only regret, but I can say that I had no part in them."

Miss Verlaine had finished her story, and was perilously near to tears.

"Bring me a plate," I whispered to Mrs. Blake.

In a moment she returned and placed one in my hands. I laid the confession of Van Kleek upon it, crumpling it up as I did so. Then I reached across the table which separated us and handed Miss Verlaine a match.

She understood, and the next instant Van Kleek's confession was a tiny heap of quivering ashes.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

Then a surprise was in store for me. Aunt Lottie tottered over to my chair—threw her arms about my neck and kissed me.

Right there everybody had a cold in the head. A regular—one—two—three—everybody blow together.

"Now I am going to ask a question," said Berritt. "Tell me, Miss La Reaux—why did you have my friend Tommy arrested?"

"To impress Van Kleek with the idea that Thomas had stolen the confession at the time he first called, I was ready to do anything that would shift the blame to others. It was never my intention to allow the matter to be brought to trial. Now you will be able to appreciate my apprehension and fright when I picked up my paper one morning and saw the account of the settlement out of court and the statement that certain family documents were still in my keeping, and that I had agreed to turn them over to Thomas Van Vellzon. Could anything have been more terrifying to Mr. Van Kleek when he read it? This was the very thing I had tried to avoid, therefore I resorted to any means that would help matters, even for a day, and had no intention of being at home to receive Thomas, even though I had invited him to call."

"And that was where my awful mistake was made," interposed Van Kleek, "in allowing my nephew to waylay you, Thomas, but I did not think that he would be so brutal—honestly—I did not. And when they found that you did not have it, the couch was used to gain an entrance to her

home. It was this that frightened Miss La Reaux into consenting to the long deferred tribute of respect we had planned to the memory of your grandfather."

And now, as upon a former occasion—long past—it was morning, and the carts were rattling over the pavements out in the street.

Again, two people went forth, but now the burden was lighter.

Van Kleek's arm was encircled about Aunt Lottie's waist as they slowly went down Mrs. Blake's front steps.

The story of my grandfather's desk is finished, but a wee bit of a chapter remains to be written.

It will be short—the more the pity—because it is the finest tale of all, and it commences like this:

A bonnie lass sits beside a man — six months later, mind you?

If thou art a man thyself who reads, take off thy hat, for 'tis sacred lines I'm writing.

Lucile Verlaine is her name. I must repeat the name—Lucile; and do you know that sometimes I write the name on a bit of paper just because I love it. Then I tear it up quickly, for fear some one will read it.

Lucile is seated at my side—close. I shall repeat that also—close, for I am madly, wildly, gloriously, frantically in love with Lucile.

"Guess what I found out to-day?" said Lucile.

"How many guesses?" I asked.

"Three."

"That you love me," was my answer.

"No—you only have two more."

"You found out—that—" (trying to be sure)—"that I love you."

"No—you have but one guess left."

"That we love each other," I said very quickly, as if squandering all on my last chance.

"No—stop—you are crowding me off the divan."

"There is no other discovery in the whole world that is worth while," I answered.

"Oh, yes—there is. Listen. I shall tell you what I discovered. They were married yesterday."

"Who?"

"Aunt Lottie and Van Kleek."

"How do you know?"

"I saw the announcement this morning. Van Vellzon—La Reaux."

"You will soon see one that reads Van Vellzon—Verlaine," I answered.

"Be careful, sir! Do not forget that I stole the secret drawer."

"You are the dearest little thief in the whole world. You have also stolen my heart."

Then we were silent for a long time, for Lucile had nestled in my arms, and her glorious brown hair was against my cheek.

"I wonder if it would be wicked to say 'God bless the old mahogany hoodoo?'" she asked.

"No—let's do it," I answered.

"And the bill of sale," she added; "can't we include that?"

"No—I have a far more precious document to offer for that coveted blessing."

"What is it?" she asked.

"The chattel-mortgage you intend to issue me—on your affections."

"And it must be sealed," she mused.

"Of course," I said, "by the great seal."

Then I sealed the contract by the sweetest kiss that ever graced a similar document.

(The end.)

FANCY AND IMAGINATION

BY G. A. DELAP

FANCY scarce wings above the mountain height,
Where clouds and mists the upper ether bar;
Imagination is the eagle-flight
That in the empyrean seeks the star!

A Verbal Contract

by William Dudley Pelley

LET the layman accept this as a self-evident proposition: There is no place in the wild-west show business for a mean man. Men who put on a wild-west show from a personal experience of the life they depict, are specimens of the white and red race who ride hard and shoot straight. Men who ride hard and shoot straight are totally incapable of splitting hairs or haggling over legal technicalities. They are men who give their word for their bond. They expect the other fellow to do the same. Therefore, when a man brought up in the financial school of " do to the other fellow the thing he would do to you if you gave him the chance," attempt to extend their lucrative operation to the employment of ropers and Indians who take a man at his face value until proved otherwise, eventually that man finds his soul roosting shivery and naked on the ruins of a defunct proposition for want of a body to wear.

Ball Stockett was a mean man, and Ball Stockett was in the show business. This is equivalent to the statement that Ball Stockett did not hail from the West. It was a safe bet that Ball Stockett had been born somewhere on the east side of New York, of poor but dishonest parents, and considered the world a legitimate field for the plying of any business that held promise of financial reward so long as it kept within that obnoxious thing known as the law.

Twenty-two years in the staging of questionable musical comedy, and a habitat that rarely extended many miles beyond Twenty-Third Street, had not improved his view of life. Forty found his face dissolute and contemptuous. His manner was a sneering contempt for anything but the grossly material. His idea of doing business was to pay the price and get a pull somewhere. His immaculate dress was marred by an evil, selfish face where great dark circles hung beneath whisky-wet eyes.

Such was the man who imagined that because he had made money bullying and maltreating helpless and half-starved chorus girls into a semblance of something supposed to satiate the tired business man, he could take Charley Carstock's " Days of '53 " wild-west show and make it return dividends of forty per cent.

" You're too damned sentimental about your business," he told Charley one night when that drawn-faced and adequately busted individual barely brought the outfit back to New Jersey and had offered it to Stockett for three thousand dollars cash. " Gimme a dozen wagons, this wild-west trick of yours, plenty o' gasoline for the front, some good spielers who don't expect the earth for payment, and half a dozen good concessions, and I'll make so much dough you couldn't pack it under the ticket stand with your feet." Charley muttered something about the rise in the cost of transportation, State licenses, grain for the stock

and money for performers. "Hell!" exclaimed Stockett. "I'd cut out transportation by makin' it a wagon show and stay three nights in a place. Get around the grain question by feedin' the damned plugs less. Money for performers? Cut out half the cost o' canvas men and niggers by makin' 'em double. The Indians wouldn't do it, wouldn't they? Well, they'd do it for me! How? I'd get them out to "hell-and-gone," and then if they didn't want to take what I give 'em and do what I told 'em, let 'em get out and walk back. Contracts? What good is a contract for a player? Pay 'em just enough so it costs 'em more to sue than they'd get back. They won't leave you. I know! There's three men for every one job in this country. Contracts are only for the managers, anyhow—made to hold players. I'd like to see a guy hold me to a contract I didn't want to keep."

Neither Bill McClellan nor myself knew Ball Stockett's history or caliber when we signed for a season with the "Days of '53." It came about this way:

Before Bill went into the show business he'd been a twister. That's what they call the man who rides and breaks bad horses. He'd been a wrangler and a line rider; then he tried Florida and opened a riding school for the high-brows who came in the winter. He tried the cavalry for a time, but finally landed in the show business with five of his own horses that he'd broken and taught. He leased these to the show he might be with, caring for them himself and doing a trick or two out front to make himself valuable. Thus the show saved so much investment in stock; the price of a man to care for them; and also acquired a trick rider, for as a handler of horses Bill McClellan stood preeminent in his profession.

Bill McClellan was a man's man, every inch of the five-foot-five of him. He was as tough as rawhide and his face was the color of copper. His mouth was an abrupt, bellicose line with parentheses of muscles at either corner. His hair was clipped close to his head, convict fashion. Awake or asleep, week-day or Sunday, from one year's end to the other, his dress was corduroy trousers thrust into scrubby riding-boots, a fiery red shirt, dirty sombrero with crumpled edge and flashy scarf of pale blue hanging loose about his neck. He was one of those wicked faced, taciturn Westerners whom one might imagine guilty of any number of crimes until one saw him fondling his horses or cultivated his friendship while bellied against a bar, and heard his troubles told from a heart as big and simple and pure as a child's.

I worked with Bill. I helped care for his stock. Also I had a trick whip-snapping and rope-throwing. I opened with cutting a strand of paper held in my mouth by the snapper of a rawhide and closed with tying up the show's rube. Both were old stunts, but they always made a hit with the kids.

We went with Stockett because of Sam McLeod. A tall, gaunt, picturesque old Westerner was Sam. Born in Utah in the days of the forty-niners, he'd drifted down to Texas. He'd bull-dogged steers, headed outfits, skun cattle and taken part in the Wyoming invasion. He'd traveled in every country on earth. Among punchers, ropers, Indians and showmen everywhere he was known as Square-Deal Mac. Now, at sixty, he was gaunt and weather-marked, philosophical and tolerant. Mac had been running the wild-west trick with Charley's show and in his slow, square, honest way was open to Stockett's proposition when Ball took it over and began to put what he called "pep" into it.

Bill introduced me to Square-Deal Mac in a New York theatrical hotel. We had drinks all around, brushed off several women who persisted in making our acquaintance, and got down to business.

"I'm up the stump, boys," said he, and proceeded to explain how and why. "Stockett's ordered me to get him horses. Oklahoma Red was in town from the pictures over in Jersey the other day and promised to come across with four. We took his offer and booked solid for eighteen weeks. Yesterday the vet gives a look at the stock that come and says they won't get as far as New London. They're all gone forward and get around like four cases o' acute and alarmin' sickness. I don't think Red double-crossed me. Them horses was switched somehow before they was boxed. We got hides that the picture

people didn't want no longer. Here we are, got to open on Monday and no trick stock. Now, boys, this contract is chicken. If you come with me there's fifty a week per head in it. There's a wad behind this show and it's the real goods. I'll get you two-fifty a week for your five-head provided you do what you can in the arena. Save my life, boys. Help me keep my job with Stockett."

