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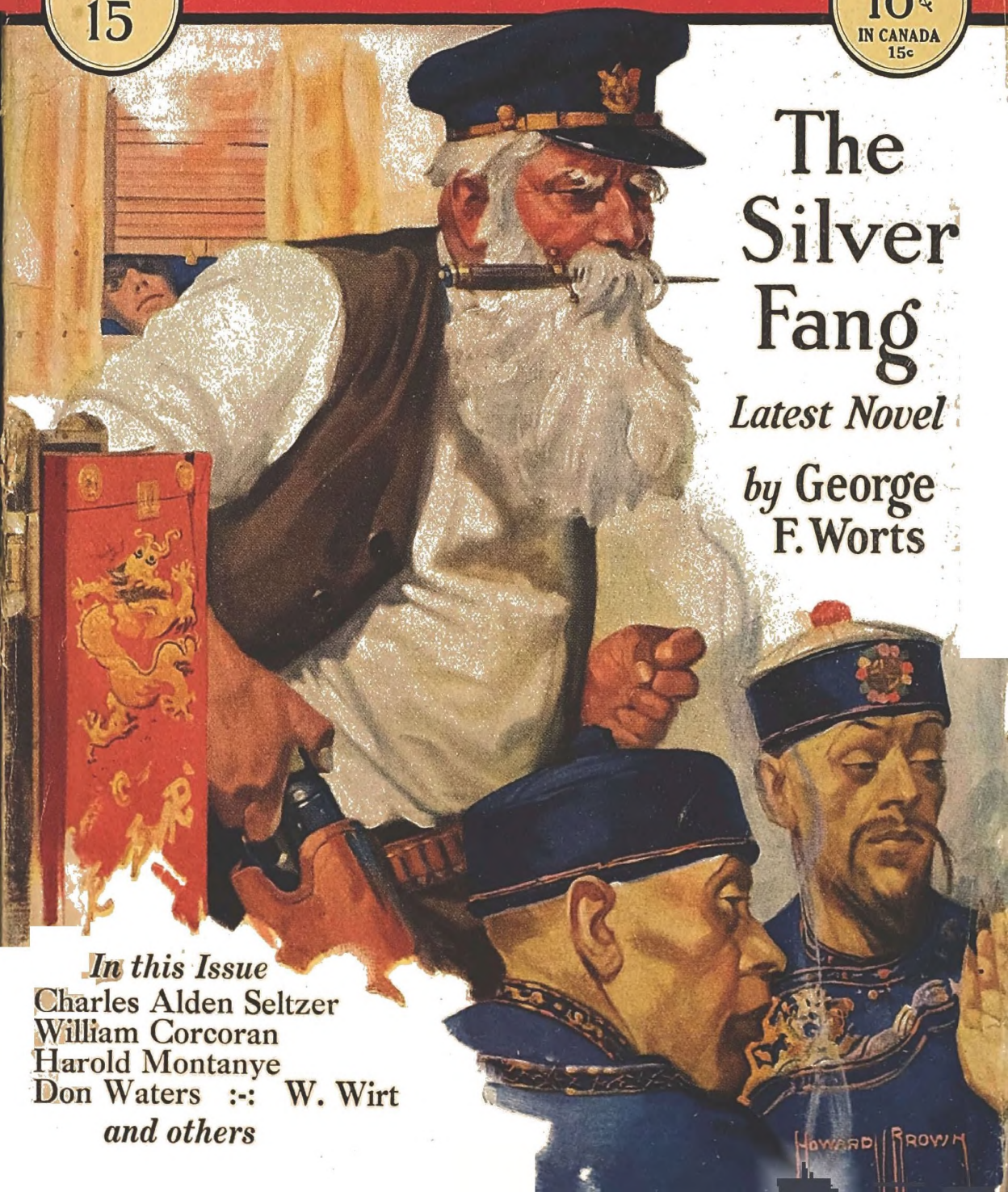

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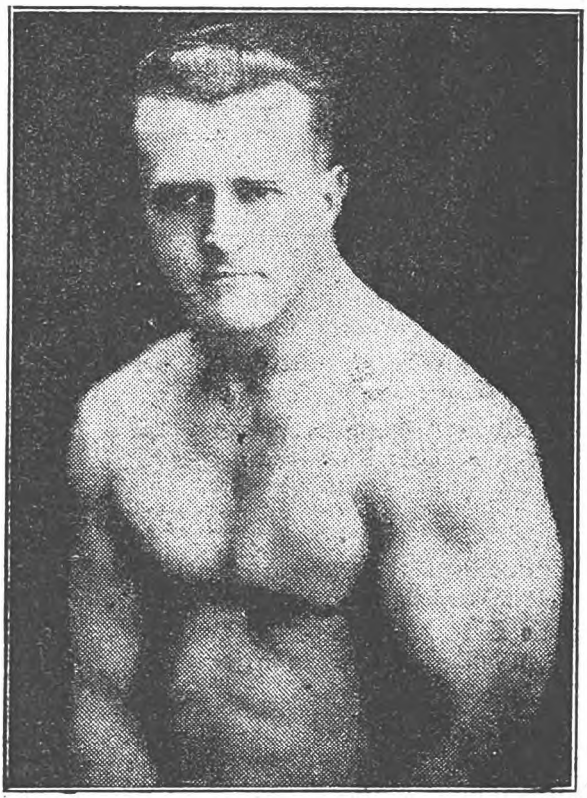

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VOLUME 200 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 15, 1928 NUMBER 1

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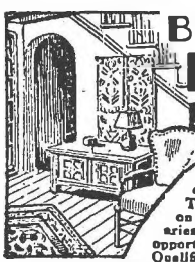

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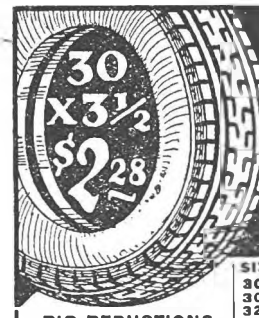

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ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 200 SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1928 NUMBER 1

"Please wait here for me. I'll be back. Keep this!"

The Silver Fang

Pirate blood flowed in Malabar MacKenzie's veins—but he never guessed how his love of antique jade would lead him into his grandfather's swashbuckling footsteps

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Crime Circus," "The Return of George Washington," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A JADE TREE—AND DANGER!

MALABAR MacKENZIE, standing before the jade peach tree in its plate glass case, became aware that he was no longer alone. A series of soft impacts on his senses informed him.

He had the gift, or the acquired habit, of concentration, and he was concentrating on the Chia-Ching peach tree. The Chia-Ching peach tree was a wonderful example of the goldsmith's and jewel carver's art; a tree perhaps a foot in height, with leaves of jade and fruit of rose quartz, set in a pot of gold and red enamel.

On his frequent visits to the Metropolitan Museum he always stood alone before that case. People seldom came into this room, with its great mirrors and high golden ceiling, and when they did come they darted quick, blurred glances about them and hurried on to other wonders. To them, it was but another room full of glass cases which, in turn, were full of neatly numbered objects to be glanced at and mingled with a whirling impression of oil paintings, hammered gold jewelry, Egyptian mummies, ceramics and sculptures.

To Malabar MacKenzie and the few like him, it was the costliest, the most perfect collection of jade in the world, containing the finest specimens of the finest dynasties of India and China. The room was a replica of the Room of Mirrors at Versailles, but its mirrors reflected few lingering faces.

They reflected Malabar MacKenzie's good-looking young face often, and for periods sometimes of hours. He loved good jade, and he liked to look at it alone. That was why, this afternoon, he became a little irritated when his senses, one at a time, were so softly impinged upon.

He was at first aware of an added greenish light, not true jade-green, but, rather, the shade of green which the old emperors of China loved to line their robes with. Gazing as he was at the jade peach tree, it seemed suddenly as if a mysterious greenish illumination had been turned on, like the reflection of sunlight on green apples. It came from his left.

His next impression was one of smell —some strange perfume. It, too, caught him back to things Chinese, for it savored of sandalwood and yet it contained some delicate flowery note as well.

Lastly, he heard the purring sound of a throat being nervously cleared. And it was the clearing of the throat, on this high, nervous key, that shook him from his preoccupation with the jade peach tree.

All this took place within inches of Malabar MacKenzie—the g r e e n i s h light, the exotic perfume, the purring.

But he did not turn his head at once to look. The impressions, in these surroundings, were worth savoring awhile. He pictured the slender green blur to his left as a daughter of the Mings, with a face the color of the fruit of the jujube tree, lips carmine, eyebrows like sleeping silkworms shading her phœnix eyes.

She stood as still as he was standing. Evidently she was quite as absorbed in the jade peach tree as was Malabar MacKenzie.

He looked at her and saw a slender young woman of about twenty, in a green hat and a green dress. She was decidedly not Chinese. The illusion all but vanished; the perfume emanating from her remained an interesting mystery. It was as Chinese as the jade at which she was gazing with such complete interest.

AS she seemed absolutely unaware of his existence, Malabar MacKenzie stole another look at her, and this time he did not feel irritated at all. Her profile was charming. She had pretty lips and a small but noble nose. Her eyes were dark, as dark as malachite. Her lashes were long and curving. Her pallor, he supposed, was natural. She could not have been more attractive if her cheeks were the color of South Sea coral.

His pulses stirred with interest. If she was as interested in the jade peach tree as she seemed to be, he would like to talk to her about it. He knew all about the peach tree. Indeed, there was not an object in this room about which he could not have told her a great deal. But, being a shy and retiring young man, he did not dare.

It was a shock for him to discover, as he did in a moment, that the divinity in green was not looking at the peach tree at all, or at anything else in the plate-glass case. Her malachite eyes

were fixed with a fierce intensity upon the mirror at the left of the case.

A little disappointed that a girl so beautiful, so intelligent looking, should be deceitful about ever so small a matter, Malabar MacKenzie looked in the mirror, too. But he saw nothing that should make a girl narrow her eyes with fierce intensity, or cause her to be pale and to continue to clear her throat as if her mouth was dry and her heart was hammering with excitement.

Under her arm, pressed against her side, was a flat square purse which matched her dress. The elbow holding it there, he observed, was trembling, as if she were exerting considerable pressure.

He wondered why she was so nervous, and again followed her gaze into the mirror. Again he saw nothing, nothing but the flight of eight or ten steps which led from the northeast corner into a room containing inferior jade and lacquer *chops*. No one was in sight. Yet she stared at the empty stairs as if nothing else existed; and Malabar MacKenzie, completely captivated, stared at her as if nothing else existed.

This silent and motionless drama continued for perhaps half a minute. Then something happened.

Still as if she were unaware of his presence, the girl in green gave a soft, smothered gasp. At the same time, two men started down the little flight of stairs. One was tall and thin. The other was short and broad. Both were unmistakably Orientals. They may have been either Chinese or Japanese or Siamese. Malabar MacKenzie could never tell one from another.

Quickly glancing back to his unknown companion, Malabar saw that her eyes were no longer fixed with fierce intensity on the mirror. They were round and dark with terror. This play of fear gave her the kind of fascination that lightning at night gives to a familiar, beautiful landscape. She was now all white and black. Her eyes were pools of black ink. Her skin was paper white. Her lips were colorless. And her nostrils were quivering like those of a high-strung horse before a race.

Suddenly, as the two Orientals were midway down the stairs, she turned to Malabar MacKenzie. Her frightened eyes seemed not to see him, and her face had become so white that he was afraid she was about to faint.

As she looked at him, a subtle change came into her staring eyes. Some of the terror left them, as if a glimpse of him was reassuring. In a husky voice, low as a whisper, she said rapidly:

"Please wait here for me. I'll be back. Keep this."

Then he felt a slight pressure at his left side. As he quickly reached into the pocket of his coat, where the pressure had seemed to be, the girl in green hastened out of the room with a twinkling of white silk legs and white slippers.

Malabar MacKenzie, a little dizzy and quite red with excitement, clutched the green purse she had thrust into his pocket, and, in a deep breath, filled his lungs with the lingering, provocative perfume she had left floating in the air.

He had the feeling of one who has been snatched, unprepared, into a swift, violent current of mystery.

MALABAR MacKENZIE was no longer interested in the jade peach tree. He did not move, but he kept his eyes fixed, as the girl in green had done, on the mirror to the left of the case. As she hastened out, it seemed to him that the two Orientals quickened their pace. They hurried toward the large doorway through which the girl had gone. But at the doorway they parted. One of them went on, the other sauntered back into the Room of Mirrors.

This one fell to looking, as if with the liveliest interest, into the case containing the jeweled jade of India. Using the mirror, Malabar MacKenzie

watched him with an interest no less lively.

This was the tall, thin one. He was dressed modestly and well in gray, and in one hand he carried a gray felt hat. His blue-black hair was cut short, oiled, and parted precisely down the middle. His face was long and, in color, dark saffron, indicating that he probably came from the southern part of Asia.

Malabar MacKenzie watched him as one strange cat watches another. The tall Oriental was slowly touring the room. He would presently reach the case before which Malabar was standing. So far, he had not even glanced at Malabar, but that young man was certain that the Chinese or Japanese, or whatever he was, was somehow observing him.

He waited, and presently the man stood beside him; a man of about his own height. His attention became fixed upon the jade peach tree.

"A beautiful thing," the man said in a moment, in a voice that contained only the faintest of accents.

Malabar MacKenzie said nothing. He waited. The man beside him sighed, as if with rapture.

"It is, I believe, the finest specimen of pure Chia-Ching in existence. What an age of art was lost to the world with his passing!"

He turned now, as if for corroboration, and Malabar, at the same moment, turned too. Face to face, the two men gazed at each other. Malabar's eyes were narrowed and sharp with curiosity; the other's were the polite eyes which one turns casually on a stranger. They reminded Malabar of shoe buttons; shoe buttons behind a filament of gauze. They were too casual. Within them a sinister light seemed to glow.

"You are interested in jades?" asked the Oriental, who, Malabar had finally decided, was Chinese.

"Very much," said Malabar.

Both turned simultaneously to the jade peach tree.

"Notice how delicately those peaches are carved," the Chinese said, "to simulate the real fruit. You can fairly taste their juice. The unripened fruit, as you know, is veined malachite, and that little bush in back is of yellow agalmatolite. Chia-Ching left few samples of his art to equal this one."

He paused. He was easily, suavely making conversation; and it was his evident object to make Malabar talk. But Malabar was too busy thinking to talk. He was wondering why the girl in green had left so suddenly, and why she had left her purse in his pocket, and what this unctuous and somewhat ominous Chinese gentleman had to do with her leaving.

The Chinese gentleman's flow of words became suddenly interesting.

"I was passing through this room with a friend. I saw you standing here, absorbed with this tree, with a young lady. I told my friend it was quite remarkable for young Americans to be so deeply interested in old Chinese art. True lovers of jade are so rare!"

He sighed again, but Malabar did not help him. He sensed that this oily person was coming to his point.

"We remarked particularly upon the young lady, who left a moment ago."

Malabar felt his heart beginning to quicken. There was the first false note—that qualification.

"If you will permit me to say so," the Chinese went on, "even in this land of lovely women, she is a girl of noteworthy beauty. Was she, by chance, accompanying you—or had you just met, so to speak, in the shade of Chia-Ching's peach tree?"

And there was the second false note. Malabar turned on him and said in a cold and dangerous voice:

"The young lady is my sister!"

WHY he said such an amazing thing it would be hard to explain. Malabar himself did not quite know why. He only felt that some inexplicable danger threatened

the girl in green—she had been so frightened!—and he was, perhaps, throwing a sort of protection about her.

The Chinese was looking at him with a faint, derisive smile. The veil of gauze had been withdrawn from his eyes, leaving them hard, glinting shoe buttons. Light played upon them as light plays upon the edges of keen knives. With an abrupt bow, he said:

"I humbly beg your pardon," and walked quickly, with a soft tread, out of the Room of Mirrors.