Bill said: "I don't know this Stockett. But I know you, Mac, and that you're on the level."

So, because Mac gave us his word, everything would be all right, we discussed the proposition and concluded to take a chance.

II.

BILL and I joined the show in a little town just beyond Springfield, Massachusetts. It took Bill just two minutes to size it up as a good-paying proposition. The main trick was our wild-west exhibition. It had a good gasoline front and a fair side-show. There were seven concessions and the place was run wide open, for that was Stockett's way. He did business by paying something and getting a pull somewhere.

To begin with, the investment wasn't heavy. The canvas had done first duty for a private boxing exhibition of a rich Long Island sport. It had stood Charley three hundred dollars. It was dropped round a square, with seats for the crowd on the south and west side. Along the east side of the arena were the tents for the ropers, and teepees of the Indians. Across the north side the application of good paint and bum art had created an imitation of a border town: The First National Bank, Dead Town Board of Trade, Shorty's saloon and Red Mike's dance-hall. Not the least of the frontier attractions was the axiom on the door of Red Mike's emporium: "Enter without knocking and leave the same way." The drop was on the north side, also, and led out into the space before the horse tent. To one side was the cook-tent. On the other was the pay-tent. Only the white men and the nigger canvas men ate in the cook-tent. The Indians got their own meals in their teepees. I mention all this for the sake of what followed.

We first saw the Ogallalla chief, "Last Arrow," on the afternoon that Bill and I rode on the grounds. We came in the front way, stringing our stock behind us. Chief Ogallalla was on the ballyhoo stand in front. Jimmy Braitewaite, hot and sermonlike, was spieling the rubes his history.

Six feet six tall was old Ogallalla, the North Dakota Indian. I've seen many types of Indians, but the eighty-eight-year-old savage standing above that gaping crowd in his terrible war-paint was the grand old man of them all. His features were the perfect Indian profile, huge and sharp, like a jagged boulder. His coarse hair, braided in two thick cables, hung over his stocky shoulders and was streaked with iron gray.

The Titanic face was heavily daubed with yellow, and from eyes and mouth were slashes of vermilion, as though the features were running with gore. He held a somber blanket around the left shoulder and right waist. In his belt was a deer-foot knife reputed to have removed many a poor duffer's roof. He was gazing stonily over the heads of the crowd, far into unseeing distance.

Bill stopped the file of horses and turned to me.

"My glory, sonny!" he exclaimed. "Look at that Indian. How in the devil has he fallen to this?"

There was that about the old Ogallalla chief I could never quite get over. He was a statue in bronze. Dress him in the costume of a ballet-girl, and Last Arrow would still have been dignified. Yet afternoon after afternoon and night after night he gathered his blanket about him and padded and stumbled about the arena at the tag of the opening procession, or mounted the ballyhoo stand—his only asset for the bread of life, his personality—ending his days in the tinseled mummery of a make-believe universe instead of his own wide wild prairies or star-stabbing, snow-crowned mountains.

What stories he had lived if only he could tell them! This man saw the daylight while Fulton's steamboats were still the national jest. In his boyhood the buffalo had been so plentiful they had darkened the face of

the prairies. He had children before the first prairie-schooner joggled and clacked across the sunset plains to the beckon of the cruel golden fortune where the Pacific smiled. He had sat in stolid silence after the Custer fight and refused to divulge the things he had seen for fear of the things the white man might do.

The pathos of it!

His prairies gone, his people scattered—all the old man could do was pose before the grandchildren of the pale-faces who had stripped him of his heritage, and for the prostitution of his dignity he received his meals, shelter, and a scant few dollars a week. I did not marvel at the respect with which the ropers and bucks approached him. They were Western-bred—and knew!

Complications began as we drew near the Canadian line. We had been out three weeks. One night I found Billie still at the corner of his table in the cook-tent. His hat was off on the table before him. His bald head was in his hands.

"Bill," said I, "we been out three weeks now, and I pretty near spent my wad. Ain't there no pay-days to this show?"

"I know it," said Bill, his mouth a tight, thin line.

"What's the matter with this outfit? Didn't Mac give us his word the swag would come across regularly?"

"Come on," said Bill; "we'll go see Mac."

We found him in the arena, tightening up the lights.

"I don't like the look o' things, boys," said he. "We been playin' good crowds, and there ain't no reason why Stockett shouldn't come across. I tackled him two or three times because the other boys is grumblin'. He says he'll pay up as soon as he squares on some other expenses."

Says Bill savagely: "I ain't on this circuit for my health. And believe me, kid, if I pull out with my stock I'll hitch the canvas to the leg o' the last horse and the whole show will come along after us. Get me?"

The person who kept us from open revolt as we got farther and farther from the railroad was Bella Sullivan. Mac may have called Stockett the financial angel of the show, but it was Bella who supplied all the angelic features beside the coin.

She was Texas-born and Coney-bred. She rode a steer and did a crack-shot trick just before the final hold-up. Then she came in back after the performance, rolled up her sleeves, and supervised the cooking for the bunch. Some girl! She was dark-eyed and Irish, short, stout, and tough as buckskin. Yet no one ever hinted she wasn't a perfect lady. She was married to Mike Sullivan, our head rider.

Folks who pay anywhere from a quarter to a dollar and a half to lamp a wild-west exhibition might take it with a jolt when I say that for doing all this Bella and her man received only sixteen dollars a week between them. Then some folks wonder why the wild west is degenerating.

Bella persuaded us to give the show a chance. She said Stockett was new at the business. Then there might be debts of starting-up that he was working out of. I couldn't see how Bella could take it so easy, her drawing only eight a week and working so hard. She leaned back with a dreamy look in her eyes and answered me:

"It's the call o' the white-tops, sonny. I just can't resist 'em. In the spring-vaudeville it just seems I'd go to pieces. The horizons is callin' and callin'—and I got to get out with the blue sky overhead, the fragrant dirt under foot, the smell o' the sawdust an' horse-sweat, spillin' o' blank-cartridge smoke, and laughter o' the kiddies! It's in the blood, sonny, and I was born to it. I'd almost pay eight dollars a week if Stockett would suddenly refuse to let me work."

Bill overheard her and said: "Well, I don't pay no eight dollars to Stockett for th' privilege o' lettin' me work! We been out three weeks now, and it's seven-fifty I got comin'. I'm goin' to see it pretty quick or Stockett's goin' through th' rest o' life dazed and given to walkin' in confused circles!"

And we were getting farther and farther up into the country without railroads and away from friends.

Finally we reached Vernon—a little town smothered in hills and woods and rubes. The boys come in for supper, and

found Bella sort of down-faced. Finally she dished over some soldiers, Murphies, and lump-jaw—which is to say beans, potatoes, and canned beef—and says:

"We're sort o' short on the eats, boys, but can you make a meal on these?"

The way she apologized was sort of pitiful.

"Look here," says Bill, "what's the reason this outfit can't have the proper chuck?"

"Stockett says we been livin' a mite too high," says she. She said it as though somehow she was responsible.

"Yaas," said Bill, getting up and jerking down his hat. "Look at me! I'm fairly burstin' with the fat o' the land, I am! Milk and honey is runnin' out o' me like sweat! Somethin's wrong with this show, and little Wyomin' Bill is goin' to find out what!"

Then Bella told us. Said she:

"Don't start anything, Bill. Mac is worried enough; can't you see his face? He's got a third interest in this outfit, Bill. It's takin' all the pep out o' him because he's invested his last thousand in this outfit and Stockett won't let him have any say about the management. He knows how the boys feel. But he's afraid to start anything. He's afraid he'll lose his wad. I been with Mac goin' on six years now, and he's on the square. He'll get us out if we stick by him. But he's puzzled. He never run up against a partner like Stockett, and he's givin' him a chance to act the square!"

This was a stunner. Bill was taken back. But peace at such a price is only smothered war.

"We're playin' good crowds," said Bill. "Stockett's buffaloin' him!"

Bill went to Mac.

"The first town we strike," says Mac, "of any size, I'm goin' to see a lawyer."

"I don't need no lawyer to settle my trouble," retorts Bill.

He turned around and stalked off to the pay-tent. Stockett sat at his little folding-table. It was aggravating to Bill because even at the moment Stockett was counting money.

"What do you want?" said Stockett.

"Money," said Bill.

"I ain't payin' off yet," said Stockett. He was natty in his spotless gray Norfolk. A liberal Panama hat was shoved back from his red forehead. In a corner of his mouth was a fat cigar, and he hiccuped with the effects of a good evening meal at the village hotel.

"Why not?" said Bill.

"It's none o' your business!"

"Ain't it, though?" Bill retorted. "Waal, I rather reckon I'm goin' to make it my business. I got a contract with this show for myself and helper and horses for two fifty a week. We ain't drawed a cent since we joined. The grub's rotten, and the boys are ugly. There's goin' to be an understandin' betwixt and between you and me before this outfit goes a mile farther."

"Got a contract, have you?" retorted Stockett. "Let's see it."

"It was a verbal contract with Square-Deal Mac. But it holds. You commissioned him to get tricks for this show before we started, o' course!"

"No!"

"What?"

"I did not! If you've got any such contract, let's see it."

"It was a verbal contract, I tell you. I ain't been doin' business with men that had to put everything down in black and white, they was so stinkin' crooked."

"You're old enough," said Stockett, "not to go on the road with any show for such a dam'-fool figure without a contract. As for the grub, business is rotten, and I'm cuttin' down expenses. Charley Carstock ain't runnin' this troupe no more. Ball Stockett's financing here, and we're out to make money—not drop it."

Bill studied the man a moment. In the silence Stockett counted out fifty dollars and shoved it across. He also got out a book of blank receipts and began writing. He ripped out the slip he had written and shoved that across with the money.

"If you want to accept this," said Stockett, "take it away."

Bill read the receipt.

"This don't say 'On account!'" he exclaimed. "This reads 'for three weeks' work.'"

"Sure it does! I won't pay a damn

cent more. What muttonhead ever told you I was fool enough to pay two hundred and fifty dollars a week for one trick? We'd go broke in a month."

"Sonny," said Bill to me, "go bring Mac."

I brought Mac.

"Mac," said Bill, "did Stockett commission you to book my trick for fifty dollars a head per week?"

"He did," replied Mac calmly. There was something deadly in that calm.

"It's a damned lie!" swore Stockett.

"Shut up, Poison Face!" ordered Bill. "I know Mac, and his word is as good as his bond."

"Well," sneered Stockett, "what you goin' to do about it? This ain't New York, and you ain't got no written contract."

"I don't need any," said Bill, "for what I got to do."

"What's that?" demanded Stockett angrily.

"Make you keep your word for the first time in your dirty life!" announced Bill. Leaving money and receipt lying on the table, he left the pay-tent.

III.

I was some relieved to find that Bill didn't intend to shoot up the slimy thing we were working for.

"We'll leave him flat," declared Bill, back in the horse-tent. "Sonny, go do your trick in the arena and have it over with. Then get the black mare and ride back the seventeen miles to the junction. Find out what facilities they got for shippin' this stock back to New York. I ain't broke yet, Mac, and I'll stake every man, woman, and Injun in the outfit for the fares back to New York that wants to come. We'll wait for the tent to get full to-night, then we'll all pull out. I kind o' reckon Ball Stockett will be sorry for himself when there ain't no show and the crowd gets tired waitin'."

"But there's all the receipts for the three weeks," protested harrowed old McLeod.

Bill gave him a wink.

"It won't be the first time I've seen a hold-up pulled off," said he, "for a righteous purpose."

But whatever rough-house plans Bill had for the opening of the evening show were nipped in the bud.

The performance opened with a procession. First came the Rube, followed by the band boys. Then was Bella and her husband on their ponies. The boys and girls rode on two by two, then the warriors. Finally came Ogallalla, too stiff and old to mount a horse. He stumbled along on foot at the rear as best he could. With somewhat of a jolt I had learned several days before that Stockett had only hired him away from another show to add class to our outfit.

Well, the procession got half-way round the arena when there was a shout, and the end of the line was mussed up.

We turned around in our saddles, and there was old Ogallalla prostrate on his face.

For a minute that broke up the show. Mac came from the band boys' seats, lifted the old man and bore him out to the horse-tent.

Bill was bending over him when the old chief came around.

"What's the matter, chief?" Bill asked.

The old man knew not a word of English. We got Silver Eagle, who did a bow-and-arrow shooting stunt, to act as interpreter.

"He say," announced Silver Eagle, "he hoongry. No food maybe three, four day."

"What!" bellowed Bill. "No food for three or four days! What's the meaning of this? Some one bring Stockett here. Tell him if he don't come, Bill McClellan will fetch him—and it 'll be in sections!"

Stockett had heard of the rumpus, and he came. He was peevish and cursing.

"What in hell's the trouble now?" he demanded. "You yaps are worse than a show o' skirts full o' artistic temperament."

Bill got off his knees by the old Indian's side. He stuck his thumbs in his belt. For several seconds he eyed Stockett without speaking.

"What's this damned redskin stoppin' this show for?" demanded Stockett.

Suddenly Bill stepped up to the boss.

"You can cut out that cussin'," he ordered. "Let me inform you it's as good as your thumb-nail life is worth to pull any peevishness in th' present state o' my sentiments. I want to know how long it's been since this old man has had food?"

"I told him four days ago that if he didn't want to help the boys pack the canvas and take down the seats he wouldn't eat. Every man that travels for me has got to make himself useful. I ain't got no use for a lot o' kettle-faced mutts to stand round and pose!"

"I suppose," said Bill, "you carefully explained to the old feller that he must do this when you hired him—before you took him away from where he had the chance to refuse—oh, of course!"

"Do you think I'm that slow?" demanded Stockett.

"I think you're that much coyote!" retorted Bill. He turned angrily to Silver Eagle. "Ask him," said he, "how much this pole-cat offered him to come with this show?"

There was more Ogallalla talk. Silver Eagle said:

"He say chief white man say he give twenty-fi' dollar week come play show. He come. No money, no food since he come."

"How about the rest o' you Injuns?" demanded Bill.

"Bella come with food to teepees," said Silver Eagle.

Bella, caught in her good works, blushed shamefacedly.

"I never thought of Ogallalla," said she. "He never came to the cook-tent, and I supposed he got his grub in his teepee. Must have been the old man was too proud to come."

That was it. Old Ogallalla had realized his mistake in being enticed by glaring offers from his friends and his other contract and was enduring his lack of funds and his hunger with Indian stoicism. Helping with the canvas for him was out of the question. Only an Eastern skunk like Stockett would have ordered it.

"Did you offer the chief twenty-five a week to come with this show?" demanded Bill.

Stockett lost his temper.

"It's none of your damned business how much I offered him! I'm running this show, and if you don't like it you can take your stock and your men and get to hell out! If you don't want to get out, stay where you are and shut up! If this old guy is too proud to work, and can't do any trick in the arena but stand around and look wise, he can rustle his own grub. If you're aimin' to start somethin', start it now! We'll see who's boss here, you or me! Because you got five head of horses here don't prove you own this show!"

This speech might have done the business on Twenty-Third Street. But it was rash indiscretion before a crowd of men who ride hard and shoot straight.

Portentous silence followed its delivery. Bill glanced down at the old man who arose in his feebleness and was assisted to the horseman's cot behind the mangers. Maybe something that Bill saw in the old man's helplessness, something of the old West speaking to him in the red man's stern suffering rather than tempt further the white man that had already humbled and maltreated him so much, prompted his action.

"It's plain, you pale-faced skunk," said he quietly to Stockett, "that you never was in the Indian country and know the infamy you're heapin' on this old man's head. But I been there and I know. Maybe, too, you can skin men like me and Mac and Sonny and the rest o' the boys—who can take care o' ourselves and was born with our eyes open. But it goes ag'in' my Western grain to see you takin' advantage of an old man like him who had his grandchildren before you wore diapers! Now, then, you boys stand back. Me, little Billie McClellan, is goin' to give this human weasel the worst lickin' he ever received in all his born days!"

Stockett carried a gun, and he clapped his hand to his hip. But before his elbow had bent, a fist like knotted oak had caught him on the point of the jaw and sent him end over end. Before his body had stopped tumbling, Bill was on top of him with a curse. Fingers like steel grippers dug in Stockett's throat. He cut him in the face and banged his ugly head upon the ground.

He threw him around the horse-tent so alarmingly that it stampeded the horses, who tried to break tie-ropes and escape. Finally Bill leaped off him and grasped the big raw-hide from my hand with which I snapped the paper strands in my lips. One, two, three, four—terrible cuts he lashed across Ball Stockett's body. He only stopped when Bella lurched for his murderous arm and hung dead-weight upon it.

"Wait, I'll get you for this!" cursed Stockett. He was a mass of bruises and blood.

Then Bill gave an order.

"Peg him out, boys!" he commanded.

The ropers, hungry to be in on the scrap, leaped on the blinded and cursing man. In one minute and thirty-five seconds Ball Stockett was securely pegged to the ground of the horse-tent. Then, cursing and swearing unthinkable blasphemies, foaming in his rage and pain, he struggled fruitlessly while Bill went through his pockets and removed all the money from his person. The key to the strong box of the show was also taken. Bill sent me for its contents.

Over four thousand dollars came to light in the ensuing ten minutes.

With the helpless showman pinned by wrists and ankles to the filthy sod, Bill sat on the cot and paid every man in full the amounts due him according to their verbal contracts, taking each man's word for the amount. He handed old Ogallalla seventy-five dollars in cash—more money than the old warrior had ever had in his life.

There was ten hundred and seventy-eight dollars left after all the men had received their money. It represented the profits of the three weeks' work.

Bill took one thousand of it and handed it across to Square-Deal Mac.

"There's your investment, Mac," says he. "And the next man you go in business with, be sure he hails from the West."

Mac took the money in a dazed sort of way.

Then Bill did a queer thing—a thing after the manner of man he was. He took the seventy-eight dollars remaining, restored it to Stockett's wallet, and shoved the wallet in the showman's hip-pocket.

"Why not keep it all?" snarled Stockett, his eyes poisonous with hate.

"Because," said Bill, "it belongs to you. Now, boys, we'll leave him lie here till he cools off. Go on with the show. The crowd out there has paid their money. We'll give 'em a fair deal, but we'll close to-night."

The boys complied with alacrity, stuffing their money into their chaps as they made for their horses. They rode into the arena and the show went on. Some sensation it would have made had the crowd known that the owner of the outfit was lying pegged down in his own horse-tent within a hundred feet.

I did my stunt and went to the cook-tent, where Bella was feeding the old chief. He accepted the food with quiet dignity, holding his precious seventy-five dollars in his huge hand like a little child.

Bella was weeping.

Bill came in while I was stuffing with grub in preparation for my long ride to the junction.

"You oughtn't to have done it, Bill," said she. "He ain't to blame. He just didn't know that to run a show like this he's got to go absolutely on the square."

"He knows it now," said Bill.

I went to the horse-tent for my pony. As I passed Stockett he made language at me that turned me cold with the blasphemy of it.

"I'll get him for this! Oh, I'll get him proper!" he cursed. "Since he didn't need a written contract, maybe I won't need a written contract to keep his stock. We'll see!"

I didn't know what Stockett meant by this. But before midnight I found out. As I rode off the grounds I had a sneaking feeling that if any one unpegged Stockett it would be big-hearted Irish Bella.

But the worst was yet to come!

IV.

It was a long, hard ride to the junction. My business kept me there an hour.

A bright moon came up as I turned my horse back to the show-grounds. Somewhere in the little Vermont village the town-clock struck one as I saw the white

tents of the outfit lying in the valley below. The moonlight was extraordinarily bright. Things were uncannily real in its weird luster.

Maybe, as I rode up to the entrance and breathed in relief that nothing had happened so far, that was why I noted a moving shadow across the arena that instantly stopped as I turned my horse in.