Malabar MacKenzie abolished the plan to follow him, and dismissed as absurd the easy theory that the Chinese and his chunky companion had followed the girl in green with flirtatious intentions. Why, in such case, would she have thrust her purse into his pocket?

He was puzzled, excited, and a little angry, as impatiently he waited for the girl to return. Never in his life had a girl stimulated his imagination as the girl in green had done. He carried on, in fancy, a delightful acquaintance with her. When she returned he would persuade her, very tactfully, to dine with him on one of the hotel roofs. During dinner, she would clear up this mystery. Malabar smiled.

His smile presently went away. As time passed his impatience grew. He wondered if something had happened to her. Why were these Chinese following her? It suddenly occurred to Malabar MacKenzie that the girl in green might be nothing but a common shoplifter; she had stolen some valuable object from one of the exclusive Chinese shops on Fifth Avenue, and the owners had trailed her to the museum. If this theory were true, whatever she had stolen would be in the green purse.

Malabar resisted the temptation to examine the contents of the purse. A gentleman did not pry into the secrets of objects left by trusting young women in his keeping.

The room grew darker. Electric lights came on. Still the girl in green did not return. The museum would close shortly; the tall Irish attendant sent more and more frequent glances in his direction.

It was evident that she would not, or could not return. Malabar followed the last of the crowd out of the museum and posted himself at the head of the granite stairs which led down to the street. Perhaps the girl did not know when the museum closed. In any event, he would wait for her here awhile.

Dusk had come early this evening, because of a fine rain that was falling. It was half rain, half fog.

The lights in the museum went out, and the murk of the rainy afternoon turned to the darkness of evening. Green busses and taxicabs flickered past. The drizzle stopped and was followed by a fog, which grew thicker as Malabar watched. It filled Fifth Avenue in a gray cloud.

For an hour and a half Malabar MacKenzie waited for the girl in green to return. At the end of that time he was provided with an unexpected diversion. A taxicab stopped at the curb. The door opened and some one got out. At first, Malabar thought it was the girl, then he discerned that the alighting figure was short and stocky. For several moments this unknown looked up the steps toward where Malabar was standing, then started toward him.

Malabar's interest quickened. The man coming up the steps was the companion of the one who had spoken to him in the Room of Mirrors!

He came up quickly, peering into the shadow where Malabar was standing. He wore a black raincoat, which he unbuttoned as he came up the steps. His right hand he dropped into his coat pocket.

The gesture was deliberate and, to Malabar, menacing.

In a voice unexpectedly high and thin, he said to Malabar:

"So you are waiting still! It is so good of you! Miss Lavender sent me to tell you that she has been unex-

pectedly detained and that you should deliver her purse to me."

He bowed slightly, and held out his free hand.

"I won't deliver Miss Lavender's purse to any one but her," said Malabar.

The smile abruptly vanished. The right hand started from the coat pocket. Malabar swung his fist to the man's plump jaw. For all he knew, with that act, he became a shoplifter's accomplice; but he was taking no chances.

The Chinese fell on his back and lay on the wet stone without moving, his eyes slightly parted, his mouth ajar. Malabar thrust his hand into the suspected coat pocket. It encountered the familiar cold, hard bulk of a revolver.

Without disturbing the revolver, he hastened down the granite steps. His assailant was showing signs of returning consciousness, and Malabar saw nothing to be gained by lingering. In the morning he would return to the Room of Mirrors and wait for the girl to appear.

He stopped a cruising taxi, jumped in and gave the driver his address. Malabar's face was burning with excitement. To him, the presence of the revolver was sufficient proof that the girl in green was not a shoplifter. Merchants, Chinese or otherwise, did not pursue stolen merchandise with revolvers.

Malabar MacKenzie would have been an amazed young man if he had been told that he had been snatched up by a torrent of forces which would carry him to the very ends of the earth.

CHAPTER II.

RAISING THE JOLLY ROGER.

THE taxicab stopped before a forty-three-story apartment house on Park Avenue. An express elevator sky-rocketed Malabar MacKenzie to the fortieth story. The top four floors of the building comprised the MacKenzie residence.

A butler in blue livery relieved Malabar of his hat. He passed through luxurious rooms to his suite and entered his bedroom. The tastes of this young man were, obviously, not simple. The walls were bright with costly modern paintings, with etchings by Whistler and Zorn, with prints by Hiroshige and Hokusai. The furniture of the suite, of the Spanish Renaissance period, belonged in a museum. So did the rare jades and the specimens of carved crystal and colored quartz which were everywhere scattered about.

A glance led one correctly to the assumption that the occupant of these rooms was tremendously interested in things artistic.

Malabar removed the green purse from his pocket and examined it critically. It was made of a fine grade of thick green silk, upon which had been painted a band of gold. Curiosity tempted him to open it, but he put the temptation aside. He would wait until morning—until noon! If the girl in green did not return to the Room of Mirrors by noon, then he would open the purse. No gentleman could be more considerate of a lady's purse.

A valet came in on silent shoes and said:

"I believe your father is waiting for you in the pool, sir. Will you swim with him or shall I draw your tub?"

Absently, Malabar replied: "Draw my tub, Hodges."

"Very good, sir. Will you be wearing evening dress this evening or a Tuxedo?"

"Tuxedo," said Malabar, with the same air of preoccupation.

He laid the purse on a table under a lamp with a parchment shade. He looked at it all the time Hodges was helping him out of his clothes. Absently he held out his arms for the dressing gown. But Malabar did not go at once to his bathroom.

At the south end of the bedroom were casement doors which gave upon a small balcony. Malabar, drawing the blue robe about him, went out on the balcony.

Below him, the city lay blanketed in fog. Above, stars burned dimly. It was one of the advantages of living forty floors above the street. Through the fog yellow light penetrated as a vague glow. He might have been in the bows of a ship fog-bound in the dawn.

Somewhere in this fog was a girl named Miss Lavender. Was she in danger? If not, why had she not returned to the Room of Mirrors? Malabar was worried about her. Peering into the fog, he wondered about her. He thought of the sandalwood perfume she used, and he recalled her heart-stirring appeal when she had turned to him with eyes gone black with terror. He had never been so affected by any girl he had ever known.

A voice behind him discreetly said: "Your bath is ready, sir."

Malabar bathed and absently dressed. Hodges inserted the studs in his shirt. Hodges put on his patent leather slippers and tied the bows. Hodges helped him into his vest and coat, and Hodges tied his tie. Malabar was very dependent on Hodges. He was, in a way, a spoiled young man.

He was glancing indifferently at his image in a pier glass when a footman entered. There was more color in Malabar's face than usual. His blue eyes were brighter.

The footman said: "Your father wishes to see you in the pool, sir."

MALABAR followed him out of the room. The MacKenzie swimming pool occupied the entire forty-first floor of the building. It was an eloquent testimonial to the luxuriousness of the most luxurious age the world has ever known. The four walls were nothing but frames containing leaded amber glass. The sides of the pool were of lapis lazuli tile, the bottom, of ivory tile.

The water, triply filtered, was turquoise. From the very center of the pool, which was oval in shape, rose a tiny Japanese pagoda. Ivy vines drooped from it to the water. An agitated swarm of golden canary birds flew in and out of the pagoda.

Floating on his back in this exotic setting, was a fat man with a bald head and a black mustache. He was smoking a cigar.

Malabar looked down at him with a vague smile and said: "Hello, dad."

The floating man with the cigar in his mouth agitated his pale-blue hands and legs and stood up in water which came to his chin.

"I thought you were going to have a swim with me to-night," he barked.

"I'm sorry, sir; I was delayed."

We see Malabar MacKenzie in his most characteristic rôle: a beautifully groomed young man, with an approach that is mild and courteous. Broad of shoulder, deep of chest, distinguished of features, it is hard to believe that he is the offspring of the plump, world-weary cigar smoker whose head and neck emerge from the turquoise waters below him.

"Where were you?" snapped Jason MacKenzie.

"At the museum, sir."

The elder MacKenzie champed the cigar and blew clouds of fragrant blue smoke from flabby lips.

"At the museum!" he exclaimed in a mocking voice. "Every time I ask you where you've been or where you're going, all I hear is 'At the museum,' or 'To the museum,' or 'To a dealer's,' or 'To an art auction!' Why don't you rent a room in the museum and live there? Why don't you get a job up there as a guard?"

While he spoke, he came sloshing through the water to the edge of the pool. Malabar continued vaguely to smile, as if his perpetual attitude toward his parent were one of good-

humored indulgence, which, indeed, it was. They were as far apart as the moon and Mars.

"What were you doing at the museum?"

"Looking at jade, sir." One does not talk to such a father about enchanting girls in green one meets by accident.

"Looking at jade!" the elder mocked. He reached the edge of the pool nearest where Malabar was standing. A footman took form, it seemed, out of the air and reaching down, seized Jason MacKenzie's fat, white hands and with remarkable facility hoisted him out of the water. The servant then vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

It was the way Jason MacKenzie insisted on having his quadruplex apartment run; without friction, without ostentation. You wanted something, and some perfectly trained servant silently did or obtained it for you.

He stood, dripping water, before his tall and handsome son. He reached out, dropped his cigar on a silver tray which was being extended toward him, and lifted off a slim-stemmed glass containing a pale liquid.

Smacking his lips, Jason MacKenzie tossed down the dry Martini. The tray, the cigar, the empty glass magically went away; but the disapproval in the jet eyes of Jason MacKenzie remained.

"Come with me," he said gruffly. "I have some things to say to you, Mal."

Malabar followed him to a small automatic elevator. He always felt uncomfortable when he was in his father's unclothed presence, and to-night his father's fat slug-white nakedness was a little more distasteful than usual.

THE elevator stopped at the top floor, at the elder MacKenzie's suite. Here one found evidences of another kind of connoisseur. In one corner of a spacious and luxurious drawing-room was the largest, costliest, most complicated radio set that money could buy. It occupied more space than a grand piano. Over an enormous fireplace was a loudspeaker in the form of a South Sea Island war shield, from which the strains of a lively fox trot were streaming.

Jason MacKenzie waddled across the room and started down a hall, with Malabar behind him looking everywhere but at the plump white figure of his father. On his left, as he passed, he glanced into his father's private bar —a perfect replica of those historic institutions which passed with the advent of the new civilization. Here, behind a door of armor plate a foot thick, resided one of the choicest collections of whiskies, champagnes, vintage wines and liquors in New York.

MacKenzie, Sr., barked at a valet who hovered ghostlike in his bedroom: "Clear out of here!"

Malabar, waiting for the storm to break, glanced at his father's trophies. On the floor was the pelt of a grizzly Jason MacKenzie had shot in the Rockies. Above a dressing table were girls' photographs. They comprised a varied assortment: there were demure girls, hard-faced girls; there were blonds and brunettes. Some were slim and some were not. He had always felt a little sorry for the little blond one with the trustful blue eyes, and he had often wondered what had become of her after, in due course, his father had discarded her.

He glanced indifferently at a large framed photograph of himself in the trunks and gloves of pugilism. His father had wanted him to become the intercollegiate light heavyweight champion of the East—and Malabar had done so. Beside this photograph was a faded one of an old man with fierce hawklike eyes, bushy gray hair, a hard, cruel mouth. That was the original Malabar MacKenzie, the present Malabar's grandfather.

Jason MacKenzie was saying: "I

cleaned up two million dollars in the Street to-day."

Malabar was not at all interested. His inborn courtesy alone prompted him to ask: "How did you do it, sir?"

"Amalgamated Motors," his father answered. His voice was cross. "I don't suppose you know that Amalgamated Motors has gone up forty points in the past two days."

"No, sir, I didn't know it. What happened?"

"I decided to run it up forty points, and I did. If you took the slightest interest in business—in my business—you would have been helping me. I'm a wreck. Look at me!"

Malabar looked sympathetic, but said nothing.

"It was one of the cleverest movements I ever put across. For weeks I've been spreading the information that Amalgamated Motors is wabbly, would probably skip the next dividend. Every bus-boy, elevator operator and taxicab driver in New York sold short on that information. Was I buying? I'll say I was buying! I sprung the trap to-day. I caught them with their clothes off!"

Malabar's politeness had taken on an edge of distaste.

"I don't see why you had to do that."

"Do what?"

"Take money from bus-boys, elevator operators, and taxi drivers."

"Of course, you don't! You don't know business!"

"Couldn't you have rigged up a deal to take a little of Morgan's or Rockefeller's money instead, dad? They wouldn't have missed it."

His father glared at him, undecided whether to take him seriously or to laugh at his abysmal ignorance. Lacking a sense of humor, he was provoked by the existence of one in Malabar. He endeavored to clear up the uncertainty.

"Do you disapprove of what I did this afternoon?"

Malabar hesitated before answering. He heartily disapproved of what he considered no better than legalized robbery. But never in his life had he openly voiced disapproval of any of his father's deeds. But a new chemistry was working in him to-night. His afternoon's adventures had made him reckless.

"It seems unfair to them," he answered.

HIS father had been seated on the edge of his bed. Now he got up.

"Are you telling me," he demanded in a menacing voice, "that you disapprove of my making two million dollars?"

Malabar stood pat. "I certainly disapprove of the way you made it, dad."

He was alarmed at the tide of red that washed up into his father's face. It stained even his ears, his neck and the upper part of his chest.

"The hell you do!"

Malabar did not retreat. The fat was in the fire now. But he said, in a controlled voice: "Remember, sir, the doctor said you must hang onto your temper."

His father made a downward slap with his hand.

"To hell with the doctor! I want to get this straight. You disapprove of the way I make the money we live on, do you? So that accounts for your high-hat attitude around this place! You spend your time mooning around museums and sleep-walking around galleries and dealers, while I sweat and slave making the money for us to live on! And you disapprove of me! You!"

"We don't need any more money, dad. Certainly, we don't need bus-boys' and taxi drivers' money."

"Don't we?" his father roared. "You've got mighty particular where our money comes from. Why haven't you ever questioned where the rest of it came from? If you're so particular, why haven't you gone to work beside me? I'm open to ideas! I welcome

ideas! But you haven't any! You damned dilettante! What's become of the MacKenzie blood?"

"Pirate blood!" snapped Malabar.

His father sucked in breath wheezily. The battle was on—the battle that had been in the air since Malabar left college.

"Yes," his father panted, "it is pirate blood. It's fighters' blood. But it was left out of you. I *am* a pirate. That's what the newspapers call me. A Wall Street pirate! I'm proud of it! I've scuttled more ships than your grandfather ever dreamed of! Believe me, no nerveless squirt ever sailed the skull-and-crossbones at his masthead!"

Malabar said quietly: "Is that what you want me to do—become a pirate?"

"I want you to stop being a lily-fingered dilettante and become a man! Like your grandfather was! Like I am! Your grandfather started his career in Rangoon when he bought the third steel steamer that ever went into the Far East, with money he won in a poker game! The Shark, her name was. A fine, red-blooded name!

"He made his house flag out of a square of red undershirt, with the broken off point of a cutlass sewed on it. That's where he got one of his dozens of nicknames—the Silver Fang. It took a stiff wind to make that flag stand out, but your grandfather made his own typhoons.

"Old Malabar Mack! He taught the Malabar pirates what piracy was! They were babes in arms compared to him. He was a pirate, a real one. He called himself a trader, but he plundered Chinese junks of their silks and spices, and Malay proas of their *beche-de-mer*, and South Sea Island outriggers of their pearls. He was a man! He was a poacher, a blackbirder, a driver and a killer. A pirate! Damn your soul, you ought to be proud of him and me!"

"That silver fang," said Malabar steadily, "was a nice touch. I respect old Malabar Mack. He was an artist."

"And I suppose I'm not!"

"It's hard to see artistry," said Malabar, dryly, "in looting bus-boys, elevator operators and taxi drivers of their tips!"

"Ah! So you're ashamed of me!"

"PIRACY," Malabar answered, "is a lost trade."