Curious, I stopped dead. Then carefully I wheeled the pony so I could barely see through the main entrance.

What I saw as I waited was a canvas for that painter fellow, Remington. The tents and teepees were stark white and silent beneath that witching illumination. No light was burning on the grounds. But two forms were in there, moving stealthily under the moon.

It needed only the slinking cock-sureness of one to tell me it was Ball Stockett.

It needed only the padding, bent-over, subtle, and sinister figure of the other to show me it was old Ogallalla.

I saw, too, that Stockett did not know he was being shadowed.

But when Stockett stealthily approached the well-known front of Bill's tent, my heart bounded suddenly into my throat. For in the bright moonlight something gleamed wickedly.

In Ball Stockett's hand was a knife.

Swiftly I debated what I should do. Would I dash in and rout the danger lurking so close on Bill? What could I accomplish? On the other hand, what was old Ogallalla doing so late in the arena?

Somehow in that moment came a strange confidence in the old Indian. He had something in mind to accomplish. I would wait and watch. In the last resort, I had my gun at my hip, and, though it was loaded with blanks, I could arouse the outfit.

Stockett crept nearer and nearer to Bill's dog-tent. Fifty paces behind him padded the huge shadow of Ogallalla. The old man was directly in front of Silver Eagle's teepee — the Sioux who did the archery trick.

Then the old chief executed a strange maneuver. He disappeared in the shadow of the teepee. When he returned he had some implements in his grasp.

Then I understood.

The old chief had known what Ball Stockett would do in the coming night. He knew, too, that his aged muscles could not grapple with the showman if he planned to harm his fearless friend. So the fierce old eyes that had so often searched the prairie night saw something in the moonlight that not even the eyes of the white man would have noted in the day. He had secured Silver Eagle's bow and one of his wicked arrows!

That was it! Guns might do for the white man. But the simple ash bow and single arrow was good enough for the man who was full-grown when the camp-fires of the forty-niners had twinkled across his invaded West. These he could understand and utilize.

There was no haste in his manner. No one ever saw an Indian in a hurry. His swiftest movements are made slowly, because he makes no lost motions. As no one knew how many white men had fallen before that portentous deliberation, so no one could claim the thing had not been done by him before. There was no hesitation, no faltering. I saw him very plainly bend there in the teepee shadow and saddle the arrow to the bow.

Stockett had now reached Bill's tent. Before he turned in for whatever murderous deed he might have in mind, he stood up straight in the moonlight and scanned the arena. A bright, shining mark, was his white breast!

Then as I drew my gun for alarm, in case the dénouement went wrong, I saw old Ogallalla let his blanket fall to the ground. His huge hand seemed to smother the feather of the wicked arrow, saddled on the cord. Once!—twice!—three times!—he willowed the bow to test its pliancy. Then, as Stockett poised there, he drew it on a target with his eye.

Some tableau!

Bright moonlight; dark and sinister in silhouette the form of the gigantic old chief; his Titanic profile bent in line with the arrow; the three rakish feathers pointing out behind; one foot slightly forward; the instrument of death palpitating on the draw. For him the walls of canvas did not

exist. The war-paint travesty for a few puny dollars a week was forgotten. Once again he was the red man primeval, sinister, and deadly, calling back all the skill of his years.

I heard a snap, a whir—a cry of mortal agony! In the instant that he posed there, listening, the arrow had been released, and with a half-shriek, half-sob, the whole ending in a bubbling grunt as the blood deluged into his lungs, Ball Stockett pitched forward with an Indian arrow in his heart!

An Indian arrow is no joke! An effeminate and sophisticated East, educated in Springfields and Krags, may think with a wink of an Indian's arrows. An effeminate and sophisticated East has never beheld one of those lightning darts leave the bow of a genuine red man who shot them on the prairies before the white man came, and with wicked malignity cleave the air swifter than the eye can follow. An Indian arrow, shot into the side of a thundering buffalo, can pierce the carcass and protrude the other side. A bullet from the most powerful Colt's revolver cannot do the same!

We found Ball Stockett stretched on the ground. He was face upward, his features contorted in some fearful agony. In his clutchless right hand was the famous deer-foot knife of Ogallalla. In his heart was Silver Eagle's arrow!

Verily there was no emotion, no expression on the old chief's face as he came up to where my shots had aroused the camp. That face was incapable of expression. Immobile as mountain rock was his profile. The deep-set eyes in the moonlight were like sockets in his skull. He gazed upon the man he had murdered as a hunter might glance at the game which he had shot. How many men had he thus gazed on—I wondered! This man was old when Custer was a stripling.

Ogallalla gathered his blanket about his waist. Holding it with one hand, he reached the other across Stockett's body and untwisted the knife from his contorting fingers. He made no sound. He simply dug it in his belt and padded away.

Bill rolled groggily from his cot. Blubbered-eyed and frowzled he appeared at the entrance to his tent to learn the cause of the ruckus. We saw the whole diabolical plot—when Bella owned up.

Taking pity on the wretch, she had unpegged him. Stealing Ogallalla's knife, he had crept to Bill's tent, meaning to stab it in his heart and throw the blame on the aged savage. Thus could he lay claim to McClellan's horses yet rid himself of a non-producing old man, the booking of whom he regretted.

Bill said to me: "Work your brains on it, sonny! Shake your head and start your thoughts ticking! Him hobblin' round the arena like a broken-legged cayuse—rubes lampin' him for a few bucks a week—and him able to shoot like that! I'll get him a contract on the Big Time, or Bison Bill, and me 'll fuse in such pandemonium that the rube sheriffs won't be able to do more to separate us than land a wallop round the edge of us now and then and run like hell!

V.

Old Chief Last-Arrow now plays Big Time.

I saw him the other day. With sure eye and steady hand the old Indian put four arrows out of six into the eighteen-inch target thirty paces as easily as the night he put one arrow into the breast of Ball Stockett at fifty. He draws thirty dollars a week for his trick. No longer does he stumble and stagger round the arena of chewed ground at the tag of an opening and closing procession. But when his stunt is done he walks silently to his camp-stool before his teepee and there he may be found, sitting erectly in perfect silence, hour after hour, day after day, thinking—thinking—thinking—of the days of his lost youth, of his lost people, of the changes his eight-and-eighty years have witnessed. So with his wants supplied—alas how pitifully few—he will continue to sit until the end, calmly and majestically waiting for the death that at the close of some show-day shall beckon to him from the crimson sunset. Thus I saw him last, his face a hideous yellow, seamed with a million wrinkles, gazing into unseeing distance and thinking—thinking—thinking! He is the *l'envoi* of his race, the glory of the West of yesterday, the real American!

Out of the Mouths of Heathen

by Miles Overholt

THERE are two things I have always worried about. One is: Who is the first person at a theater; and the other: Why don't Chinamen whistle? The last one ain't keeping me awake nights any more—not since I met up with Ling Chow out at Redshirt, which town advertises itself as a part of Nevada.

The difference between Chinese ain't any too noticeable, anyway, half of 'em being cooks, and the rest laundrymen, but when they all join hands and eliminate whistling as a conservation measure, or something, and spell the same kind of hen trackage, and twist their front names around behind their backs, why I don't wonder they worshiped this guy Confuse-us.

But it wasn't any trouble to pick out Ling Chow in Redshirt. He was a builder of chow, a cook, probably getting his name from Mr. Hoover's national pastime, and he was the only Chinese in our well-slighted city. Ling Chow wasn't any social favorite, you understand, but being a Chinaman, he was noticeable, and being a human, he was picked on.

The catch in that whistling puzzle was sprung in Bud Coulihan's saloon one of those dank, prosaic nights when all nature, excepting the saloon kind, was wrapped in repose. Ling Chow injected himself into the home circle or family-entrance of Bud's foolish factory seeking to get on the outside of a well-thought-out thirst in a wholesale and tin bucketish manner.

Now, it came to pass—or at least I came to pass, that being all I had been doing for an hour while the other members of our set were holding fulls and fours and hectic flushes—as I say, it came to pass that Lafe Keep and Hi Meeker and Bad Milligan and Long Bill Langtry were all in what you might call a playful mood. And that made it serious for Ling Chow. Having taken over all the right, title, and interest in my worldly goods, they decided to frolic a bit with the Celestial.

After surrounding him and cutting off his retreat, these four Alkalikes began to teach that Chineser some of the latest dances, including the stare steps.

They made it an inducement for him to make a Gertrude Hoffman out of himself for the time being by gouging little periods and exclamation points and other pointed remarks in the floor with their bullet-headed six shooters around a couple of his feet, and he did his best to please.

Then they added to the repertoire of the delightful affair by forcing him to sing little bits from the late ballads, like "The Moon Shines To-Night Along the Wabash," and "Little Alley Moany," which wasn't much of a success, musically speaking, if you ask me, because this here Ling Chow wasn't in any sense a song-bird. I never

saw a Chinese that was. Why, they even have to use chopsticks to play the piano. At least that's what I thought it was when I saw one doing it, although some educated son-of-a-gun told me it was xylophone.

Anyway, Ling Chow wasn't exactly a Mary Garden. He sounded a lot more like the Garden variety than the Mary, but these four gun-carrying infidels didn't seem to mind. Their laughing was louder than Ling Chow's singing, anyway.

Then one of those brilliant stars of about six feet of magnitude got hold of a thought somewhere, though I can't imagine how he was able to hold it long enough to place it in circulation.

Said "Bad Bill" Milligan:

"I've always heard that a Chink couldn't whistle. Let's learn the son-of-a-gun to warble a few notes."

But right there is where the machinery stuck. They couldn't move an inch. That Chinese wasn't constructed of the right kind of material, it looked like. If he had to whistle for a living, all his relatives would have starved to death. Those two-by-four-flushers got real mean, too, and abusive. They treated Ling Chow most discourteously, to say nothing of pulling his hair and slapping him, and shooting unnecessary holes through his clothes.

But it didn't bring them a whistle for a plaything.

Ling Chow was scared. I never saw anybody so plumb disheartened over anything. He was pale and everything. But he didn't whistle. He begged his tormentors for his life and other incidentals, but all he got was an extra cuff, and it wasn't an affair that would appeal to the esthetic atall.