"It 'll never be a lost trade. As long as there are men and merchandise, there will be pirates. I don't give a damn whether you're ashamed of me or not. I'm disgusted with you. I thought you were going to be another man like your grandfather and myself. Why did you quit the ring? I'd have been delighted to have put all the money in the world into your training. You might have become light heavyweight champion of the world, and, in time, the heavyweight. You're yellow!"

"No man," said Malabar, "who ever climbed into the ring to fight, was yellow. I quit because it didn't appeal to me."

"And what are you planning to do?"

"I don't know, sir."

His father glared at him. Malabar shifted his weight to the other foot.

"Don't go!"

"I'm not going, sir."

"We're going to have this out!"

"Yes, sir; I think we should."

"If you haven't any ideas for your future, I have. As far as I can make out, you're spending your days in museums and art galleries, and your nights raising the devil in night clubs. I don't object to a little hell-raising. In fact, I'm for it. But no man is entitled to raise hell at night clubs unless he's raising hell in some constructive form in the daytime."

Malabar, smiling at the quaintness of this logic, answered:

"What are your ideas for my future?"

His father, for the first time since the discussion had begun, smiled. It was an ugly smile.

"Get out and show me you have

some nerve. I don't want you around my office. We'd never get along. Get out of this apartment. Get out of my sight. Well, how do you like the idea?"

"Fine," said Malabar.

"You may like it less when I give you the details. No more money. Hereafter, you earn your own bread, your own clothes, and pay for your own roof. If you're starving, wire, phone or cable—and I'll send you enough for a square meal. What happens to be in your bank account is yours. It's the last money you're going to get from me. That I am determined upon."

Malabar said nothing. He looked at his father steadily. He wasn't angry, and he wasn't surprised.

"What," Jason MacKenzie inquired, "do you think you'll do?"

In his voice and in his look were contempt. Malabar's answer was startling. As if he were selecting his words with care, weighing them with a hard finality, he said:

"Become a pirate, sir."

He withdrew, carrying in his ears the explosions of his father's laughter.

CHAPTER III.

WARNING.

THE grandson of a China coast pirate was conscious, as he entered his suite, of no other sensation but relief. The storm that had been threatening for years had broken at last; the atmosphere, as far as Malabar was concerned, was cleared.

He knew that his father had merely been awaiting a favorable opportunity to eject him from his house. Ruthless with his enemies, Jason MacKenzie would be ruthless with his son. The upshot had been a logical end of their acquaintance. And Malabar's feeling was one of devil-may-care indifference.

He would be glad to leave these rooms forever. He would, he decided, take nothing with him but a few of his clothes.

Malabar's eyes, as he entered the bedroom, fell upon the mysterious green purse. It lay where he had placed it, an apple-green glow under the parchment lamp. He picked it up and sniffed it. His pulses ran faster as he inhaled the exotic perfume of sandalwood mingled with that of some flower.

Hodges entered the room and coughed apologetically.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "but some one left this note for you while you were with your father. A—a Chinese gentleman left it, sir. He said there was no answer."

Malabar reflected that his valet would probably be delighted to have him off his hands. Hodges disapproved equally of museums and night clubs. He had once been employed by the Duke of Southumberland and he had fixed ideas on what young gentlemen should do; what they should wear, and at what hours—and in what condition—they should return from nocturnal adventures.

Malabar examined the folded sheet of paper. It was rice paper, the fragile stuff upon which the greatest artists of Japan and China have expressed their ideas.

At the top of the sheet, in black ink, in a curious, squarish hand, was printed: "To Malabar MacKenzie." And, beneath that, ran the strangest message that Malabar had ever received:

> Under the peach tree, a wise man does not stop to adjust his hat.

That was all. It was unsigned. Malabar knew the famous proverbs of China; recognized this sentence as the half of a quotation from Ho Tung. His color heightened as he read it, and his eyes took on new luster. It was a beautifully expressed threat; a roundabout typically Oriental way of warning him to mind his own business.

Under the peach tree, a wise man does not stop to adjust his hat!

The reckless mood was fast upon Malabar. His nostrils twitched to the scent of a fascinating and dangerous mystery. Already to-day, his life had been twice threatened.

The immediate effect of the warning upon Malabar was to decide him to open the green purse. Its contents would govern his course. He would, at least, secure Miss Lavender's address and return the purse to her and, perhaps, offer his services.

He opened the purse with the trembling hands of excitement. As he was not prying by nature, he felt a little guilty.

Malabar opened the green purse and dumped its contents upon his bed—the bed in which he would never sleep again.

His eager eyes examined an interesting assortment of objects. There was a small white envelope, containing the imprint of the New York Central Lines. There was a blank yellow envelope and a blue envelope bearing a halftone reproduction of a steamship and a blue star. There was a small black booklet. There was a wad of new goldbacks in a rubber band. There were coins.

There were the accessories of a young lady's make-up: lipstick, compact, and, in addition, a tiny white powder puff. Lastly, there was a flat green object about the size of a silver dollar, wrapped in a small lace handkerchief.

This he picked up and examined first. It was an excellent specimen of a kingfisher jade, actually a museum piece. It was a jade lozenge carved in the shape of a butterfly.

His mind, as he examined it, went back to his suspicions of the afternoon. The jade butterfly was worth, in the open market, perhaps four hundred dollars. And it was perhaps three thousand years old. Had the mysterious, the vanishing Miss Lavender stolen this lozenge in some exclusive Chinese shop? Or from a collection?

MALABAR put the jade lozenge aside and, one at a time, examined the other members of this interesting collection. The little black book gave him another rousing thrill. It was a passport. And it contained the first passport photograph he had even seen that did its subject justice.

Frank dark eyes gazed out at him from a slender wistful face. The lips were parted slightly in a smile, the smile of a Sphinx. Even the State Department's seal did not mar its mystery.

Malabar, with the feeling of one who has somehow been frustrated, read the data appended to the photograph.

Age: 22 years.
Height: 5 feet, 2 inches.
Forehead: Straight.
Eyes: Brown.
Nose: Small, straight.
Mouth: Small.
Chin: Small, firm.
Hair: Dark brown, curly.
Complexion: Fair.
Face: Oval.
Distinguishing Marks: Mole on left shoulder blade.
Place of Birth: Haiphong, Indo-China.
Occupation: None.
Nationality: American.
Signature of Bearer: Sylvia Lavender.

The last was in a firm, girlish hand.

Malabar was conscious of a vague disappointment. He could have described her better than that. He would have said that her height was just right, that her eyes were as beautiful as the play of moonlight on twin pools, and that her face was the loveliest that any man had ever gazed upon. He could have gone on and on.

He glanced at the item: Place of Birth: Haiphong, Indo-China. Somehow, that was fitting. But the mystery of her remained as complete as ever.

Malabar laid the passport aside and picked up the New York Central en-

velope. It contained a ticket to Chicago on the Twentieth Century Limited, a ticket from Chicago to San Francisco over the Union Pacific, and Pullman accommodations.

Malabar, gazing at the colored slips of paper, became more excited than ever. The ticket on the Century was dated to-day. Sylvia Lavender had been standing beside him in the Room of Mirrors two hours after her train had pulled out of the Grand Central!

Deliberately, she had missed that train. Why?

He opened the blue envelope and received the highest-voltage jolt so far. It contained a ticket, made out in her name for one continuous first-class passage on the Blue Star Liner Vandalia, sailing to-night from New York to Rangoon, Burma.

Malabar examined the little black book containing the passport. It was visaed for France, Italy, Egypt, India, Burma, the Federated Malay States, Indo-China, and Japan.

He now opened the yellow envelope, and his perplexity grew. It contained another ticket, another steamship ticket, entitling Miss Sylvia Lavender to a passage, first class, on the steamer Siberia, from San Francisco to Hongkong, sailing one week from to-day!

Certainly, Malabar reflected, the mysterious Miss Lavender was living up to her first impression. Here were two passages in her name, one from New York to Hongkong, China, in a westerly direction; the other, from New York to Rangoon, Burma, in an easterly direction. Both bore the same date of departure.

IT was evident that she had been at a loss in which direction to go. It occurred to the perplexed young man that this might be an indication of a vacillating mind; yet Miss Lavender had certainly not impressed him, in the few moments he had observed her, as a girl with a vacillating mind. On the contrary, he had received an impression of resolution and purpose. He could not help but wonder now if she had deliberately left her purse in his keeping for the very definite purpose of intriguing his curiosity, arousing his interest. Had that act been a mute but dramatic appeal for his help?

Malabar came to the end of his chain of reasoning, as much at sea as ever. The girl in green had entered his life as a fascinating mystery, and a fascinating mystery she remained.

The green purse contained no address; no hint of where he might find its owner. She might be staying at one of the large hotels. She might, on the other hand, be staying with friends. But one clew had been allowed him to work on: that she was sailing to-night on the Vandalia for Hongkong.

And if she was sailing to-night on the Vandalia, Malabar MacKenzie was sailing also. It did not seem reasonable to him that, having purchased transportation to Hongkong in one direction and not used it, she would fail to be among the passengers when the Vandalia sailed to-night.

Sylvia Lavender would be on board the Vandalia when she sailed to-night. Of that, Malabar was confident. She must be on board!

His decision was to thumb through the telephone book for the Blue Star Steamship Company's number and, having secured it, to pick up the telephone which reposed on the bedside table.

Malabar was presently connected with a clerk in the passenger department of the Blue Star Line, and the clerk was saying, in the awed accents which frequently afflicted clerks and stewards and head waiters when the magical name of MacKenzie was used:

"Yes, Mr. MacKenzie; indeed we will find something for you, Mr. MacKenzie."

Flustered and awed, he begged Mr. MacKenzie to hold the line a moment. His voice, on his return, was brisk and more confident.

"The Vandalia, as you know, Mr. Kenzie, is our most popular round-the-world cruiser. She was booked up solid this noon, but I am happy to say that a cancellation came in not two hours ago. I am sure it will please you, sir. It is the Prince of Wales suite, the finest suite on the ship."

"When does she sail?"

"At ten to-night, sir."

With habitual indifference, Malabar asked: "What will be the cost of that suite to Rangoon?"

"Thirty-five hundred dollars, sir. Shall I put you down for it?"

"Yes," said Malabar. "I'll send my man down with the check."

"You have your passport, of course?"

"I have," said Malabar. He had the passport he had used on his last trip to France. It still had a year to run. He could secure visas along the way.

It was characteristic of Malabar not to recall that the goose that had laid his golden eggs had gone out of business forever within the past hour. He had had an arrangement with his bank, whereby, when his balance dropped below one thousand dollars, a draft was automatically put through on his father's account for ten thousand dollars. The loss of this pleasant arrangement was one that Malabar was destined to regret sorely.

He went to the museum piece that was his desk, found his check book and wrote out a check to the Blue Star Steamship Company for three thousand five hundred dollars. He rang for a footman, and when the footman appeared, gave him the check with instructions to take a taxi to the Blue Star Line building, secure his ticket and return with it post haste. After the footman had gone, it occurred to Malabar that he would need some ready funds for his adventurous undertaking. He would, he decided, draw a check for one thousand dollars and cash it with the Vandalia's purser. He had, it chanced, less than twenty dollars in his pocket.

AS he turned to write out the thousand-dollar check, realization dawned on the absent-minded young man. Color rushed into his face, and retreated, leaving it exceedingly pale. He hastily totalled the last column in his check book. His balance before the three thousand five hundred dollar check to the Blue Star Line had been drawn, had been three thousand five hundred and seventy dollars and seventy-five cents.

Malabar sighed gustily with relief. The check was good, after all. It did not occur to him that he might have canceled that costly suite and run the chance of securing, at the last minute, cheaper accommodations. His mind did not run along such lines. He was only thankful that the three thousand five hundred dollar check was good. To finance the adventure he was embarking upon, which would end heaven only knew where, he had, in total, less than one hundred dollars.

Nor did it occur to Malabar that, once in Rangoon, most of the hundred would have gone in tips and smoke room bills. Never having been marooned in his life, he did not think of being marooned in Rangoon. And of the many spots on this earth where a man might, of his free choice, decide to be marooned, Rangoon does not head the list for desirability.

His mind was on other matters. He must have his clothes packed. He must select, from his private arsenal, some weapon with which to defend himself. He was now certain that such necessity would, in due course, arise. A third corner of his busy mind was going over, in a sort of flashback, a few of his father's most painful comments.

His father had said, in substance, that Malabar never had and never would amount to a damn. It was gratifying to Malabar to take a last inspection of his belongings.

There wasn't a canvas, a print, an etching on his walls which was not worth more than he had paid for it. The same applied to his jades, his furniture, to the very rugs on the floor. It occurred to the young man that, if he had not run headlong into an absorbing mystery, he might have set himself up as an art dealer. There was big money in that business. He might have made a fortune.

But he was not sorry that the opportunity had been denied him by a caprice of fate. He assured himself, grinning excitedly, that he was fate's willing handmaiden. He would follow her beckoning finger over hills and valleys and seas and deserts, in fact, just as long as Sylvia Lavender remained her personification.

Hodges all but betrayed astonishment and disapproval at Malabar's orders. Only his long years of training saved him.

"Pack my bags for a sea trip," said Malabar. "All I want is plenty of fresh linen and about three suits. Pick the suits that will wear longest."

"Yes, sir," said Hodges, "a short sea trip, sir. Will I accompany you?"

"No, Hodges."

Hodges almost stared. He always accompanied Malabar on his trips abroad; he frankly believed that the young man would be helpless without him. And Hodges loved the sea. He did not care for its motion or its life, but he heartily enjoyed the opportunity it gave him to treat steamship stewards and deck boys like the scum they were, in Hodges's estimation.

Manfully endeavoring to conceal his disappointment, Hodges said:

"You will be gone only a few days, if I may be so bold as to ask, sir."

"I will be gone forever, Hodges."

HODGES, for the first time since he had been Malabar's valet, registered an emotion. It was bewilderment—the bewilderment you may see in the face of a man who places a sour pickle in his mouth, thinking it is a sweet gherkin.

"You must be jesting, sir."

"No, Hodges. I have just had a conference with my father, and we agreed that it would be pleasanter for all concerned if I went to the end of the world, and stayed there. So I'm going. It happens to be Rangoon. But don't write me there. I may try one of the other ends of the world."

Hodges made soft clucking sounds in his throat. They were his way of betraying further amazement, disappointment and sorrow. In his heart of hearts, he was tremendously fond of this irresponsible young man.

With an expression of sadness he went about obeying his master's last commands. His mien was that of an undertaker, administering the last attentions to a beloved friend rapidly growing cold.

The footman returned breathlessly with Malabar's ticket as the packing was nearing its conclusion. Malabar made his final decision in his father's residence when he selected a revolver. From an assortment of gold-mounted, mother-o'-pearl-inlaid firearms, he took an inexpensive revolver, a .38 caliber Colt's police positive. It would occupy but little room in his hip pocket, and its mechanism was simple.

It was a few minutes after nine when Malabar, after shaking hands with the servants he had known for so many years, took his departure. And as he went, he looked back; not in a spiritual sense, because he was leaving that forty-three-story pile of steel and masonry without regret, but in an alert, watchful sense. As he entered the taxicab which was to take him to the pier, he was startled to see a familiar face.

In the taxicab directly behind the one Malabar had entered, a man was leaning forward. His face was long and thin. He was hatless. His hair, blue-black, caught oily gleams from the brilliantly lighted steel-and-brass canopy at the apartment entrance. His eyes,

set at a slight angle in his saffron face, were as bright, as hard, and as black as shoe buttons.

Malabar caught but a brief glimpse of the face before it was withdrawn into the murk of the cab behind; but that glimpse was sufficient. It identified the suave, urbane young Chinese who had chatted with him this afternoon before Chia-Ching's jade peach tree.

The grandson of the China Coast pirate, looking backward again saw that the cab was following.

Malabar, willing handmaiden of fate, thrilled to the realization that, for the first time in his life, he was considered to be of sufficient importance in some bright pattern of intrigue to be shadowed. Of what thrilling interest must be the entire pattern! Would he ever be permitted to glimpse it?

Still at the vaporous outer whirl of a mystery, he guessed that he would, if his luck held, presently be at the hub of it, in the thick of the liveliest excitement he had ever known.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Ghost Ship of Diamond Shoals

AS great a mystery as that of the Marie Celeste is the story of the Carroll Deering, a Bath-built schooner, better known in marine circles as the Ghost Ship of Diamond Shoals.

She was only a year off the ways when she cleared Rio de Janeiro for Norfolk via Barbadoes. She was a thousand-ton schooner, with five towering masts and a light cargo, a weather-beaten New England skipper and a seasoned crew. It was the last ever seen of captain and crew. There is no record of that last voyage, the log stopped when she left Rio. What happened to captain and crew after that is one of the unsolved mysteries of the sea.

A month later, on a stormy Sunday evening, a patrol from the life saving station looked across the Shoals. There was no sail or smokestack in sight, and the turbulent seas were empty. Next morning the Deering lay on the Shoals, all sails set and tearing to ribbons in the gale, her boat gear hammering her sides, and no sign of life aboard.

Owing to the gale and high seas it was a day later before the life savers could reach her. Even then they expected to find some of the crew on her, but she was an empty ship and had been devoid of life long before she plunged on Diamond Shoals. There was nothing on her to show why she had been abandoned; plenty of food in the galley, and water in the casks, no sign of a hasty departure or of sickness or death. And she had been undamaged when she sailed into the "graveyard of the Atlantic." Under the drive of her sails the ship had smashed onto the reef beyond the power of tugs to pull her off, so she slowly broke up.

No word was ever heard of the missing captain or crew, no bodies found. No lifeboats were sighted, nor had any come ashore anywhere. The weather had been good after she left Rio, but once she sailed out of the harbor, she was never seen again until she went to destruction on the Shoals. Where she had been during the time that she was neither sighted nor spoken, what dread calamity of the deep made her people take to the boats and leave her with all her sails drawing, what happened to them after that is a mystery that would tax the ingenuity of a Conan Doyle or a Conrad to unravel

Minna Irving.

Caribbean Magic

Only the turquoise sea was peaceful as young Murray Colton and grizzled Mack Braden approached the West Indian isle—while ahead rumbled the ominous beat of Obeah tom-toms

By HAROLD MONTANYE

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

"WHO'RE you pushin', fella?" Murray Colton peered through the darkness of the narrow alleyway, trying unsuccessfully to identify the vaguely familiar voice of the form that blocked his way.

"I just want to get by, nosey—I got a thirst that needs a lot of personal attention," he answered sarcastically and started to push forward again.

"Not so fast, fella, not so fast," the voice answered, and Murray felt a hand pressing against his chest. "Here I'm walkin' along all peaceful-like, tryin' to get out of this damn alley, and you come tearin' along and flatten me against the wall."

"Couldn't see you, could I?" Murray rasped, his voice rising. "But maybe I'll flatten your nose if you don't get out of the way and let me get by!"

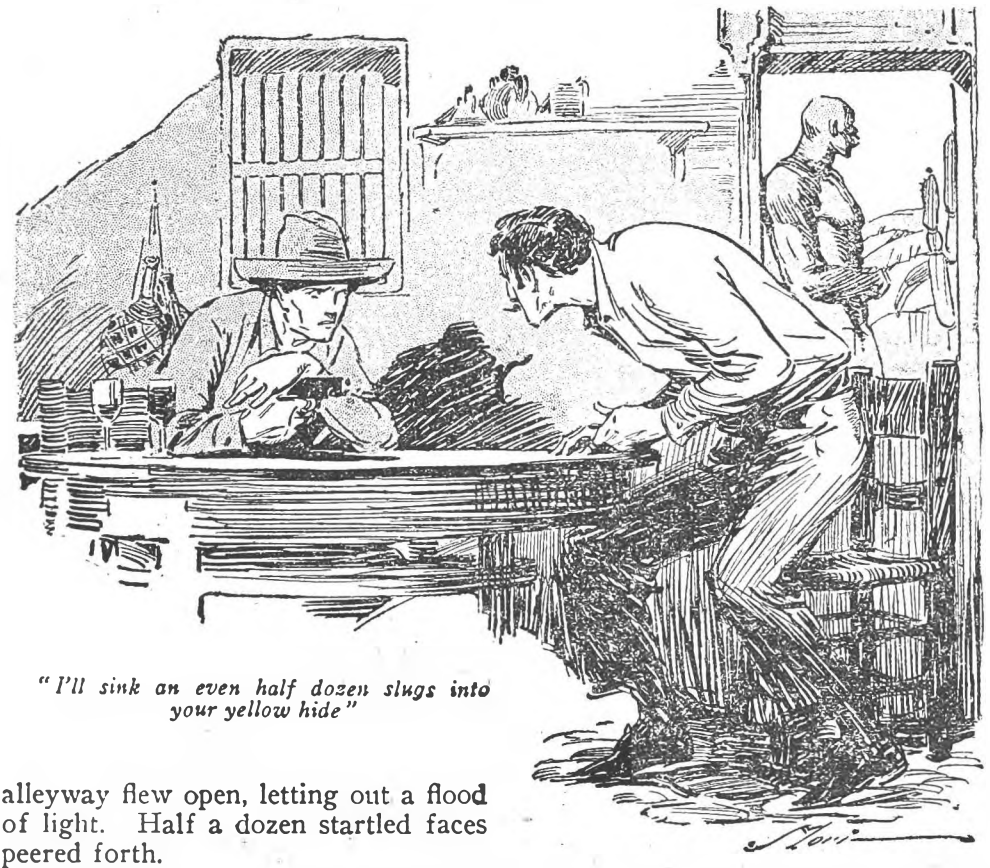
"Yeah? Whatta you think of that!" The hand on Murray's shoulder tightened.

At the same instant Murray's right fist came up from his side and whanged against the dimly outlined face before him. His left hooked around in a half circle and the figure before him staggered backward.

"Mebbe that'll teach you—" Murray began, when something hit him with the force of a battering ram and he came in sudden and violent contact with the cement paving. For an instant everything swayed crazily before his uncertain gaze. Then he scrambled backward on all fours and, jumping upright, went berserk. Here, he told himself, was a chance to get rid of some of the venom the events of the past few days had put in his heart.

For the next sixty seconds the stillness of the alleyway was taken up with the sound of fast shifting feet, the crack of vicious blows as they landed on face and body, sharp rasping intakes of breath, as the two men fought back and forth, never a word passing their lips.

Suddenly a door at the end of the



"I'll sink an even half dozen slugs into your yellow hide"

alleyway flew open, letting out a flood of light. Half a dozen startled faces peered forth.

Unheeding, the two men stood toe to toe, ducking, twisting, sending in blow after blow, each refusing to give ground.

And then, as suddenly as the first blow, the light fell on their bruised faces, and their mouths flew open as their hands dropped to their sides.

"Well, I'll be—" Murray stopped and spat blood. "Mack Braden or I'm a son of a gun!"

"Right you are, fella. I thought I knew you the third time you snaked that left hook in on my nose. Boy, that's a wallop!"

The half-dozen men who came pushing toward them stopped and stared in wide-eyed amazement as the two fighters suddenly began thumping one another on the back, exchanging the pet names men use when they suddenly come upon an old friend.

Arm in arm they passed between the silent, staring group and into the dimly lighted café at the end of the alleyway. Standing before the bar they regarded themselves in the mirror that lined the wall.

Braden's battered nose was swelling fast, Murray's left eye was beginning to close. They turned simultaneously and roared their derision of one another's appearance and ordered two New Orleans fizzes, for which the place was famous.

"FELLA, you was certainly in a hurry comin' in that alleyway. You didn't use to go around actin' like a locoed steer," Braden complained after two long gulps.

Murray put his glass on the bar with a bang and his lips set in a hard straight line.

"Boy, I got a right to be locoed."

"Yea-h-h-h?"

"Yeah!" Murray answered shortly and changed the subject.

"Where the devil have you been keeping yourself for the last two years?" he asked.

"South America, workin' for an oil company," Braden answered slowly as he watched Murray pour the contents of his glass down his throat and beckon for another.

"You didn't use to act as though you was tryin' to drink up all the liquor in the world, either," he added. Murray laughed and drank deeply of his second drink.

"I'm just trying to wash a couple of bad tastes out of my mouth," he grunted, adding, after a moment of thought, "I was going to be married next week, you know."

"Was?" Mack asked, his eyes beginning to twinkle.

"Do you remember Sylvia Forrest?" Murray went on.

"Dan Forrest's kid?"

"Yes." Murray gulped down the rest of his drink before he continued.

"To-day I get a note from her telling me I have no prospects and couldn't support her the way she is accustomed to living."

Mack's lips spread into a grin. Then he threw back his head and howled with laughter, saying, "What does a bird with your money need with prospects? She must be—"

"That's just it," Murray interrupted. "I found out only a few days ago that all I got in the world is eighteen hundred dollars and a lime estate."

"Eighteen hundred dollars and what?" Mack broke in, his eyes wide.

"A lime plantation on an island in the Caribbean."

"Why, when I went away you were just about to fall into a fortune," Mack put in.

"I fell the other way," Murray said bitterly. "My uncle, old Amos Colton, was the executor of dad's will. Everybody thought there was a fortune. A few days ago Uncle Amos rubs his hands together and tells me I'm broke except for this lime joint the old man took for a bad debt. When I broke the news to Sylvia she points to the great outdoors and suggests that I get acquainted with it."

"Fella, you ought to be glad you found it out before you married her, if that's the way she acted."

"I am glad. Finding it out is what hurts. And also the fact that I'm busted."

"Mebbe this plantation is worth something."

"Uncle Amos says—"

"To hell—'scuse me, I mean hang Uncle Amos. As I remember that bird, I want to forget him. Why don't you go down and look it over?"

As Murray started to answer a curious light crept into Braden's eyes and he put up his hand to silence him.

"Listen," Braden burst forth. "Let's go down and look over this place together. I've been hangin' around this city for two weeks and I'm so tired of it I'd shove off for hell if I had an invitation.

"I had about a thousand bucks saved up when I got fired. We'll chuck our dough in together and find out if this lime place is a quince or not. I always did have an idea I'd look right pretty sittin' on the front stoop of a hacienda with a flock of natives fannin' me with palm leaves."

While Mack talked the sullen expression on Murray's face gave way to a grin of appreciation, and his thoughts wandered to a time four years before when he and Braden had weathered a hail of German lead in the Argonne. And he remembered the words of their colonel when the regiment was disbanded:

"If you ever need a man when you're in trouble, go to your friend Braden. He'll always come through!"

The faces of the motley crew who lined the bar broke into wide grins at the infectious laughter of the two who had so recently been fighting, as they

clasped hands and began thumping one another on the back to seal the pact.

THE next morning Murray appeared at his uncle's office with Braden in tow. When he announced his intention of taking over the plantation and trying to make a go of it Amos Colton's eyes began to shine.

"That is what I had hoped you would do, Murray," he smirked, placing the tips of his fingers together evenly. "I waited for you to make the first step without suggesting it. In case you need a few hundred dollars I will be glad to advance it to you. With the property as collateral, of course."

"Well, that's nice of Uncle Amos," Murray answered, his tone slightly sarcastic. "But I think we—"

"We?" Amos Colton broke in.

"Mack here is going with me."

Braden, watching him, could have sworn that he saw a half startled expression come into Amos Colton's eyes. And when Amos spoke, Mack knew that, for some reason, he was entirely out of favor with the idea of Murray having a partner in his venture.

Before they left his office, however, Amos Colton promised to inform the native overseer, La Touche, that they would arrive on the next boat and instruct him to get things in readiness for them.

When they reached the street Murray turned questioning eyes on Braden and was rewarded with a grunt of disgust.

"What do you think of him?" Murray asked.

"Reminds me of a rat sticking its head out of a hole," Mack answered promptly. There were other things on the tip of his tongue, but he held them back, fearing that he might offend Murray.

"Did you have a lawyer examine the accounting he gave you?" Mack asked.

"Yes. Dad and he had the same lawyer. He went over the papers and said they were all in order. You know the old man did a lot of gambling in oils and grain."

"He musta," Mack grunted.

"Do you think there is anything wrong?" Murray asked.

"You say you thought there was a small fortune when your father died?" Mack countered.

"Yes."

Mack pursed his lips, and a short whistle escaped him.

"All I know is I wouldn't trust that old buzzard with the gold in his own false teeth. I got a hunch everything ain't just as it should be. And I also got a hunch he's still got something up his sleeve. Maybe this little jaunt of ours will turn out right interesting."

"What do you mean, Mack?"

"I'm damned if I know myself," Mack answered, shaking his head. "But I didn't like the shifty look in that old weasel's eyes."

And that was where he left it, refusing to commit himself further.

During the next ten days, while they awaited the semimonthly sailing of the mail, cargo and passenger steamer, and gathered together their equipment, they called on Amos Colton several times. And each time Mack became more convinced that there was some sinister motive behind Amos Colton's desire to have Murray take over the management of the run-down lime estate.

IT was early afternoon on the day of their departure that Mack's suspicions became a certainty in his own mind.

They had seen that all of their luggage and equipment was either stowed away in their stateroom or put with the baggage to be slung into the hold, and had strolled ashore to get a supply of cigarettes to last them throughout the voyage.

Coming back onto the dimly lighted pier, they were jostled by four seedy-looking men who were engaged in an argument. As the argument waxed

warmer they stopped to watch developments.

"I'll lay me two dollars on the little fellah when the battle begins," Mack grinned, as the first blow was struck.

Suddenly they were engulfed in the center of the mêlée. Laughing, they ducked backward to get out of range of the flying fists.

As Mack ducked a blow that was aimed at one of the men near him, he saw another one, a burly blackguard, slip his hand inside his tattered coat and edge out of the fight to the spot where Murray had taken refuge. Something about the way he moved reminded Mack of a cougar stalking its prey, and he watched him, fascinated.

When the man was a bare three feet from Murray's side his hand came out from underneath his coat and Mack saw the gleam of cold steel. With a roar Mack dived in time to throw the man off balance, his thrust coming down harmlessly behind Murray's back. Then, leaping forward, Mack tried to fasten his hands on his knife arm and throat. Ducking beneath Mack's grasp, the man lunged wickedly upward, the knife tearing through Mack's clothes and leaving a hot, skin-deep scratch across his stomach.

As Murray came tearing into the fight one of the other brawlers tripped him so that he was thrown forward into Mack's arms. While they disentangled themselves the man with the knife raced off the pier, followed by the others, and headed south along the water front.

With a bellow of rage, Mack started in pursuit, followed by Murray, two pier policemen and a half dozen longshoremen. But when they turned the corner of the first warehouse there was no one in sight.

Two blasts from the steamer brought Mack and Murray to a halt. Looking backward they saw that the gangplank was about to be hauled up, so they whirled back and raced aboard just as the forward lines were being cast loose.

Gasping for breath, Mack gave vent to his feelings while he inspected the slit through the front of his clothes. Then he growled at Murray:

"Unless I'm going batty myself, that was a little *bon voyage* surprise planned by your dear Uncle Amos!"

"You're ba-batty all right!" Murray gasped, trying to get his breath.

"Yeah-h-h? Mebbe I am. But that spig was all set to sink that knife in your back when I pushed him off balance. He was hanging on the outside of the fight waiting until they got you mixed up in the middle of it. Then he was supposed to knife you and then they'd all break and run as you fell. I've seen it done before. A knife won't make any noise, and it gives them a chance to get away."

"But old Amos wouldn't pull a thing like that on me! In the first place, he wouldn't have the nerve."

"He would if he knew there wasn't any chance of his being implicated. And as for asking me what the point is —well, answer it yourself. If I knew that my suspicions had any basis I could pull the props out from under him right now. But I don't, so we've got to keep our eyes open and wait until some one slips up and gives away his racket. There are lots of ornery men in the world who would cut out their own mother's heart for money."