I was as mad as I could get over a purely non-personal matter, but he wasn't my Chinaman. If I was going to start out in the prime of life that way defending Chinese, I would go some place where they were thick so's I could make a showing and get credit.

After they saw Ling Chow wasn't going to do any twittering for the nice gentlemen, Long Bill Langtry became attached to a grand little idea.

"I know what's the matter with this here Chink," he said. "He's got the wrong queue. Let's shave his head so's he'll have plenty of air for his brains."

Which barberish remark was welcomed with a good deal of joy by those anti-Chinesers. So they grabbed Ling Chow and tied him together all in one piece, and Hi Meeker produced a knife which had understudied a razor. The bartender and I began to wish we were a national guard or something so's we could stop the show. But that is as far as we got. Just about that moment of time Ward Mason, manager of the Gold Bar mine, busted into the middle of the scenery. That is, he got in verbally, but he'd been an unnoticed eye and ear specialist, he having been playing those silent organs upon the busy little fiesta for quite some time.

I guess he must have been rehearsing with a wild-cat or something, because he landed in the middle of the merry little party with all of his propellers working at once. I could see a cold, metallic gleam in his left eye and another in his right hand, and those four-to-one warriors began reaching for a strap or some other invisible means of support. It was what a lot of folks would call a stirring moment.

Then Ward ordered a retreat, and the enemy was leaning against the wall, face backward, longing for a more settled condition of affairs. Their guns were reposing on the bar at the earnest solicitation of their persuader. I loosened up the ties that bind and the Chinaman fled the scene. It wasn't altogether his scene, so he didn't have any trouble fleeing it.

Mason kind of ill-treated those playful cutthroats for a while by laying the heavy end of his six-shooter against their most vulnerable features, and then he opened the door and kicked 'em out into the welcoming maw of the yawning darkness. Which is darn near poetry. You ask me.

It took seven or eight dollars' worth of Jim Plughoff's time to induce Ling Chow not to go plunging out into the world away from Redshirt, Ling being the only cook in camp, and Plug's restaurant the only feeding station. Plug promised to insure his life or take some such protective measure, so Ling stayed.

The next night Mason and I happened to be toying with the viands at a kind of a late hour, and this here chow Chinaman slopped over out of the kitchen and into the dining-room, and stood in the door about a Chinese minute.

" Hello," said Mason.

" 'Lo," said Ling.

" Tell me," said Mason, " why you can't whistle."

The smile which Ling had been wearing faded into a kind of a gray grin, and then fizzled entirely. But he came closer.

" Do any Chinese whistle? Really," insisted Mason, " I'm interested."

" No Chinamans whis'le less he die," chowed the cook. " Chinamans flaid; dev'l in whis'le."

" Why?" I inquired, it not costing me anything.

Ling Chow came closer to Mason.

" Long time 'go in Yang-tze-Kiang countly eve'ybod' whis'le," he said, not aiming any of his chop suey language at me. " All go lound whis'le for money. One time Laing Poo—him gleat luler—get mad. Say cut off head ev'ybod' who whis'le. Mebbe t'ousan' loose-um head. Nobod' whis'le now; muchee flaid."

" Sounds like a Chinese laundry bill to me," I remarked.

" Very interesting," said Mason.

" Now Chinamans whis'le, 'nen die right 'way. No Chinamans whis'le foh mebbe million dolla'," said Ling Chow.

" Well, that being the case," said Mason, carefully pushing the prunes out of sight, " I don't blame you much for resisting those playful bandits. I know those Chinese superstitions are world beaters. Personally, however, I think under the circumstances I would have warbled a few notes."

" Me, I would have been whistling yet," I said, which brought no applause whatsoever.

Then Ling Chow went back to his chow, not thanking Mason or anything for ending the war. But I observed that Mason got a better grade of pie and pudding and other Chinese puzzles after that.

After occupying the rest of the uneventful, but wide, evening with taking care of the animals, such as bucking the tiger, feeding the kitty, holding a bob-tail and the like, I strolled up toward my lonesome cabin along about bedtime. Not being a constable or a candidate or anything, I didn't run when I saw a little surreptitious guy trying to blend into the night-time under Hi Meeker's cabin window at the edge of Main Street.

Maybe there was something I ought to become addicted to, I said to myself in an aimless sort of a manner, so I sneaked over to the cabin, aiming to become one of Eve's droppers, too. But Ling Chow—for it was indeed he (literary stuff)—arose from his Chi-nese and went away from there in what could properly be called haste.

You can't hear a first-class murder being plotted every night, unless you go to the movies and hear 'em with your eyes, so I lay down there beside myself among the sage-brush and listened.

It appeared that Bad Bill Milligan and Hi Meeker and that other pair of deuces had decided to sneak up to Mason's cabin and mangle him up a lot and then kill him a lot more, that being their idea of revenge, or settling a bet, or something. They certainly were mad at Ward Mason.

" And," said Long Bill Langtry, " we'll shave his head, too, and make the son-of-a-gun whistle."

About this time I heard a slight accidental noise on my numb side and Ling Chow came sneaking in under the window. He wasn't bothering me any, so I kept still.

Then Bad Milligan said:

" And we'll brand him with our private mark."

And then they thought of a lot more pain-producing methods which the Germans hadn't yet invented, and if they were going to apply them all they would have to hire a well-filled hospital, or there wouldn't be near enough material.

The general idea seemed to be that they must have a care. Their alibi was almost as important as the murder itself, they argued one to the other.

Mason's cabin was one of a couple of dozen up near the Gold Bar mine, and all of them were populated with people. So they had to murder with tact.

"Here's my plan," said Hi Meeker. "One of us 'd better go up to his cabin, friendly-like, get into the shack on some ol' pretext, and then when he ain't lookin' knock him out. Then we kin drag him down here and wait till he comes out of it, and then start the fireworks."

Oh, those were the brave boys.

But there weren't any lights for miles around, and if they could wield the sleeping potion at the proper stage of the performance, so he wouldn't make any noise, why they could get away with it with a good modicum of ease. Then they turned the cards and Long Bill won the job of getting into Mason's cabin and mussing him up.

They worked out the details with the same kind of glee that Old Bill Hohenzollern and Fred Hindenburg would use, which figured out something like this:

All four of them were to insert themselves into a coulee just below Mason's cabin. Long Bill was to go up and get in by offering to apologize for the previous evening's performance and promise to improve with rehearsals or something, and then lean on Ward's head with his six-gun. After that joke had gone over and Mason was convulsed with mirth or some other convulser, Bill was to come out and whistle shrilly twice.

But there were two burning questions to the mirth-provoking deviation to be quenched.

The second one was: What if Mason wouldn't behave himself, and Long Bill had to suddenly leave in the middle of the night without his hat?

With the commotion that might be commoted, if Mason happened to be a good commoter, it wouldn't do to get excited or make any strong and unusual noise, lest it attract attention from the proletariat, or other foreigners, these four diplomats argued. There must be a mild and patient way of notifying the other hard-boiled brothers.

"It's gotta be a ca'm warnin'," said Lafe Keep, "so's to make out it don't mean nothin'—one of them harmless sort of sounds like whistlin' a tune, or wavin' a handkerchief."

But in view of the darkened condition of the night, they discarded the handkerchief idea.

"Bill, he don't know no tunes," spoke up Hi Meeker.

"Don't, huh?" biffed back Bill. "You orter hear me whistle 'Annie Laurie.'"

"Let's hear yuh," said Hi.

And Long Bill proceeded to render that quaint selection from El Scotto. It darn near sounded like "Annie Laurie" at that.

In a couple of minutes the whole happy family was whistling that "Annie Laurie" tune, and it made me sick. So I crawled out so's Ling Chow couldn't make a record of my departure, and if I had been six or eight men I would have gone up and told Ward Mason to hide or change his name.

Instead of that, I struggled back to town to hunt up Zack Bowman, the city marshal, and see if he could quit holding up Coulihan's bar long enough to stave off a murder.

But what with meeting an old friend from Tonopah who must have put something in the cider, why I didn't remember back any further than fifteen minutes from date. I forgot all about Zack, Ward Mason and other folks too numerous to mention, and went to bed.

As soon as the little gleams of intelligence began to seek out the crannies and nooks in my gilt-edged dome the next day, I hurriedly got a lot of thoughts together and went out to see if something hadn't ought to be done.

About the first well and favorably known person I met up with on that there historic occasion was Ward Mason.

Gosh! He was alive!

He told me all about what I didn't know about, just like he hadn't been about two-thirds dead the night before.

He was asleep, he said, when he heard a noise which didn't remind him of rats or anything like that because it was too much like one of those dull sickening thuds, with a couple of groans at the end like a pair of punctuation marks, or something. He didn't get up, because maybe it wasn't anything and besides he was sleepy.

Then in about a minute he heard, faintly and sort of trembly, what might pass for the old familiar air of "Annie Laurie" on the cool night air—making two airs in all.

It sounded so peaceful and home-like that Ward just turned over on his opposite side and slumbered himself to sleep. But when he got up at daylight he found an object in human form piled all over itself at the corner of the cabin. The object was Long Bill Langtry with his head in a very poor second-hand condition, having been discouraged with an ax, or something.

Which accounts for the groan feature of the cheap, but diversified evening.

So from that point Mason and I herded ourselves into the Palace Restaurant for our customary repast, I having not repasted since the day previous, and it then being after repasting time.

Mason asked the waiter to send the cook in to him, which he did, thinking we were going to kill him, maybe.

Ling Chow slippered in and stood in the doorway.

" 'Lo," he said.

" Hello," said Mason. " Come closer."

He did.

" It has occurred to me that I need a first-class whistler in my business," said Ward. " The pay 'll be twice what you're getting here."

Ling Chow took off his chow habiliments. He's a pretty smart Chinaman for grasping other things besides cooking tools.

" Me learn plitty soon play ukulele," he said, going after his hat.

But I certainly would like to know who is the first person at a theater.

U U U

A LETTER FROM HOME

BY SERGEANT RUFUS STICKNEY

YOU may talk about your rubies,
You may prate about your pearls,
You may sing of beauteous women,
And of gorgeous dancing girls;
But the Army Man will tell you
That no matter where you roam,
There is nothing half so precious
As a letter straight from home.