With a shrug of his shoulders Mack turned and went below, leaving Murray gazing at the small group of people on the end of the pier. When he followed, his step was a little more firm, his jaw a little more aggressive than it had ever been before.

CHAPTER II.

THE CARIB.

A HALF hour later, after they had stored their luggage away in a minimum amount of space, they went on deck again and sauntered aft toward the smoking room. As they

were about to enter their attention was attracted by the excited exclamations and gestures of a group of passengers gathered along the port rail.

Following their gaze, they saw that the steamer was being pursued by a pugnacious little tug that had pulled well up off the port bow and was exchanging signals with the bridge.

Suddenly the tug changed its course and veered in toward the steamer. As it came alongside a seaman on the steamer's main deck heaved a line to the tug. Then a rope ladder was thrown over the side and dragged along the tug's deck.

Weaving, plunging, keeping an even pace alongside, the tug held its own while a man upon the deck made ready to mount the ladder. Slowly, so slowly that it seemed at times that his strength was giving out, he made his way upward until he was seized from above and pulled over the side.

As he turned his face upward Mack dug his elbow in Murray's side and muttered something beneath his breath.

"What?" Murray asked.

"Where have I seen that mug before?" Mack said, half to himself.

"What mug?"

"The bird that just came aboard. I've seen him some place in the last few days."

A grin overspread Murray's face.

"Boy, you're going to see pink snakes soon. Come on in and have some lemon and lime and forget it or you'll be gunning for the captain and chief engineer before we get ashore."

Shaking his head from side to side, Mack followed him into the smoking room. While they waited for a steward he remained silent, refusing to answer Murray's good-natured gibes. But a little later he suddenly brought his glass down on the table with a bang and exclaimed, "I know!"

"Know what, *Sherlock?*"

"He's the half-breed I saw in your uncle's office yesterday. Remember? I called him to your attention when we were leaving because he looked like the Caribs I used to see down in Cartagena."

Murray sat silent for a moment, and when he spoke the grin had been erased from his lips.

"You're right, Mack. I remember." He stopped to shake his head a half dozen times. "It was hard to believe at first, but I'm beginning to think that Uncle Amos is—" He hesitated as though loath to say a thing that had not been proved.

For the next two days they spent most of their time in the smoking room or striding about the deck getting their sea legs. And when the sea turned from deep green to blue and the first gentle breezes of the trades caressed their faces, they took to the steamer chairs they had reserved on the upper deck and hashed over their plans for the first steps of opening up Caribbees, the Colton estate.

And while they cut their way through the violet tinted Caribbean, touched at Charlotte Amalie and Christianstad, and spent a half a day wandering about the market place at Guadeloupe, Mack kept a constant eye on the yellow-skinned Riviere of the shifty eyes who had clambered aboard from a tug in the harbor.

Although Murray laughed at his precautions and told him that he had spent too long a time among the comic opera plots and counterplots of Central America, underneath he had learned to regard Mack's suspicions with a new respect.

And the morning that they left Guadeloupe and were watching the irregular mass of Dominica's mountain spires rise like gigantic green cathedrals ahead, Murray's conviction became quite as pronounced as Mack's.

AS the ship rounded the northern end of the island and slipped behind the protecting tip of Prince Rupert's Bay and the Cabrits, he and Mack crossed through the saloon

passageway to better view the palm-studded shores. When they stepped out on the port side angry voices reached their ears. Turning, they saw Riviere standing before a girl whom they had not seen before during the voyage.

She was standing with her back to the port rail, and because her voice was angry and a trifle high-pitched they easily heard what she was saying.

"I have kept to my cabin entirely because of you, Mr. Riviere," they heard. "I think I have made it more than plain in the past that I—"

"You will change your mind very soon," he interrupted, bowing with mock courtesy. "Perhaps you will even be glad to solicit my friendship."

Uncertain whether or not to interfere, they saw her eyes shoot fire and her hand came around in a half circle, catching him fairly on the cheek in a stinging blow. Cursing, he grabbed at her wrist, his face gone pasty, while he hissed words they could not hear.

Starting together, Murray reached Riviere a fraction of a second before Mack, and sent the breed spinning across the deck. As they both started to follow him the girl's voice came to them pleading and not a little frightened.

"Please," she begged, and something about her eyes reminded Murray of violets sprayed with dew, "don't carry it any further. It will only make it harder for me."

With that she smiled a frightened smile and disappeared down a companionway while they gazed after her in astonishment.

When they whirled back toward Riviere he was brushing the paint from his shoulder, where he had come in violent contact with the forward deck house.

As Mack started to speak he advanced toward them, his eyes gleaming points of rage.

"You will pay me for that," he said to Murray, quietly enough.

"No time like the present," Murray assured him cheerfully, his fists closing.

"I don't brawl like a street ruffian," the man sneered, and his hand slid into an inner pocket and rested there while he raked them with his eyes. "When I get through with you, Mr. Murray Colton of Caribbees, you will be tamed for all time!"

Turning upon his heel, he continued to brush the paint from his coat as he sauntered down the deck.

Anger flamed in Murray's eyes, and he made as though to follow him, but Mack put out a detaining hand and shook his head.

"Let him go for now," he said. "He's heeled with a gat, and he'd be only too glad to use it on you. Did you notice that he called you Mr. Murray Colton of Caribbees?"

"Did you see those eyes?" Murray countered.

"Sure, he would have sunk a piece of lead in you if I hadn't been here to witness it."

"I don't mean his eyes," Murray answered; "I mean the girl's."

With a snort Mack started to walk away, then, reconsidering, turned back, his voice pleading.

"Say, Murray, do you realize that that half-breed was all primed to dust your wishbone and laugh over it?"

"Sure! But what can I do about it—ask him to stop, please?" Murray asked lightly.

But behind the lightness in his words Mack caught a tone he had not heard before, like the *ping* of a hammer ringing on true steel.

IMMEDIATELY after the ship dropped anchor in the roadstead they saw the girl whom Riviere had affronted slip gracefully down the gangplank and into a launch flying the British ensign. Upon inquiry the chief engineer assured Murray that she was the niece of the colonial administrator of the island.

And as they were drawing away from the ship in a native skiff, they saw Riviere stagger out of the smoking room and make his way down the gangplank, a trio of native servants aiding him with his luggage.

La Touche, the native overseer of Caribbees, met them on the jetty and took charge of their luggage as it passed through the informal British customs.

He then led them through the cobbled streets, lined intermittently with thatched huts and enormous stone buildings constructed to withstand the fury of tropical hurricanes, to the Hotel St. Pierre.

They found the proprietor a bloated, wheezy individual, who sat behind the desk with a bottle of rum at his elbow and an enormous pipe dangling from one corner of his mouth, as he attempted to drive away a swarm of flies with limp gestures of his pudgy hands.

During the dinner Mack plied him with questions. Most of the answers were monosyllables or s l o b b e r i n g grunts between mouthfuls of food. But he did inform them that the first formality expected of them was a call on the administrator at Government House.

So, after the noonday siesta, they made their way t h r o u g h the sun-parched streets and presented their names to a smartly uniformed native at the residence of the administrator.

They were immediately ushered into the presence of Colonel Jamison, a lean, bronzed Englishman, who greeted them warmly and to whom they both took an instant liking.

After a frosted rum swizzle had been placed in their hands he casually and urbanely volunteered much valuable information and advice concerning the problems they would be called upon to face in opening Caribbees.

When Mack asked him about the labor market he shook his head slowly and hesitated before answering. Something about his expression caused them to watch him closely while he chose his words.

"I'm sorry to say that we've been having a bit of trouble with the natives, especially up in your section of the island. They are always independent, and right now they are restless. We've had a few poisoning cases, love potions, and that sort of thing, and we haven't any way to get at the guilty beggars.

"But I am hoping that after carnival week they will go back to normal. Of course, labor is cheap—eighteen pence a day for the men and tenpence for women."

"When they work?" Mack asked.

"When they work," he answered.

When he accompanied them to the door Mack asked him, in a casual manner, if Riviere, a man who had come down on the boat with them, was a planter.

"Yes," Colonel Jamison answered, his lips setting in a hard line that did not escape them. "He is the owner of a more or less disreputable hotel, the Casa Grande, where all the trouble on the island is brewed. A short time back he bought the plantation that adjoins Caribbees to the north. And he is more than apt to cause you trouble if he lives up to his reputation."

And then, as though he were afraid that he had overstepped his official duties in warning them, he politely but inexorably bowed them down the steps before they could question him further.

THROUGHOUT t h e interview Murray had kept his eyes and ears open for some sign of the administrator's niece, and once, after Mack had mentioned Riviere's name, he almost inquired about her. But something warned him to hold his tongue when Colonel Jamison made no reference to the fact that she also had accompanied them down on the boat.

"Well, we don't know so much more than we did before," Mack said as they

turned out of the government grounds and into the cobbled street that lined the indigo sea.

"Why, you big chump," Murray protested, "he gave us a lot of good dope."

"Oh, sure—stuff we already knew," Mack answered. "But I wanted to get some more information about this gent Riviere. I don't believe in looking for trouble, but when it's looking for me I like to take it by the horns."

"Let's wander around to Riviere's hotel and look the joint over," he added.

"All right with me," Murray answered. "In fact, I'm agreeable to anything that will take us out of this darn sun."

"Unless I'm crazy," Mack smiled, "Riviere would be only too glad to give you a one-way ticket to a hotter place."

They found Riviere's hotel after a few minutes of walking and entered by a green swinging door that led into the café. Once inside, they stood still until their eyes had become accustomed to the dim lights after the bright glare of the tropical sun.

As the room formed before their gaze they saw that on their left was a short bar, behind which a grinning black with brilliant turban was pouring drinks into a tray of glasses. A half dozen nondescript whites and half-breeds sat at the tables scattered about the room.

Through a curtain in the back came the low strum of a stringed instrument, a babble of voices chattering in patois, and the soft laughter of native women, sweet, cajoling.

They slipped into chairs at a table near the door, with their backs to the wall. A red turbaned, coffee-colored waitress came shuffling toward them, her eyes roving over them insolently. The voices in the room dropped to buzzing whispers.

"Tell Mr. Riviere we want to talk to him," Mack smiled, while Murray gazed at him in wide-eyed amazement. Turning without a word, she glided away with that round hip movement peculiar to the native women.

In a moment, almost before they had settled themselves in their chairs, the curtains were pushed violently aside and Riviere came striding into the room.

Behind him came two giant blacks with shining, heavy machetes dangling at their belts. His eyes were cold glints of steel glistening bright in the light of the colored lamps. His lips were narrowed and cruel.

He was across the room in a half dozen quick strides, while Mack smiled at him with guileless eyes.

"We were wondering," Mack began, as his eyes darted from one to the other of them, "if you would give us a little information about getting our equipment up to Caribbees. We're new at this kind of thing, and we thought that maybe just a few words from you might save us a heap of trouble."

Riviere's eyes crinkled into a half smile, half smirk, while he regarded them in the manner a cat has with a cornered mouse.

Not a voice sounded in the suddenly hushed room as he slipped into a chair across from them.

"SO you want to know how to get your equipment up to Caribbees?" he finally sneered.

"That's the idea," Murray answered shortly.

"But suppose I tell you that you are not going up to Caribbees?" he asked in return, his voice taunting.

"We'd say you were gone cuckoo, fella," Mack answered slowly, his voice steady and hard as steel.

In answer Riviere swung about and ordered the two blacks to clear the room. Almost before he had finished speaking the half dozen derelicts shuffled through the curtains into the back room, their glasses clutched in their hands.

Still speaking in patois, Riviere ordered one of the blacks to guard the entrance from the back, and ordered the other one before the street door. Then he leaned across the table and laughed into Mack's face.

"'You fools!" he said. "Do you suppose I'll ever let you out of here? You've played into my hands of your own free will. There are only a hundred whites on the island, and not much chance that any of them saw you come in here. And if they did, who can say that you didn't start trouble and my men merely protected my property? A snap of my fingers, and—"

"Oh, I guess we'll go out all right, Riviere," Mack smiled at him, but his smile was like the cold beauty of the sun gleaming on the blade of a rapier.

In answer Riviere started to get to his feet. But he suddenly stopped and sat back, his eyes fastened on the edge of the table before Mack.

"If you move your hand a quarter of an inch I'll sink an even half dozen slugs into your yellow hide," Mack went on quietly, his voice hardly above a whisper. Peeping over the edge of the table, half concealed within the palm of Mack's hand, was the blue nose of an automatic.

"We didn't like your little display of bad manners this morning worth a damn," Mack continued. "In fact, we don't like anything about nosey people, and you in particular.

"We just dropped in here to warn you that if you leave us alone we're right peaceful fellas, and if you don't we're tougher than elephant hide. If you doubt it, signal to one of your apes over there, and see how fast I can drill holes in you.

"Some day soon I'm comin' back here to find out just what you ve got up your sleeve, and meanwhile, unless you want to find yourself standin' in front of this thing when it speaks, don't try to knife us in the back. I'm right sorry I don't have more time to stick around now and hear just what you got on your mind. But mebbe one of them fellas might get nervous with his cutlass, and then where would I be?"

Still smiling, Mack slipped the gun into his side coat pocket and got to his feet. Followed by Murray, he made the distance to the door in four strides, never looking back after he had once turned his back on Riviere. Shouldering the half naked black aside, they slipped out of the door into the bright glare of the tropical sun.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAGIC WARNING.

ONCE outside and striding quickly away, they almost expected to hear the roar of a gun behind them. After they had swung around the first corner Mack broke into a grin that ended in a loud guffaw.

"I knew he was yellow," he laughed. "If either of us had made a move in front of those natives they would have cut us into pieces that would make a sausage machine blush. But now we have him worried. He'll be afraid that we'll tell the administrator the whole thing and that will make him a little more careful about the way he goes after us."

"But what was the use in getting him riled?" Murray asked.

"Just what I said. He'll stop and let that rest in his craw for awhile before he tries to knife us again. Once you get the jump on these half-breeds down here half the fight is over," Mack answered.

Turning to the left on the water front they came opposite the custom house and decided to make arrangements for the release of their luggage the next morning. Afterward they strolled south along a trail that edged the sandy lagoons, in search of the hut where La Touche had told them he could be found, intending to tell him that they would be ready to leave for Caribbees in the morning.

A thousand tiny humming birds darted with quick erratic flights through the salmon covered blossoms of a *bois immortelles*. Blue and purple shadows lengthened out and danced through the scrubby trees that lined the narrow road. The sky turned from reddish pink to primrose and royal purple and far out over the sapphire sea white puffy clouds were topped with golden turrets.

Naked children rolled on the white sands of the lagoons. Woolly-headed black women slapped their wash upon the boulders at the mouth of the creeks where they emptied into the sea.

Natives coming in from their labors in the tiny clearings that nestled along the sides of the hill swung the barbarous-looking machetes they used for tilling their soil and protecting their homes.

A mountain whistler warbled mournfully in the jungle above them as they heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs coming from around a bend in the trail ahead. As the rider came into view they saw that it was the girl whom Riviere had accosted on the boat that morning. And almost instantly, even before they noticed that the natives were peering silently out of their huts they knew that both horse and rider were keyed to the breaking point.

As they stepped back into the shadows of the trail to let her pass a native voice sounded high and shrill. The cry was taken up by a half hundred other voices until the air became a bedlam of high-pitched screams.

Suddenly a half clothed child came tearing out of a hut directly in her path. Her pony reared until it seemed she could not keep her saddle. Coming down on his neck she lost one of her stirrups and went lurching over his shoulder into the dust.

The voices of the natives rose in a chant of derision as they closed in about her. With a cry Mack dived for the horse and Murray charged through the pack of blacks that surrounded her.

Lifting her into his arms he hurled sharp, piercing commands at the stinking bodies packed about him until they slunk back into the shadows, muttering and chattering among themselves.

While he carried her back to the place where Mack was trying to quiet the still plunging pony her eyelids fluttered open and she gazed up into his eyes with an expression of mixed bewilderment and alarm. With his face the color of a newly boiled lobster Murray tried to reassure and quiet her.

"YOU'LL be feeling all right in a moment," he said as he put her gently down with her back against a scrubby tree.

"I—I guess I'm all right now," she answered and glanced apprehensively toward the row of huts that were fast becoming a part of the shadows along the road.

After a few more moments they helped her to mount and she asked them if they would escort her back to Government House.

"Uncle Clyde is going to be furious at me for riding out alone," she informed them as they tramped along beside her.

"It's dangerous riding out among these natives alone, Miss—Miss—" Mack stuttered and stopped.

"Jamison," she supplied with a smile, "Colonel Jamison, the administrator, is my uncle."

For a moment she fell silent, then laughed a little nervously, adding:

"You always seem to be handy when I need assistance."

"I hope we always will be," Murray put in.

"I want to thank you again for helping me this morning, but—" She stopped again and they both wondered at the strangeness of her voice, as though she were afraid of something and yet afraid to tell them of her fears.

"You must be careful not to arouse the enmity of the owner of the Casa Grande, Mr. Riviere," she continued

after a moment, her voice strangely unsteady. "He is a dangerous man."

"I'm afraid you're a little late with your warning," Mack laughed.

A few minutes later they were inside the government grounds, where she took each of them by the hand and thanked them again.

As they turned to go, Colonel Jamison came into view in the doorway. When he saw his niece his face clouded and he hurried down the steps, his expression one of angry disapproval.

During the next few moments while he lectured her, Mack and Murray sidled from one foot to another trying to hide their embarrassment. But when he had finished, and they saw the twinkle in her eyes, something stirred within them and they gave her a wholehearted grin of appreciation. Nettled, Colonel Jamison turned his attention upon them.

"You may think I'm foolish to worry, but it isn't safe for even a man to go about these days. I was sorry I wasn't more frank with you after you were here this afternoon. There's trouble brewing among the natives and I can't put my finger on it. I know Riviere is the ringleader, but I don't know how bad it is. But let me say that if you have any firearms in your luggage you had better get them out and get them oiled up. You may need them if we are to believe all the things Captain Waring, the inspector of police, reports.

"Until after carnival week is over, I think it advisable that you stay here in Roseau. I have sent messengers out to all of the planters warning them that they had better come in. And I have wired the governor of the Leeward group to request a cruiser to stand by. Frankly I don't believe there is any real danger, and yet—"

"We'll be right glad to help in any way we can if trouble starts," Mack interrupted, and Murray nodded his head vigorously in accord.

Colonel Jamison gazed from one to the other of them for a moment and something he saw in the steady gleam of their eyes and the set of their jaws drove the frown from his forehead.

Then he and his niece made their way up the steps while Mack and Murray strolled silently out the driveway, their minds torn between his warning and the charm of his niece.

WHEN they got back to their rooms at the Hotel St. Pierre and had opened the door between them, they took up the subject of their plans again.

"What do you think we had better do: go ahead, or sit tight down here?" Murray asked as he doused his head from the sweating water monkey.

"If La Touche has managed to scare up enough burros to carry our stuff, I say we strike out for Caribbees in the morning," Mack answered.

"Me, too," Murray agreed. "If anything breaks down here we can come back. Besides, what chance will forty or fifty whites have against thirty thousand natives if they do have an uprising? All the constabulary except the officers will join them so they won't be of any use."

"Right!" Mack called back, his voice smothered in the folds of a shirt he was pulling over his head.

During supper La Touche came in to inform them that he had hired a cook, a house servant, a messenger to "head" supplies up from Roseau, two ponies for their own use and a half dozen burros to pack their equipment. Immediately they informed old Kingsley, the proprietor of the St. Pierre, that they would be leaving in the morning.

However, it was well past noon when they got La Touche and his pack train under way and swung themselves into their saddles. As they came slowly out of the courtyard of the St. Pierre a messenger arrived with a hastily scrawled note from Gwendolyn Jamison in which she extended them a cor-

dial invitation to visit Government House whenever they came into Roseau, and again warning them against Riviere.

When Murray looked up after reading the note through twice, his eyes were shining in such a way that Mack could not suppress a grin. Mack was thinking of the night a few weeks back when, back home, Murray had told him that Sylvia Forrest had jilted him. And then he suddenly sobered as a vision of Gwendolyn Jamison's twinkling eyes floated before his vision and something quite alien to his nature stirred in his heart.

Half an hour later they had left the thatched huts of Roseau behind and were headed north along the flats, the lilting song that came from their lips keeping time with their horses' hoofs. Blue ameiva and huge iguanas scampered across their path fading like magic into the baked roadside. The booming of the sea and the soothing swish as it slipped over the white sands into the lagoons brought them a feeling of utter contentment.

From there the trek took a winding course up the mountainside until the sea lay like a great sparkling blue and green gem below them. Higher up, as they plunged into the lower rim of the jungle, it was cut off entirely from their view. Above and below they could hear the roar and crash of the tiny rivers as they plunged and squirmed downward to the sea.

At times La Touche led them off the main trail through solid walls of jungle, where their horses' hoofs clicked along over huge flagstones that were half buried in the ground, the artillery trails laid by the slaves of invading French armies in the days of the Bonapartes.

IT was while they were traversing one of these short cuts, bending low over their ponies to evade the lianas and bush ropes that dangled from above, that the roar of a rifle reverberated through the jungle and a bullet whipped by their ears.

Before the second crash came Mack had thrown himself off his horse, and was hugging the ground with Murray lying just behind him. La Touche, after one backward glance had dived for the protection of a giant *gomier* behind which he clung as though he had become a part of its gummy bark.

As silence settled about them again they began to worm their way upward. Suddenly, the sound of breaking branches came from the shadowy jungle ahead and they sent a half dozen bullets whipping through the leaves. The whir of a partridge's wings and the call of a mountain whistler, long drawn and mournful, floated back to their ears. Then silence.

Going cautiously forward they came, in a few minutes, to a small clearing where La Touche pointed to footprints that had been made by the bare feet of a half dozen natives.

After examining the marks they found that to follow them would mean taking a native trail through almost impassable jungle. Undecided for the moment as to the most advisable thing to do Mack turned to La Touche who informed him that it would be next to impossible to follow it.

"They were sent to ambush you, sare," La Touche went on, "and lost their courage when you returned their fire."

"How the hell do you know they were sent to ambush us?" Mack asked his eyes narrowing.

"Trouble travels with the speed of birds here, sare," La Touche answered, his eyes darting nervously here and there in the jungle. "It is whispered from mouth to mouth and no one knows from where it comes."

"Well, what do you know about our trouble?" Murray put in.

"Only, sare, that I did have, oh, a very hard time to get servants, sare. They did say that you are surrounded by evil spirits."

With a grunt Mack shoved his Colt back in its holster and mounted his pony, but there was a grimness about him that belied the grin he directed at Murray.

Until they reached the flats at the top of the mountain they kept their eyes and ears open, straining every sense to detect an alien sound about them. Once over the top they dismounted and waited for the servants and burros to catch up to them.

When they appeared the sun was fast becoming a ball of fire over the western rim of the mountains and it became necessary to guide the burros by means of flaring flambeaux. As they started on a light rain began to fall and before they had covered the two miles to the trail that led down to the plantation house it was coming down in torrents.

Leaving the servants huddled beneath rude shelters of plantain leaves, La Touche led them down the narrow trail toward the house. As the wind extinguished the flambeau La Touche carried they could not see their hands before their faces. Dripping like drowned rats, they waited while he went on ahead to relight within the shelter of the house.

Once inside, they peered about as the light threw eerie shadows across the one long room. An iguana scampered across a rafter and peered down at them from his perch over their heads. And mingled with the rattling bamboos and sighing *chataigniers* was the far-off beating of Ebo drums—African tom-toms — and the chanting of frenzied voices, rising and falling.

"Ugh!" Murray laughed.

Mack grinned and pointed a finger at La Touche who was shaking like a leaf in a gale.

AFTER they had inspected the sleeping rooms, kitchen and servants' huts, they started back up the trail to lead in the burros.

They found them huddled together, a flambeau still burning under the plantain shelter. But there was no sign of the servants.

"Where the—" Mack began, and turned toward La Touche.

"Call those low-lived sons of pigs and dogs, and let's get this stuff in," he directed, rain running down his face in streams.

"They have gone, sare," La Touche answered.

"Hell's bells!" Mack growled, "I know they've gone. Call 'em back!"

"They will not come, sare," La Touche answered while he walked back and forth, peering into the darkness of the trail that led down to the house.

Suddenly an exclamation burst from his lips and they swung over beside him. With trembling hands he pointed to a rude cross that had been placed at the fork of the trail.

"A *Jumby* cross, sare," he said, his teeth chattering a tattoo. "They're putting the *Obeah* on us—magic, sare."

"Rot!" Mack exploded, and threw the crudely crossed sticks aside.

After they had led the burros down the trail and had unloaded them, they broke open a case of supplies and cooked their supper over the fire pot in the leaky kitchen.

Before they turned in for the night they placed Colts and rifles within easy reach, and slipped the heavy hardwood bars through the brackets on the hurricane shutters and doors.

"Mebbe that 'll keep us from gettin' one of those machetes wound around our necks," Mack said as he extinguished the light and flopped into his bunk.

When La Touche awoke them the next morning they found that it was still raining, and the clearing before the house was swathed in clouds that prevented them from seeing to the first rim of jungle. But while they were eating breakfast the sun broke through on the green slopes of Diablotin and Abbatre Bois, and patches of blue appeared in the sky.

At noon, clothed in top boots and slickers, they followed La Touche on a tour of inspection that included the twenty thousand lime trees spread out through the Layou Valley, three thousand orange in the clearing before the house, two thousand coco, and some fifty of coffee and nutmeg, along the upper trail.

On the way back they noticed that the rude cross Mack had removed the night before had been replaced by another. La Touche passed it by without a comment after glancing nervously into the jungle that hemmed them in.

"How long will they keep putting those things up there?" Mack asked impatiently.

"Until the *obeah*-man has ordered them to stop, sare," La Touche answered, "a native will not come down the trail until then, sare, or he would find a potion in his rum."

"Poison, eh?"

"Oh, yes, sare," La Touche answered quietly.

"Well, there's one thing darn sure," Mack said in a moment, "we've got to get some men in to spray those trees and take care of the clearings and the green fruit. If we can concentrate the juice and get the oils out of this crop it will give us enough money to go ahead and put the place on its feet.

"It will take a couple of months of hard work to put the mill and boiling house in shape, and we've got to get some new parts for that four-tayche battery. Of course, the oils will be easy enough if we can get some women to work the machines, but the juices—" He broke off and stood silent, while La Touche regarded him with a new respect shining in his eyes.

"Look here, La Touche," he finally went on. "You stay here and get our things put away and we'll ride back to Roseau and see if we can't line up some natives who aren't afraid of ghosts—of your *jumbies*. We've got to have labor and we've got to have servants, and we'll get 'em if we have to make them more scared of us than they are of *jumbies*."

CHAPTER IV.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

WHEN they took the trail an hour later, each had a rifle swung to his pommel and an automatic in the holster strapped about his waist.

"Looks as if we expected a little heavy shooting," Murray laughed as they started slowly down the winding, treacherous trail.

"Mebbe we'll get it, too," Mack answered. "Usually these threats of native uprisings don't amount to a darn because they don't have anything to fight with, or a leader. But I got a funny feeling that this Riviere is going to stir things up just long enough to put us out of the way while the general excitement is going on. And remember one thing: don't ever pull your gun on a native unless you shoot to kill!"

With that he dismounted and led his pony over a treacherous stretch where a misstep would have plunged them down into the rushing waters of a river a hundred feet below.

In an hour's time they had made their way to the lower rim of the jungle. They dismounted to water their ponies in a viaduct that supplied water to the mill of an estate in the valley below. As they were about to swing into the saddle again the harsh cries of a band of natives came from down the trail. Coming closer the voices became a bedlam of high-pitched screams and bestial baying.

Moving quickly they led their horses off the trail and concealed them behind a thick screen of plantain leaves. Training their rifles through the tangled mass before them they covered the trail, ready in case the horses should give away their hiding place.

As the jabbering, frenzied blacks

came into their range of vision they saw that they were all reeling from the effects of palm wine or rum. In the lead was a giant black, naked to the waist, his body gleaming with the brilliant stain of herbs.

In his left hand he carried a rifle. From his right dangled a keen-edged machete. Less colorfully painted, a mob of fifty blacks followed in his wake, all armed with machetes, a few with rifles and old muskets, their eyes rolling with the hideous shrieks that came from their lips.

Keeping silent until the band had passed around a bend in the trail they then led their horses out and mounted, each with the same thought in their mind unspoken. Had they murdered and rifled the estates on the way up?

There wasn't any doubt in their minds as to the objectives of the mob that had just passed. They knew that they were bound for Caribbees. Had Riviere sent out other bands of marauders beside this one?

At the little settlement at the foot of the hill, they decided to abandon their horses and circle around the town to avoid riding the several miles of flat land along the sea where they would have presented an easy target to any one lying in ambush.

The sun was just slipping into the sea when they edged up over the last steep foothill and gazed down on the town below. At almost the same instant smoke and fire began to pour from the government buildings that lined the water front.

THE staccato rattle of rifle fire came to their ears, and the wild howling of a thousand voices suddenly gone mad. As the firing increased in volume and was reenforced by the *rat-tat-tat* of a machine gun, conflagrations sprang up in a half dozen places within their view. And almost directly below them the barracks of the native police burst into flame, lighting up the Government House grounds as though a huge searchlight had been thrown upon them.

Suddenly, over the top of the stone wall that surrounded the grounds a thousand forms poured like a river of ink. Waving machetes, screaming, leaping in the air as they advanced, they had progressed halfway to the house when a machine gun sprayed them with lead. For an instant they halted, wavered, then pushed ahead. Another burst of lead that mowed down the second rank brought them to a dazed halt.

And then, as suddenly as they had attacked, they went streaming back over the wall, beating and tearing at one another to get away from the deadly fire that came from the house.

Far out along the shore the flare of another fire lit the heavens and Murray turned sick with the thought of the terrible butchery that was taking place.

"We've got to get down there and help them," he said and in his mind was a picture of Gwendolyn Jamison facing the howling pack of savages that raced through the cobblestone streets.

"Probably most of the whites on the island are there," Mack answered.

"Unless they fire Government House, they're all safe inside until they run out of ammunition. We better go down the side of the mountain right here, if we can, and slip into Government House from the back. Are you ready?"

"Ready," Murray answered, and his voice was grim with determination.

Rolling, slipping, they began the perilous descent down the slope, their rifles clutched in their hands.

Once down, they slipped within the shadows of a row of giant crotons that lined an alleyway, and advanced cautiously in the general direction of Government House. Rounding a corner they came upon a band of a dozen blacks who were creeping toward the rear wall of the house. Falling in a few feet behind them they followed, halting while the negroes prepared huge pitch torches to throw over the wall.

At a signal from Mack the two Americans poured a stream of lead into the center of the group. Taken by surprise, the natives screamed in terror and went racing away, leaving three of their number stretched on the cobblestones.

"Quick now," Mack called, "we've got to get over and inside before a thousand of them come back."

Running along the wall they stopped before a huge gate whose hinges formed a foothold. Scrambling upward they stood in bold relief at the top and then dropped lightly to the ground on the other side. Lying flat on their bellies they hugged the ground expecting to be riddled by lookouts from inside the house. But when a minute had passed and no fire came they got to their feet and made a dash for the protection of the postern gate.

Crouched inside they saw that the walls at the back of the house were fully thirty feet high and practically impossible to scale, and decided that the defenders were so few they had left it unguarded, while the attack was concentrated on the front.

THEY beat the stocks of their rifles on the heavy hurricane door and were rewarded by the sound of a bullet ripping through it from the inside.