There are things we hold more precious
Than the spark of life itself;
Thus the bold seafaring pirate
Risked his life for loot and pelf,
But the Army Man will tell you
That no matter where you roam,
There is nothing half so precious
As a letter straight from home.

Though the wealth of all the Indies
Were my legacy to-night,
And I had in my possession
Glitt'ring gold and jewels bright,
I would count them all but useless,
Just life's friv'lous froth and foam,
And I'd trade them all most gladly
For a letter straight from home.

Crooks and Coincidences

by A.L. Crabb

CAPTAIN PRES SMILEY, of the detective department, cursed six of his picked men vehemently, and at length:

"We've been callin' you fellers detectives," he roared, "but that is a little system of kiddin' that is about due to be cut out. Y' ain't detectives. It takes backbone and brains to make detectives, and you ain't got neither. You couldn't catch a Bowery pedler for sellin' bananas without a license unless he wore a bell. Four days ago I send you fellers out to get Fadeaway Garrity. Them was my orders: to get Fadeaway Garrity. You had a chance to put this department on velvet, and you fell down flat.

"Now Cal Dugan is raisin' hell with the commish, and eggin' them on for our scalps. And here I am with my hands tied by a bunch of simps that ain't got the nerve or the sense to run a manicure joint — and callin' themselves detectives!"

The captain paused for breath. "I want Fadeaway Garrity," he bellowed, "and I want him bad; and if you don't get him, I'll put every mother's son of you in the bread line; s' help me."

Up to this point the six had accepted his outburst in silence. Thus dismissed, they paused irresolutely. Herman Vogt, the youngest, took a step toward the desk.

"Cap'n," he ventured.

"Well, what?"

"Well, this: maybe you're right about our sense, but what you said about our nerve, cap'n, ain't square, and you know it. You know that there ain't a one of us ever crawfished on any sort of proposition. Now listen here: you didn't give us a chance to tell you a while ago, but we nabbed Blinky Deepen over at the Dead Rat, and he says that Fadeaway Garrity left town two days after he pulled off that job at Dugan's. So you set us after the smoothest crook in America after he's already left town, and then bawl us out if we don't catch him. And then this: "I never set eyes on Fadeaway Garrity in my life."

"Them excuses don't go here," growled the captain. "Get out and get Garrity."

Buck Garrity was a burglar schooled in all the agencies that contribute toward proficiency in his profession. While yet in his middle teens, Buck graduated from the class of common yeggsters into that select coterie of artists whose handicraft incites at once the reverence of gangland and the unavailing execrations of the police.

About this time Buck underwent a rechristening, the prosaic Buck being displaced by the more expressive Fadeaway. This was fit, relating as it did to an aggravating propensity of Buck's which promptly manifested itself whenever the police evinced any special desire to lay their hands upon him.

So the fame of Fadeaway Garrity waxed garish and traveled far. But, as in many another case, success begot a condition of conceit that entailed serious consequences. By way of relieving the excess of his exuberancy, he broke into big Cal Dugan's residence and stole Mrs. Dugan's much-famed jewels. Mr. Dugan, it may be understood, was a political power in his ward. Also, Mr. Dugan held in his hands strings which when pulled aroused various activities throughout the city. The robbery, therefore, might in itself be called a serious bit of thoughtlessness; but Garrity went further than merely pilfering Mrs. Dugan's baubles. He left some scrawled lines stating that the purpose of the robbery was not mercenary, but wholly to determine how much and how loud Mr. Dugan could squeal.

That carried the matter too far, and promptly the edict went forth that Fadeaway Garrity was long past due at headquarters, and unless he were presented shortly some choice jobs would pay the forfeit. Garrity, perceiving a genuineness in their search, gently faded away.

A week later he reappeared in St. Louis, and shortly thereafter he abstracted various valuables from the palatial home of State Senator Emil Bernheim. The job was so neatly accomplished that the efforts of the police met with severe rebuttal. The chief, however, dug up from his files a two days' old message from the New York authorities which contained an account of the adventures of one Fadeaway Garrity; also, an urgent appeal for the St. Louis authorities to watch closely for a rather handsome, well-dressed man of twenty-four with a thirty-eight caliber nick in his left ear, since there would likely be physical connection between such a gentleman and any robbery bearing the marks of artistic craftsmanship. Forthwith the bluecoats set zealously to examining ears, and Fadeaway discreetly removed his maimed auditory organ to San Antonio.

There resided Mr. Jules Careza, whose income from oil holdings rendered him fat and opulent. Mr. Careza sat at his desk one night, intently conning papers of a financial purport.

"Ain't this the night to declare dividends, bo?" inquired a soft voice in his ear.

"W-w-who are y-you?" requested the frightened Mr. Careza.

"I'm the guy that made Wall Street famous. And now, Mr. Greaser, if you'll trot over that roll of yellowbacks, I'll skidoo."

Mr. Careza's frightened fingers strayed toward the electric button at the side of his desk, but the attempt died early.

"Don't do it, bo," said Garrity, pressing the cold muzzle of his automatic against Mr. Careza's side. "Them stunts ain't popular none with me." Saying which, he frisked the coveted roll, swung himself lightly over the window-sill, and was gone. A spasmodic, gurgling yell rang through the building, followed by a babel of excited voices and running feet.

By such deeds did Fadeaway Garrity, hitherto a figure to be reckoned with in Gotham alone, gathered national importance unto himself. Under glaring captions, the greatest dailies exploited his deeds with lurid force. These accounts were copied and recopied by the smaller dailies and weeklies for the benefit of an avid constituency. For the nonce, the yellow-backed argosies of Alkali Ike had poor patronage.

Meanwhile the police, aroused by the importance of their quarry, redoubled their efforts. Wherefore, Fadeaway deemed a temporary retirement to inactive life the better part of valor. He chose New Orleans as a good place in which to rest from his labors, and engaged a room at the Dauphine; this because police advices affirmed that he always stopped at the best hotels, and the Dauphine was not of "the best."

Here his habits were regular: he bathed, shaved, dined, and slept with automatic precision. He made his toilets with fastidious care, and his attire was strikingly free from the freakish cuts and clashing color-schemes so much in vogue among the patrons of the Dauphine. He wore his hair long for two reasons: the fashion became him, and it enabled him to conceal a blemish in his left ear.

Another item needs to be related here.

Fadeaway Garrity, at this time, was studiously unmindful of the papers. Some days before a particularly vivid but unfounded account of his life had so annoyed him that he had vowed to boycott all pressdom. That vow cost him dearly.

One day, just before luncheon, he was sitting in the lobby of the Dauphine. Near him sat a foppishly dressed young man with jet-black mustache and piercing gray eyes. Across the lobby, a game of Rum was in noisy progress.

We will now drop some weeks rearward and gather up another strand of our story.

Practically every institution under the sun has now and then a bee buzzing in its bonnet. The loudest buzzing, albeit the hardest stinging at times, of all these bees are the ones whose sibilations resound, as it were, from within the millinery of the press.

Find our *Mr. Raffles;* hail him with a set salutation; and then step over to our office and get five thousand in gold. So ran, in substance, a flaming advertisement in a metropolitan daily. That started a great rage. Dozens of staid old publications, whose subscription-lists were kept free of *hoi polloi* by steadfastly refusing premiums and cut rates, caught up the idea hungrily. Many papers of less conservative tendencies were already crying their readers on to as many slippery *Raffleses*. The demand for these elusive gentlemen for a while exceeded the supply, and numbers of papers were compelled to book Rafflesian appearances, or disappearances, weeks ahead.

The New Orleans *Morning Planet* engaged the services of an aspiring *Raffles* who hailed from New York, being by name Herman Vogt, and by profession a former member of the New York Detective Department.

"*Raffles!*" exclaimed Guy Rutledge, managing editor of the *Planet*. "Why, that crook belongs where the hoopskirts went. He hasn't put anything worth while across since Heck was a pup. Fadeaway Garrity is the stylish thug now. Let's put on Fadeaway and make a scoop of it."

"And get the real Garrity sore on us," objected Norris Burns, feature man. "That duck would blow in here some time and steal the fillings out of our teeth for spite."

"Not much; he'd take it as a compliment. Besides, the police have a hunch that he's doing London now."

When Mr. Herman Vogt was told that he should be known for a season as Fadeaway Garrity, his jaws sagged for a second and then snapped back into their usual tautness.

"Now, ain't this a queer little old world?" he asked softly of himself.

Thus metamorphosed, he became very much sought by the clientele of the *Planet*, each of whom desired to step up to him and, in lieu of an introduction, make the simple statement: "You are Fadeaway Garrity, mentioned in the *Morning Planet*. Come with me." That was the sesame which, rightly used, caused the doors of the *Planet's* strong-box to stand ajar. Step in. Five thousand in gold is yours.

During the first week of the quest for him, Mr. Vogt, following instructions, remained closely in his room on Magazine Street. He had selected the place on two recommendations: it was in a section of the city not likely to be closely watched, and the owner was an unimaginative Irish lady much more concerned with brooms and butchers than with missing men.

Mrs. Farrell gathered that her boarder was Payne Wampler, and that he had a stool and a ledger in the office of a Carondelet Street cotton warehouse. It seemed that he was off duty for a few days, recuperating from a slight illness.

Every afternoon he went to the mail box at the corner and deposited a letter. That was in compliance with the *Planet's* promise that Fadeaway would be on the street every day. The *Planet* planned against premature identification. It was not inspired in the matter by philanthropic motives. It expected to stimulate the public's interest in Fadeaway by the daily publication of articles correlating the proximity of Mr. Garrity and the desirability of owning five thousand dollars. Later on Mr. Garrity would himself contribute articles containing an itemized account of his whereabouts on the preceding day. He

would also engage to be on certain streets or in certain buildings at specified hours of the ensuing day. The public, hungry for news of the missing one, would eagerly buy the entire output of both regular and extra editions, and the contents of the *Planet's* coffers would swell beyond all previous records.

The matter developed as the managers of the *Planet* had anticipated. Three weeks passed, and Fadeaway had not been apprehended. With increasing boldness he walked the streets, frequented hotel lobbies and fashionable cafés. Three persons had taken a chance on him, but none had used the exact wording required by the *Planet*. The interest of the chase overshadowed the other phases of the city's life. Hunting Fadeaway became the vocation of hundreds and the avocations of thousands. The newsboys were ever on the alert, and princes of finance eyed their fellow pedestrians on the street with newly awakened interest. Maids repeated the formula to ice men and vegetable hawkers. Up-state people became interested. A young fellow of seventeen was held up and robbed one night at two o'clock at Race and Robin Streets. It developed upon investigation that he was from some Arkansas cross-roads, and was out sleuthing for Fadeaway Garrity.

One morning, under flaring head-lines, Mr. Garrity promised to be in the lobby of one of the well-known hotels of the city some time between ten and noon. Before nine the lobbies of the St. Charles, the Grunewald, and the Denechaud were jammed to their limits.

Far over in the French Quarter, the Dauphine was practically deserted, it not coming within the scope of the imaginations of those who sought for the *Planet's* gold that Mr. Garrity would make his promised appearance in that hostelry, well known only by reason of an unsavory reputation. Mr. Garrity chose to do that very thing. Attired extravagantly, and with a curling black mustache glued tightly to his upper lip, he sat in one of the Dauphine's lobby chairs and wafted cigarette-smoke on high. Near him sat a young man whose eyes, although he was apparently in deep meditation, wandered constantly. Save for the noise which arose from a game of cards, the lobby was unusually quiet.

The street door opened, a little girl entered and glanced nervously about. Then timidly she crossed the lobby and stopped in front of Mr. Vogt.

"You are Fadeaway Garrity, mentioned in the *Morning Planet*. Come with me," she said. And Herman Vogt, *alias* Fadeaway Garrity, arose and followed her out of the hotel.

When they had gone, the gentleman in the near-by chair sat still for a time, staring with unseeing eyes into space. His fingers clutched the arms of his chair convulsively, and his face was pallid as of death.

Presently he went to his room. It was but the task of a minute to assemble his belongings in order for moving. Then he passed silently out of the Dauphine's side-street door. There were few people on the streets, the noon hour not yet having loosened its hordes. Passing pedestrians seemed to study him curiously. A policeman, lolling on a street corner, gave him a professional glance. The superstitious soul of Fadeaway Garrity caught up that glance and invested it with direful meaning. The old air of insouciance had fallen from him like a loosened mantle, and his walk had become the slinking amble of the hunted.

Another policeman glanced at him, and then did Mr. Garrity become conscious of an overwhelming desire to depart from the city. Before that morning, New Orleans had been his friend. It had sheltered him, fed him, and given him amusement and protection; but a strange, inexplicable thing had come to pass. The city that had been his friend had turned a bizarre trick upon him. It had made him a fugitive, and in his brain only one thought had shape: that was to leave the city and its mystery far behind.

As the Mobile local pulled out of the depot at 11.50, the genuine Fadeaway Garrity swung himself aboard. At Mobile he transferred to another train, and on the following morning arrived at Jacksonville.

Twenty-four hours later Mr. Herman Vogt arrived at the station, and ordering a

cab, gave the driver directions to take him to the offices of the Jacksonville *Evening Star*.

Three weeks went by. The wonderful sunshine and the sea breezes had in a measure restored to Mr. Garrity his old-time poise. He had not solved the mystery of the affair in the lobby of the Dauphine. Some time when he thought of it, a little thrill of terror passed through him. His eyes had taken on a new alertness, and his ears were adjusted to a tension that took cognizance of every noise.

One day he attended a ball game between the Jacksonville and the Savannah teams. The game was replete with thrills. Victory smiled first on one team and then on the other. Garrity, intently watching the game, felt a light touch upon his arm. Turning quickly, he saw the peanut boy looking at him curiously.

"You are Fadeaway Garrity, mentioned in the *Evening Star*. Come with me," piped the youngster.

But Garrity didn't go with him. Instead he pushed the boy roughly aside, and in haste passed out the exit. The intense interest in the game permitted his abrupt departure to escape notice.

He made directly across the street for Red Golightly's saloon, a groggery whose red liquor is much esteemed by patrons to whom memory and consciousness are unwelcome attendants. As he neared the place the doors swung open and a noisy crowd emerged. In the center walked a man at the sight of whose face a strange, stifling weight settled upon Garrity's breast. At his side, and holding his hand, walked a bootblack, dirty and unkempt, but flushed and proudly erect.

"Hey, sport!" called the gamin to the passing Fadeaway. "Ain't I the lucky guy with Fadeaway Garrity in tow, and five t'ousand reward waitin' for me? Oh, he's owned up, all right," he continued, observing the real Garrity's expression.

An hour later Sergeant Wright, on duty at the Central Police Station, was visited by Mr. Herman Vogt, late in the employ of the Jacksonville *Evening Star*.

"Well, I hear they taken you to-day, Fadeaway," greeted the sergeant.

"Uh-huh," assented Vogt, "they roped me in. It was about time, though."

"Going to stay around a few days?"

"No. Leaving to-night for Kansas City. Got an engagement with the *Blade*. I dropped in to thank you for helping me get on with the *Star*."

"Th' ain't no thanks due. I haven't forgot how you saved the Jacksonville force, and me in particular, from disgrace by catching Billy Martin and turning him over to me; so, when I got your letter, I hot-footed it to the editor. He was going to take on somebody, anyhow, and so it was easy. How come you doing this sort of thing anyhow?"

"Well, I fell down on an assignment, and when I got let out these jobs were opening up. A feller has to live."

Just then the door opened and a haggard, broken man staggered into the station.

"Cap," said he to the sergeant, and there was anguish in the tones, "I think I'm Fadeaway Garrity. I wish you'd take me and find out."

And he lifted a lock of hair and exhibited a nick in his left ear for the sergeant's inspection.

LOVE

BY ARCHIBALD CROMBIE

LOVE! What is love? A fluctuant desire
Fading as doth the phosphor gleam at sea?
Nay, nay; it is a flame of quenchless fire
On the heart's altar, bright eternally!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

WASN'T it Wordsworth who indicted his generation for too much shop-keeping, too much preoccupation with the ways and means rather than the ends of living? Neither the force nor the justice of his accusation,

Getting and spending we lay waste our powers,

has been preempted by the god of the modern world—efficiency. No doubt the tragic travail of the war will leave some of the shrines of the market-place without book, bell, or candle, and our craven worship of success and big business may yield to saner and sounder values. But the artificiality that hems us in is as persistent as a dynasty, and the force of example is so potent that peace may find us with many of the old fetters still unimpaired. To all open-minded wayfarers, fed up with the artificial and the complex, from dress-clothes to biscuits, comes the urgent desire to escape into a land without laws and without laundries—for a time. We offer you, next week, free transportation into such a delectable empire.

KOYALA THE BEAUTIFUL

Sequel to "The Argus Pheasant"

BY JOHN CHARLES BEECHAM

Author of "Leah," "That Affair of Dahjangsari," etc.

will enable you to forego the dreary round of office, field, and farm, as well as the butcher, the baker, and candlestick maker and bask amid the tropical plenty of Borneo, with its wild, impenetrable jungles, where nature provides your food and tiger and leper dispute its consumption with you. Here all is simple and primitive except the passions of the human soul and the mischief and the madness, to say nothing of the warfare, which they engender, regardless of color and climate.

Koyala is not the capital of Borneo, as you might be led to infer unless you recall "The Argus Pheasant," but the native name of the most beautiful woman in all the Indies, the woman who inherited her nimble wits from her French father and the intensity of her emotions from her Bornean mother. The Resident of Bulungan, Peter Gross, had good reason to respect the one and fear the other, when the Yellow Spider took the Zuyder Zee under his particular wing, and Koyala emerged from the screen of the forest in time to see Gross bringing a white woman into— But we are cutting too close to the core of this captivating story, which you will want to investigate for yourself. The first of the six instalments appears in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Koyala will compel your regard as she held by the potent force of her personality East and West, Orient and Occident, Peter and Grace, Dyak and Malay.

FROM the athletic games of the Greeks and the gladiatorial contests of the Romans to Spanish bull-fights and modern prize-fighters, the skilful exhibition of physical prowess and manly self-defense has won the ungrudging admiration of all sorts and conditions of men. It is true, not only England, but America, has shown an ill-judged opposition to "Cashel Byron's" profession at

certain times. But blue laws and pallid moral uplifters have not been able to extinguish the spontaneous acclaim with which all full-bodied and healthy-minded men have always greeted the possession and the exercise of physical strength. But along with this recognition, and inseparable from it, has gone the demand that brute force should be employed only against brute force. The dastardly abuse of physical strength has always called forth the reprobation of all decent people. In the world's rogues' gallery, the picture of the bully is not far to seek. Public opinion and decent human feeling have driven the bully from school and public institution; but his race is not extinct, and in his worst guise we have seen his work in Belgium. The Hun is nothing more than a superbully. But his days are numbered, and nothing can stay his punishment. The net is inevitably, if slowly, tightening about him. Something of his fate, when he reaches the "rapids deserted of God," is outlined in a brilliant story (which has nothing to do with the war),

THE BRUTE BREAKER

BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "The Jungle Trail," "Captain Fly-By-Night," etc.

"A great man's strength is God-given for good purposes," declares Louis Grantaire, the hero of this novelette, who then proceeds to teach the lesson to a trio of burly brutes and lumber bullies, any one of whom is a match for the stranger, who walked into their camp and proceeded to dispute their unquestioned claim. How they voluntarily took the river to "the falls deserted by God," and how Annette reversed her judgment, and Jean no longer limped his way about the world, because Louis Grantaire— But the career of this likable man of the woods is too ably told by his creator to be lamely repeated here. All we have room to say here is that next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY will print in full this realistic novelette of the French-Canadian lumber-camps.