Lifting his voice, Mack called out that they were friends and gave their names. They heard the heavy bar slip out of the brackets and then the door swung slowly inward while a torch played on their faces.

Stepping quickly in, they saw Gwendolyn Jamison standing on the landing before them with a smoking gun in her hand, her eyes wide and surprised.

"Why don't they keep a lookout here in the back?" Mack growled as he shoved the bar on the door through the iron brackets.

"I'm the lookout," she answered. "There are only fifteen men in the house. Not enough to guard the front and sides." Her voice was quite steady as she went on, telling them to follow her and she would lead them to her uncle.

Colonel Jamison gazed at them in amazement and then wrung their hands. He called the inspector of police, Captain Waring.

"These are the two Americans of whom I told you," he said, and hurried away.

While Captain Waring posted them at windows on the second floor he explained to them that the cable office had been in the hands of the natives for the past twelve hours, and most of the town had been theirs since nightfall.

"We had to drop back here to be sure of getting through the night. All of my constabulary except two or three loyal fellows have gone over to the natives. We expect that a cruiser will proceed here when they have no word from us in twenty-four hours—if we can hold out until they come." He stopped as the firing became more intense.

Jumping to the windows Mack and Murray poured a stream of lead into a howling mass of blacks as they made another attempt to close in on the house. A bare dozen got within ten yards of the porch where they were mowed down by the withering fire. A larger band came even farther and in their hands they waved lighted torches that they flung upward toward the roof, then raced back out of range of the flying bullets.

The ground about the house became strewn with black bodies, some of them screaming in their agony, others sprawled grotesquely where they had fallen.

As the room became filled with the pungent fumes of burned powder the defenders stripped to the waist and went down on their knees on the floor between attacks, gasping for breath.

"If they ever land one of those torches on this roof we're going to

roast like pigs on a spit," Mack gasped, wiping the perspiration from his eyes with the back of a grimy hand.

Almost in answer to his words a roar reached their ears from below. Gazing downward they saw that the grounds directly in front of the house were illuminated by a blaze from above. The natives in the street were pointing and gesticulating wildly.

Rushing into the hallway Mack collided with Colonel Jamison as he came puffing up the steps, his face white, his lips tight set. In his hands he carried two chemical extinguishers. Mack fell in behind him as he climbed a steep flight of stairs that led to a trap that opened on the roof. As he pushed the trap up a gust of flame darted over the edge and licked at his face. Falling backward, he landed on Mack's shoulder and they both crashed to the floor below.

When Colonel Jamison tried to rise he fell back with his face twisted in pain.

"Go on alone," he gasped. "My ankle is done up."

GRASPING an extinguisher in one hand Mack took the steps two at a time and literally dived onto the roof with flames licking all about him. Exposed to the fire of rifles from the ground he calmly broke the plunger on the extinguisher and turned it on the licking flames. As the fire began to sputter and die the howls from the natives became shrieks of rage and the firing more desperate.

With bullets singing beneath his arms and through his clothing he moved leisurely, disdainfully back into the opening and brought up the other extinguisher. As his head and shoulders came into view a bullet found its way into the fleshy part of his shoulder and he was driven back against the frame of the trapdoor by the impact.

Howls of exultation came to his ears, but he went grimly on to break the second plunger while a bullet cut off the heel of his riding boot, another raised a tiny welt where it ricocheted off the buckle of his belt, another tore between the fingers of the hand that held the extinguisher on the fast dying fire.

With a branch that he broke from a tree he beat out the rest of the fire, waved a derisive hand to the milling mob below and went calmly down the stairs, pulling the trapdoor closed after him.

He found that Colonel Jamison had been carried to the first floor with a fractured ankle. At his own command they placed him before a loophole at the front of the house where he waited, white-faced and tenacious, for the next attack.

After Mack's wound had been dressed he went back to his old station with Murray, whom he found listening to Gwendolyn Jamison.

"Riviere has threatened me a half dozen times," she was saying. "First, he had the audacity to ask me to be his wife. When I refused he said that every white man and child on the island would pay for it. I didn't tell Uncle Clyde because I thought it would only start trouble and I thought Riviere was crazy.

"Instead, I went north for a few months. When I came back I found that he had taken the same boat. I stayed in my cabin throughout the voyage to avoid him. I have been afraid to tell any one about the morning we arrived here for fear uncle would do something so drastic that the natives would rise up in protest. I have seen his leering eyes behind every bush and tree since I came back. I am afraid to—"

A terrific crash sounded at the side of the house and they leaped to their stations as a stream of black bodies came charging through a gate that had been forced with a battering ram. Before a machine gun could be swung into action they were swarming about the base of the house, out of range of the defenders.

Captain Waring withdrew four men from the front and sides of the house and put them at loopholes in the back. The women and children, except two women who were fighting with rifles, were herded into the huge dining room, their white, strained faces telling the story of their fear.

WHILE Mack pumped lead into the bushes and shrubs about the grounds, Murray crossed the room and gasped in his ear, "how does this strike you for a regular grade A, full-sized uprising? You were right this morning when you said Riviere was going to stir things up. Wish I could get a crack at the cagy devil before I get mine."

Mack fired the last shot in his magazine and put his rifle against the wall, his breath coming in gasps. Suddenly his grimy face spread into a grin.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Why not what?"

"Why not get a crack at Riviere? You know it's worth a try!"

Before Murray could question him further he was racing down the stairs in search of Captain Waring. Finding him he asked if there was any sort of a secret passage out of Government House.

"Yes," he answered. "But we'd all be hacked down in the streets."

"I don't mean that. I mean is there any way I can get out alone?"

"Do you mean to say you want to let us down—run out yourself?" Captain Waring asked, his face going white with anger.

"Run hell, fella!" Mack barked. "I can't run if there's any one after me. I got a little idea that might work out right well. Anyway, it's worth trying."

With Waring listening in wide-eyed amazement, Mack unfolded his plan. The other shook his head, saying that it was impossible, insane, that Mack couldn't live two minutes outside.

"Well, I'm not going to live much longer in here," he answered. "What's an hour or two?"

"There's an underground passage that leads under the house and comes out below the old fort," Captain Waring said in reply. "But you can't make it, man."

"Have I your permission to try?" Mack asked eagerly.

"A man doesn't need permission to commit suicide," the administrator answered caustically.

"Fine," Mack returned and raced up the stairs where he enlisted Murray's help in blackening his body with the grime from his rifle barrel and the charred ends of corks. He tore off his boots and blackened his bare legs, then ripped his breeches to tatters. In each pants pocket he stuck a Colt automatic. While he prepared his masquerade, he told Murray of his plans.

When they had finished they found Captain Waring and asked to be shown the entrance of the passage way. With the aid of an iron bar they pried open the door that led from the hurricane cellar of the old house into the passageway, and with a wave of their hands disappeared into the damp, foul air.

At the far end they could hear the roar of the sea as it broke on the bowlders that lined the shore beneath the fort. Guided only by the flickering light from a ginger-jug flambeau, they waded through the winding passageway for three hundred yards before they came to the outer iron door.

With their bare hands and the aid of the iron bar they tore at the earth that had settled about the door, holding it rigidly in place. Finally they managed to get a leverage inside the crack and put their combined weight into moving it back and forth a fraction of an inch at a time.

As the accumulated dirt of years began falling away, the old timbers above them sagged and for a moment it looked as though the whole thing would cave in on their heads. But after a breathless wait and a few fearful

creaks, the rotted timbers held, and they managed to work the door far enough open for Mack to slip through.

Peering outside he saw leaping, shrieking figures along the water front to the right, where the custom house and post office had stood. Then quickly taking Murray's hand, Mack said, "If I don't come back in a half hour, go back and help inside, because I won't be back."

With that he slipped into the shadows and faded from view.

CHAPTER V.

VICTORY.

A FEW moments later he had become one of the howling devils who careened along the street, the very fierceness of his shrieks keeping the forms about him from coming in too close proximity to him.

After he had passed through the mob before the customhouse he turned up a narrow passageway and crept along within the shadows of a high stone wall. The few natives who passed him thought him to be a wounded man staggering toward his hut. But one giant black swung a club that missed his head by an eyelash and knocked him sprawling to the ground where he feigned unconsciousness until the warrior had passed on, satisfied with his work.

Getting to his feet he staggered through group after group of natives until he was lying flat on his stomach behind the back wall of the Casa Grande Hotel. After he had made sure that there was no guard on the outside, he stepped back a few feet and running forward caught the top of the wall. With the agility of a cat he pulled himself to the top, scrambled silently over and dropped down on the other side.

Stealing across the courtyard, he had approached within two yards of the back entrance when a black form stepped from the shadows into the light and challenged him. Swinging the gun in his hand, Mack caught the guard on the side of the head. Without a sound the black plumped forward. Mack caught him in his arms and laid him back in the shadows, where he trussed his hands and feet and bound part of his ragged breeches in his mouth for a gag.

Moving as noiselessly as the shadows about him, he traversed the ten feet to a back stairway and sped up it. From this point of vantage he could see native runners and messengers passing back and forth along the corridor, and he smiled a tiny smile because he knew that his journey was almost at an end. Within the room with the open door, through which they all poured, he knew he would find Riviere, directing the awful carnage.

Waiting until the hallway was empty he slipped inside and moved silently down the corridor. Two natives, dressed in the uniforms of the constabulary, hurried out and nearly collided with him. About their waists were strapped double action revolvers, and Mack saw that the buttons had been ripped from their tunics.

As he glided by the open door he glanced within. At a table in the center sat Riviere, a bottle in his right hand, from which he was pouring brandy into the glass of a man beside him. A giant guard stood just inside the door. Again that tiny smile flickered across Mack's lips and he swung quickly about.

As he came across the threshold his Colt came down on the head of the guard, who slumped against the wall and slid to the floor. The hand of the man beside Riviere leaped to the holster at his waist, but his gun went spinning across the room as Mack's Colt spoke once, the bullet tearing through his heart and into the wall behind him.

Moving like a flash of lightning, Mack brought the barrel of his gun down on Riviere's wrist as he reached for the gun on his desk. It clattered

to the floor, and Mack shoved his gun into the half-breed's belly so hard he doubled forward on his desk. Bringing his gun up, Mack clipped him on the side of the head and he sprawled across his desk unconscious.

As a footstep sounded behind him he whirled, and his gun spewed lead at two forms in the doorway. A machete grazed his head, but the black who had thrown it strangled and fell across the guard, a bullet through his neck. The other staggered forward two steps and collapsed, making horrible sounds in his chest.

Mack's other gun had appeared in his hand now, and he stood half bent, his legs widespread, waiting. When no one else appeared, he swung the door shut, locked it and upturned Riviere's desk against it.

RUNNING to the window he gazed down into the courtyard below. Not a form was in sight. Picking Riviere up in his arms, he let his limp form slip feet foremost out of the window and lowered him until he dangled a bare two feet from the ground. Carefully he released his hold.

As impatient knocks sounded on the door he slipped through the window and dropped lightly down beside the still body of his captive. Hoisting him across his shoulders like a bag of flour, he unlatched the iron gate and hurried out into the alleyway, circling north toward the water front

Accosted by a guard, he replied, "He are drunk, sare," and then clipped the man on the head as he turned away. At the mouth of the Layou River he had seen a half dozen native fishing skiffs the day before. Staggering under the weight of his burden and loss of blood, he made his way past the fish market and onto the beach.

The first skiff he found was a quarter filled with water, but he knew that the whole pack might be on his trail at any minute. So he dumped Riviere in the bottom and shoved it off the beach. Paddling straight away from the shore he was soon out of the vision of the mob on the water front.

Changing his course he paddled along parallel to the shore until he came opposite the old fort. Then he swung in toward the shore as Riviere stirred and tried to sit up.

"If you make one move I'll pump you so full of bullets the fish will have lead poisoning," he promised him, and renewed his efforts with the paddle until the skiff grounded on the beach.

Prodding the cringing Riviere with his gun, he got him to his feet. With his gun pressed in the small of his back, Mack shoved him toward the dark blotch on the side of the hill where he knew Murray was waiting.

As they neared the entrance the sound of voices came from the top of the hill. Looking up, Mack saw a half dozen blacks led by two men in the uniform of the constabulary coming over the rim of the fort. He knew they were coming to inspect the passageway to see if it offered a way of getting into Government House, and he had a surge of relief because it meant that they had not yet been able to fight their way in.

With all the power of his lungs he called to Murray, who came popping out of the entrance, his gun in his hand.

"Above you," Mack shrieked, and the gun in his hand barked twice. Taken by surprise, the scouting party fell back in consternation. Then, led by the two constables, they started forward, their guns roaring as they came.

As Murray dropped one of them, they turned their fire on him and he ducked out of range. Mack brought another down with his last cartridge. Then prodding, pushing, cursing, Mack forced Riviere on ahead of him as the bullets sang about his ears, and made the protection of the iron door, untouched.

"Just in time, fella," Mack gasped to Murray as a fusillade of bullets sang above their heads.

Between them they led and shoved

the fear-stricken Riviere the length of the passageway and barricaded the inner door behind them.

STRAIGHT through the gaping line of powder-streaked Englishmen, Mack led Riviere, and brought him to halt before Colonel Jamison.

"Here's the ornery, low-lived pig who started the fireworks, sir," he said. "And I've got a fine little plan to have him stop it. We'll have him stick his head out of the front door or out of the trap on the roof, and tell them to cease firing and go home before the *Obeah*-man sics a lot o' *jumbies* on 'em. If he can't make them do it, we'll cut out his tongue and throw it to them."

In spite of the fracture to his ankle, Colonel Jamison managed to hobble to his feet, gazing in wonder at the dirty, blood-stained form of Mack and his ashen captive.

"Now I say," he began, unable to form words in his amazement.

"We've got to act quickly, sir, or they'll have us roasting in a few minutes," Captain Waring put in.

Pushing his gun in Riviere's back, Mack swung him about and urged him up the stairs, with Captain Waring and Murray following.

On the second floor Mack darted into a room that was strewn with empty shells and gathered two rifles under his arm. On the top floor he tore a piece from what remained of his breeches and lashed the rifles together in the form of a cross.

While he worked, he instructed Murray to take a machine gun through the postern gate and mount it ready for action on the stone wall above the street.

"You can make it when Riviere shoves his head up through the trap on the roof," he said. "Then, if my little trick doesn't work we can get them with a cross fire when they attack again."

Placing the cross of rifles in one of Riviere's hands and a huge flambeau in the other, he pushed him up the stairs and shoved back the trap. As Riviere stuck his head out of the opening a half dozen bullets whistled by his ears and he tried to duck back to safety.

With an automatic pressing into his back as a means of persuasion, they forced him up again, with the cross and flambeau held high above his head. A bullet plowed into the trapdoor behind him, another glanced off one of the rifles and nearly drove the cross from his hand. And then the firing stopped, and the shrieking mob below forgot to shriek as they recognized him and stared up at the terror-stricken face of their leader.

Following Mack's orders, and with Captain Waring making sure that his words were correctly translated into patois, Riviere threatened his followers with all the evil curses in the *Obeah*-man's litany if they did not give up their weapons.

While he talked, the gallant little band of defenders on the floors below scarcely breathed, awaiting the results of Riviere's pleading. As the mob dissected itself into jabbering, hesitant groups, the white garrison's faces became wreathed in smiles and their hearts fired with a new hope for life.

Then, as suddenly as the attack had stopped, it was again whipped into action by one of Riviere's lieutenants. While he screamed maledictions at his leader, he emptied his automatic, the bullets sailing harmlessly over Riviere's head. But his fury served as a new torch to rekindle the fire and the chattering mob without a leader again became a howling army that had tasted blood.

As Mack and Captain Waring raced down the stairs to take their places in the defense, the form of Riviere came toppling after them to settle in a grotesque, sprawled heap, a tiny stream of red trickling from his forehead.