"SOMETHING different!" Whether it be a new hat, a suit of clothes, a mop-stick, or a magazine—this is the object of our quest, and this is the rock of assurance on which the exclusive tradesman takes his stand. It is the proud conviction of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, a conviction weekly fortified by the spontaneous testimony of appreciative readers, that it offers its patrons a quality of imaginative work such as can be duplicated in no other magazine of the country. The fiction of this magazine is indubitably stamped with the mark of freshness and originality. When we announce a "different story," you can accept without fear of disappointment the literal truth of the announcement, for when we officially endorse a story as "different" it must meet the highest standards of a most exacting editorial judgment. To illustrate our contention, take the latest thing, a story called

WINGS

BY ACHMED ABDULLAH

A "Different" Story

which will appear in next week's issue. Read this story, and we think you will have to admit we have understated rather than overstated our contention. "WINGS" is *tremendously different*. Try it. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

JUST when the world is ringing with the clear, resounding note of patriotism, we cannot pause to make scholastic definitions or to label emotions. The thing is upon us, and we are in its grip. Later, when the work has been thoroughly done, when the smoke of battle has cleared away, and the world resumes the normal tasks of peaceful times, we shall, no doubt, have the matter thoroughly analyzed by our professors and psychologists. But if you want to hear a concrete definition, want to see patriotism in the making, you must read Henry Leverage's powerful story, "THE LAST RECRUIT." Here is a gripping story with a fascinating plot; but the thing we want to draw your attention to is the irresistible working of that mystic, holy something now at work in our country, which we call patriotism, and which, like a Pentecostal fire, can make men over into a new likeness and a new nature. How it lifted two besotted yeggmen out of the mire into the pure atmosphere of love of country, you can learn in the course of this splendid story, which appears in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

THOUSANDS of people who never heard of George Meredith, and ninety-nine per cent of those who tried to get their teeth into "Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit" and failed, have thrived and gone "over the top" in the strength of this life-giving tonic, "the comic spirit." If you can relish a concrete example of the thing we assume Meredith was assessing in metaphysical terms; if, in spite of the uses and abuse of adversity, you can surrender to the enlarging heart of comedy, on no account fail to read "IDOLS OF MARCH," by Nalbo Bartley. Here is a delicious morsel of comedy, stolen from the Log-Book of a Bonehead. We think you will agree with Dia Dolling's words, "The Romany lad for the Romany lass," after you get the evidence in the case, which you will find in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

GIVEN a Russian grand duke traveling *incognito* as General Rasiloff, a mad musician, an opera

singer, young and beautiful, of Polish extraction, and the hero of "VALENTINE WEST—SECRET AGENT," by Percy James Brebner, and we believe you will straight off accept our estimate: here is a pretty kettle of fish to fry. How big are the fish and who really turned out to be the cook, we leave to your own investigations, which can be made on these preserves August 10. Needless to remind you, there is always a wind in the trees and something stirring in the offing when Valentine West puts in an appearance. This time it was "THE LADY'S GLOVE" that made all the shindy. Whose glove it was, and where it was found, and how it came to be there—these are the trump cards that will be dealt in the next hand, the —— of the series.

WOMEN DETECTIVE-STORY WRITERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been getting the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about a year, and I wish to say that it is certainly a fine magazine. My favorite stories were "The Strange Case of Cavendish" and "Draft of Eternity." I notice that you, on more than one occasion, have stated that you think women authors are better murder-mystery story-writers than men. I have to disagree with you there, because as yet I haven't read a murder-mystery story by a woman—in your magazine—that has satisfied me. "The Queen of Clubs" didn't have half the clues explained, and as a whole was a very poor story, not worthy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. "Suspense" had too much suspense to it. "The Moving Finger" certainly was raw. I can't even imagine how a man suppose to be half-dead could see a murder through a mirror at night. I am very sorry I have to make those criticisms, but I think I ought to call your attention to those facts. I agree with Mrs. A. M. G. when she says she likes stories of other lands; but I want to lengthen that statement by including stories of olden times. Four authors who shine in these kind of stories are Max Brand, H. Bedford-Jones, Victor Rousseau, and Randall Parrish. I also think that they are the four best authors on your list in every other kind of stories, so I hope you will keep them busy. Wishing you success, I remain,

LESLIE W. BRAND.

Newark, New Jersey.

NOTE: Mr. Brand is mistaken in ascribing to us the opinion that woman write better murder-mystery stories than men. We merely called attention to the obvious fact that a goodly proportion of such stories are the work of women writers, and that the work seems to have a peculiar attraction for them. Far be it from us to precipitate an argument as to the relative ability of the sexes in *any* field of endeavor.

The following five letters would seem to indicate also that

WOMEN READERS LIKE THEM

Here comes another letter to praise the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for several years and never tire of the stories. I like Carolyn Wells best for mystery stories. "Faulkner's Folly" and "Vicky Van" are the best of hers, but I like all of them. Mildred Van Inwegen's "Moon-Mad" was just great. "Gray House," by Edith Sessions Tupper, was really one of the best mystery stories I ever read, although it made me have bad dreams. E. J. Rath and Edgar Franklin are both fine writers. "A Good Indian," by the former, and "Right After Brown," by the latter, were simply fine. One can laugh till their sides are sore at the stories by him. I had better quit writing or I'll have taken up all of your space, as I could write for a week praising your magazine.

(MISS) DORA DERBY.

Jean, Kansas.

As I have only been able to get the ALL-STORY WEEKLY about once every other week, when I get it at the news-stand, I thought I would subscribe for it so as not to miss any of the stories in it. They sure are fine; just as good as any I have ever read. I thought "The Joyous Trouble-Maker" and "Suspense" were both just dandy. They seem so real and true to life. One thing I like about your stories is you cannot tell what is coming in your next one. Have only been reading your weekly since last winter, but intend to read it as long as I've the money to get it with. Am enclosing check for two dollars for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for six months, starting with June 8.

MRS. HERMAN OSBAHR.

Allen, Nebraska.

Please find enclosed stamps, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for June 8. I get it every week at the news-stand, but they were all sold out this week before I received mine. I think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is one of the best books published. The short stories are good, but can't come up to the continued stories. I have been reading "The Queen of Clubs," and think it is wonderful. I hope we shall have more like it. I do so like a mystery.

MRS. D. R. SINGER.

Chestnut Road, Edgeworth,
Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

Enclosed please find an express money order for one dollar, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, commencing with the June 15 number. Have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for some time, but never a subscriber till now. Have just finished reading "The Queen of Clubs," and it sure is fine. Would like some more stories by the same author. "The

Peacock's Eye" promises to be fine. In fact, there is no fault to find with any of your stories. Wishing you success always, I remain,

RUTH E. SMITH.

R. R. No. 1,
Crawfordsville, Indiana.

Enclosed herewith please find a money order for one dollar, for which kindly renew my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, beginning with the June 29 issue.

Give us some more stories like "Too Much Efficiency," "Suspense," and "Who Am I?" They were fine. I have taken the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three years, and have no kick coming.

Trusting that your magazine will always have the best success, I am,

MISS MURIEL NISSEN.

230 Elton Avenue,
New York City.

THINKS "WHO AM I?" ENDS WRONG

TO THE EDITOR:

May I take up a few moments of your time expressing my gratitude for some of the stories? I read most of the serials and all of the short stories and novelettes. I liked "The Sin That Was His," "Ladyfingers," "The Joyous Trouble-Maker," "Trapped," "Fruit of the Sea," "The Mystery of the Poison Pen," "Between Heaven and Earth," and "A Good Indian." "Too Many Crooks" was just fine. I think "Who Am I?" turned out wrong. Why couldn't the author let *Ruth* marry lovable, old, easy *Henry* and be happy? Of course I have read many others I like better than these I have written of, but just can't think of their names. Several years (two or three) ago I started a story in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY called "Wild-flower." Could you tell me where I could purchase it in book form, or if I could get the magazine from you?

Enclosed find money order for one dollar, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY three months more, beginning June 15.

A true ALL-STORY WEEKLY friend,

RUBY CRANE.

Woodland, Georgia.

NOTE: We regret that we can find no record of the story mentioned, but if Miss Crane will give us the name of the author, or some details of the story, we may be able to place it.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Thank you for Mr. Earl Curtis's story, "The Man in the Chair," in the May 25 issue of your magazine. I've read this story with much pleasure, as I find it most interesting from beginning to end. *Dan* is a well-drawn character, and dominates the reader's interest in spite of the fact that he is placed in an odd situation, I mean that of being a beggar who considers the world owes him a living; but the old theme—revenge—is well worked out, and compels the reader's sympathy even though one knows it is better to leave that out of life. Hoping to see more stories from Mr. Curtis,

I am, sincerely,

MRS. CADWALLEDER SMITH.

Richmond, Virginia.

Enclosed you will find fifteen cents, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of Saturday, September 22, 1917. At that time I was living in Mexico City and failed to send after my copy on time, but I've always wanted to get the final instalment of "Voyage of the Nantook." I think there is nothing as good as the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and some of my favorites are Perley Poore Sheehan, Isabel Ostrander, and Jackson Gregory. Hoping to hear from them soon again, and wishing you every success, I remain,

MISS F. VILLAREAL.

1201 Grant Street,
Laredo, Texas.

Find enclosed one dollar, for which I would like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, beginning with the June 1 number. I have been missing numbers at my news dealer's and would like them direct. When is Burroughs going to get *Cartoris* and *Thuvia* out of the dead sea bottoms? They have been there about long enough. Please stir him up.

C. R. SIMMONS.

Hammonton, New Jersey.

My husband and I like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY fine. "The Moving Finger" was a dandy, and "Who Am I?" was another good one. I couldn't name all the best ones over in a week. My husband liked "A Perfect Forty-Six" and also "A Good Indian."

Give us another one like "The Thunder of Doom."

MR. and MRS. IRA HUNT.

Ringling, Oklahoma.

Enclosed please find twelve cents in stamps, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for May 11. My dealer was all sold out before I got my copy. I think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the "best ever." Wouldn't miss a copy for anything. The stories by Randall Parrish, Hulbert Footner, and Perley Poore Sheehan are the best. Please send the copy as soon as you can, as I am anxious to receive it.

MRS. R. F. FRIDLEY.

437 South Sheldon Street,
Charlotte, Michigan.