A battering-ram came crashing against the front door to tear out a

panel. Mack poked the nose of a machine gun through the opening and poured a hundred rounds of lead into the mass of black forms hacking at the door with machetes. The porch became strewn with a shrieking, squirming mass of bodies that became a barricade before the second rank of attackers.

As they tried to cut their way through, the *rat-tat-tat* of another machine gun came from without the house and caught the insurgents between a deadly cross fire.

For a moment they pressed on, hacking and tearing at the bodies that blocked their way.

But as Mack slipped in another belt of cartridges, and held his finger down on the trigger of the machine gun, the attack wavered, then halted as Murray renewed his fire from across the grounds.

The bloodthirsty shrieks of a moment ago became frightened howls of superstitious fear, and the cry of "Warship! Warship!" came ringing back in patois from the black bodies streaming toward the mornes.

It was then that Mack and Captain Waring clambered over the bodies on the porch and led a charge, small in numbers, but terrible in its fury, that drove the last of the insurgents through the gates. Planting their machine gun between the gates, they poured lead up and down the street until it was deserted by all but the dead and wounded.

Leisurely they swung the great iron gates closed behind them and turned back toward the house as the rays of a powerful searchlight played on the hills above them. Mack turned questioning, bloodshot eyes to his companion.

"A cruiser," Captain Waring smiled wearily, but his eyes were sick with the sights about him. "A cruiser that came a day too late!"

Back within the house they found the half dozen survivors spread out on the floor, too exhausted to move out of their tracks when the attack had ceased.

As Mack started up the stairs he swayed uncertainly and ran a hand across a forehead that was wet with cold perspiration. His feet dragged, refused to function, and he slumped back into Murray's arms.

IT was four weeks later that two bronzed, hard-eyed young giants pushed open the door of an office that bore the gilded inscription, "Colton and Wickwire," and sent their names in to the senior member of the firm.

A moment later they were ushered into the presence of Amos Colton to find him poring over a mass of legal documents. Smiling serenely at one another, they waited until he had finished with the business before him.

When he swung about he found himself looking into the barrel of a blue-nosed automatic.

"Just a little something to insure your attention," Mack laughed as Murray drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket and unfolded them before Amos Colton's frightened eyes.

Speaking distinctly and slowly, so that not even a man half dead from fear could misunderstand, Murray read a letter signed by Riviere to the effect that he had been hired by Amos Colton to do away with Murray Colton in any way he saw fit. Also, that upon providing satisfactory proof that Murray Colton would not reappear, he, Riviere, was to receive Caribbees as payment.

Murray then read certain affidavits signed by "His Honour the Administrator," and a half dozen planters who had been present when Riviere had signed his confessions and bared certain plots to overthrow the government.

Two hours later, when the same two bronzed young men stepped from the elevator on the ground floor, they had in their possession documents which

restored to Murray Colton what remained of his inheritance.

And far above their heads a man with fear-stricken eyes softly turned the key in the lock of his private office and reached for the gun one of the careless young men had left behind.

When his partner and office employees had broken in the door they found Amos Colton's lifeless body sagged down in a chair. In his eyes was an expression of fear and not a little regret.

Not having heard the shot, however, the two young men made their way to another part of the city and entered an alleyway. The alleyway led into the back door of a café where they ordered two New Orleans Fizzes, for which the place was famous. After they had taken a long sip, one of them remarked:

"This is the same place we met a couple of months ago and decided to look over the lime joint in Dominica."

"Boy, howdy," the other answered, and his expression became a little sad. "I guess I'll be shovin' along in a few days. I never could stand this city."

"Shoving for where?" Murray Colton wanted to know, his eyes wide.

"Just gonna sally along and find me a job some place," Mack answered. "Our little trip cost me a lot of dough, and we didn't make much profit!"

"Job?" Murray half shouted. "Are you going to walk out on me and leave that place on my hands?"

"You won't want to be foolin' with that place now that you've got some real money," Mack said.

"Listen, boy," Murray answered. "We're getting the first boat to Dominica. We're going to buy some more property, and while I'm traveling you've got to get things in shape. We're playing this fifty-fifty, and we'll each run the place six months of the year.

"When we get back I'm going on my honeymoon." Murray stopped, and his face was a little sheepish. When Mack began to grin he smiled back and said, "what did you think I was doing around Government House those last two or three weeks—counting the bullet holes?"

"So that's the lay, is it?" Mack said.

"That's it," Murray answered.

"You picked a thoroughbred, fella," Mack said.

And they ordered two more New Orleans Fizzes, for which the place was famous!

THE END

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A Metropolitan Round-Up

KANSAS CITY, busy Western metropolis, recently was treated to all the thrills and excitement of a regular Western round-up with special metropolitan trimmings when a train two blocks from the Union Station released one hundred and eighty-five wild and woolly Hereford cattle which were being brought from Western ranges to the big Kansas City packing plants.

Steers romped through the streets, raced through the big station, entered stores and business places and generally contributed to a wild and hilarious time. Policemen and other city residents gained themselves laurels by "bulldogging," and capturing some of the steers while stockyard cowboys spent a hectic day extracting bewildered cattle from flower beds, traffic congestions, and other decidedly weird places for a well brought-up Western steer. Damage was estimated at nearly one hundred thousand dollars.

Foster-Harris.

The man set the tray down and carefully selected one of the smaller knives

War Lord of Many Swordsmen

Chinese power and subtlety beset the path of Norcross, as he and his loyal fighters march into the mountain fastnesses on a strange quest

By W. WIRT

Author of "They All Get Theirs," "Kill Him, Jimmie—or I Will," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOHN NORCROSS, war veteran and gay adventurer, is financed by the immensely wealthy Landess on an expedition into Western China, to recover a brass tube hidden near Taiyaun—close to the Afghan border—by a Russian boy whose father had once befriended Landess. Norcross starts—while Carlton, an unscrupulous collector and rival of Landess, who had learned of the quest, sends Elizabeth Dudley, a beautiful secret agent, to Taiyaun, where she will be helped by war lord Tseng to outwit Norcross and get the mysterious tube.

Norcross crosses China with one hundred and fifty picked men from the negro battalion he commanded overseas, and a chosen group of fellow-adventurers—the Irishman, Red McGee; the Fighting Yid; Billy Gray of Boston Tech; the Boston Bean—Winthrop, a millionaire adventurer; Patton; and George Gunnell. Armed with

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machine guns and French seventy-fives, they are ready to cut their way through bandits and hostile war lords.

Nearing the Long White Mountains and the city of Taiyaun they meet a fleeing party of Chinese nobles, who beg protection for the Manchu princess Ch'enyaun. Norcross promises it, and the Chinese, led by Ch'enyaun and her lover, the young prince T'ang Wang, join them. She has been driven from her city of Ningyuan by war lord Tseng and her uncle Chunghwan; and a party of Tseng's troops, led by a Bolshevik, Dimitri, ride up and demand her surrender. Norcross's troops practically wipe out the attackers, killing Dimitri.

Norcross offers to recapture Ch'enyaun's city of Ningyuan for her; so he marches through the valley of the black men—a grassy valley held by a tribe of Zulu warriors, who emigrated from Africa under chief Sungandada early in the nineteenth century. Halfway across, the Zulus fall upon them, two *impis* or war crescents of a thousand men each. After a terrific battle, in which, despite machine guns and high explosive shelling, the Zulus break through the lines, they are beaten off and well-nigh wiped out; and Norcross proceeds unmolested toward Ningyuan.

CHAPTER VI. (*Continued.*)

THE CITY CARVED IN A MOUNTAIN.

NORCROSS established a base as close to the beginning of the Ningyuan water channels as he could. Gray, McGee, Gunnell, the Fighting Yid, and fifty men took four of the machine guns and one of the seventy-fives and went forward at dawn the next morning. Party after party of Chinese, armed with long swords and lances, silently joined the little column, first prostrating themselves before Ch'enyaun, who was leading, dressed in khaki.

As they came to the iron gates, they swung open to meet them. On the ground several Chinese lay dead. A party of two hundred swordsmen joined. When they saw Norcross with other white men, and the big black men with their bayoneted rifles, their faces and eyes expressed their utter astonishment. But these outlanders were led by their princess, who had come back from the seats of the gods to fight for them, and no word was spoken. Inside the gates Ch'enyaun hesitated for a moment, then turned to Norcross. "John, I do not know how to order this. Will you take command for me?"

"I'll be your chief of staff," Norcross smiled slowly. "If I were you I would ignore the scattered units except at the main gates and attack at the palace and barracks. Mop up there first, then send out parties to clean up generally. Find out how many men are quartered in the barracks."

Ch'enyaun didn't understand half of what he was saying, but grasped the last part. She asked a question of one of the older men, then she turned to Norcross. "There are three hundred in the barracks, John."

"Then send a strong party to the rear of the palace, attack with your other men, and go straight through, cleaning up as you go. I'll take care of the front and the barracks for you. Then—"

"John, you are my elder brother," Ch'enyaun said. "I want you to take command for me."

"Translate, T'ang Wang," said Norcross. "I take command at the order of the Princess Ch'enyaun.

"T'ang Wang, send a party strong enough to carry the gate at the front. Gray, take ten men and go with them. Take one machine gun. Red, take a party of ten men and one gun to the rear of the palace with the men T'ang Wang will detail. No more killing than is necessary. Stop any rush coming out of the palace. Take and hold prisoners.

"T'ang Wang, you will lead the

main attack on the palace and work your way through until you get contact with the rear. I will give you ten men. I will take the barracks and hold the front for you while you are mopping up. George, you and the Yid stick with me.

"The city itself can be taken later, if necessary, after our positions are consolidated. The princess will accompany you. Sergeant Coudray, detail a bodyguard of four men for the princess, and let me tell you one thing—if any harm comes to her, you scoundrels better keep right on going, because I'll skin you alive and hang your hides up to dry."

"Capt'n," said Sergeant Yaller Coudray, saluting, "does it happen, us'll be daid? Come on, Corporal Moss and—"

Norcross turned to Ch'enyaun. "I will be near in case you need me, but there are those in the palace that have wronged you and you wish to handle. You must attend to that part of it yourself."

"Yes," she said sternly, once more the Manchu princess. "In that palace are the men who killed my people and drove me away. You need not worry about the city, John. The people are mine."

THE swordsmen of Tseng were asleep in the big rambling one-story barracks that extended across one side of the square in front of the palace. They were awakened by a sudden burst of shots at the doors, as the poorly placed, half somnolent guard went down under the rifles.

Getting to their feet, all still dazed with sleep and a good many with opium and drink, they saw what to them was an incursion of the dreaded black man of the back country. They had heard about them from childhood, and here they came, led by chiefs who wielded bayoneted rifles and spears. A few of Tseng's men fell to the floor face down, making no attempt to defend themselves, but the majority, after the first hesitation, grasped their weapons and rushed to the attack.

Their very numbers aided in the slaughter that followed. It was like a charge of State police into an unorganized mob. Norcross, Gunnell, and the Fighting Yid, at the head of a wedge, shot and bayoneted their way through the horde of swordsmen, reached the opposite wall, then turned, spread the men out a little and came back through them to the doors, to turn once more and go through again. Men were pushed out of the windows and doors to meet death from the machine gun and rifles outside. Norcross's men had the advantage from the start. They knew what it was all about, they were well fed, full of life and vigor, fighting under the eyes of their captain and the white men they knew were simon-pure fighting men, against an adversary they knew they could beat. Were they not the outfit that had killed two thousand Zulus?

It was over in ten minutes. Fifty or more Chinese dropped their swords and knelt for mercy, in submission to whatever fate would be meted out to them by these terrible black men who fought with smiles on their faces.

Norcross's whistle brought his men to attention. "These men are prisoners of war and to be treated as such. Sergeant, station a strong guard at the rear wall, one in front here, and I'll send a machine gun in."

Outside on the square between the palace and the barracks Norcross formed a little star with the remaining men. The city teemed with secret life and motion, but of Chinese there were none in sight. The stone walls of the palace, cut here and there with narrow slit-like windows, were impassive. From the rear there came a few scattered shots, and once a burst of machine fire, then silence.

The men who had been detailed to take the city gate came out of one of the narrow streets leading into the

square, Billy Gray at their head, their hats on the sides of their heads, their Springfields at shoulder arms, swaggering in front of some of Ch'enyaun's swordsmen. Their guns and shoulders were draped with flowers.

One of the sergeants saluted. "Capt'n, de gate is took an' de guard posted. Us leaves Corporal Johnsing an' fo' men wid de Chinks."

"Right, Billy; stick around with me. Sergeant, take your men around to the rear of the palace and make contact with the party there. Send a runner back to me. Where did the men get the flowers, sergeant?"

"Capt'n, when us takes de gate, de Chinks dat lives 'round dar comes out when dey sees we ain't de Zulus and when dey hears dat we is de princess's men, dey bring us de flowers, all dem little Chink girls, yassir."

Red McGee came up in a few moments. "Sure, 'twas not much fighting we gets, bad cess to 'em. Some run out at first and we stop 'em—then only once in awhile. Then there was quite a few wid an old man at the head and divil a wan gets by."

"All right, Red. Hold your position until relieved."

T'ang Wang came from the palace, with several of the young nobles. His long curved sword was bloody, as were the swords of the others.

T'ang Wang bowed low to Norcross. "Lord, the Princess Ch'enyaun desires that you come to her, if you can."

"Where do you get that lord stuff, T'ang Wang?" asked Norcross with a broad grin. "Captain is as high as I ever rated, old-timer."

"The princess orders," said T'ang Wang formally, "that you be addressed as lord, on pain of the slicing death."

CH'ENYAUN sat on the throne of her ancestors, the deeply carved high-backed chair blazing with jewels. She was clad in heavy silks that flashed and gleamed with the reflection from the countless diamonds and precious stones that seemed to comprise her robes. On her head was the Manchu headdress of a ruler. Her little feet were once more in satin boots. Her arms were almost covered with diamond and ruby and emerald bracelets. Around one slender ankle was a bracelet of diamonds and pearls.

She sat straight in the chair, her feet resting on a cushion, and her eyes still blazed with the war spirit of her fathers.

As Norcross and T'ang Wang reached the dais, Ch'enyaun rose and stood, with both her lovely arms held out, hands together, palms down.

"My Lord John," she said, bowing low, "thy seat is here beside me and T'ang Wang. You are our honorable elder brother."

Three days later the high priest married Ch'enyaun and T'ang Wang in the gardens of her palace. The people of the city, flowerlike in their gay silks and satins, massed around the temple. Behind and around them were the swordsmen of Ch'enyaun and the grim-faced fighting men of Norcross, uniforms cleaned and buttons polished, their rifles shining in the sun.

Gunnell, Patton and the rest were in a little group by the platform on which the high priest stood. Norcross stood in the place designated by age-long tradition for the nearest male relation of the bride. The brilliant sun, the snow-clad mountains in the distance, the riot of color and the happy murmur of the people, seeing their princess once more in possession of her city, made it a sight that even the hardened adventurers, for years used to spectacular scenes, remembered for a long time.

After the feasting and the almost week-long ceremonies were over, Norcross called the white men together in his quarters.

"The tube, as nearly as I can make out, is up in the little shrine hanging

on the side of the hill to the right. You birds keep tight hold down here, and to-morrow morning I will take some of those scoundrels of mine and go up and take a look-see."

"Better ye take Billy and me and the Fighting Yid here," said Red. "It might be that some wan else is knowin' the place, and—"

"I don't think so," answered Norcross with a grin. "Anyway, my outfit would never get over it if I took any one and left them behind. They are like children, Red, in spite of their fighting ability. It's perfectly safe. We're inside the city. I'd just as soon go alone, but I'll detail four or five of them to go along to keep peace in the family."

CHAPTER VII.

TSENG.

TSENG, lord of Taiyaun, sat in his audience chamber, his swordsmen lining the walls and massed behind him. At his feet lay the headless body of a Chinese, dressed as a soldier.

The war lord's evil, scarred face was immobile, but his eyes were those of a venomous snake. A panel slid silently back and Katherine Dudley came in.

This slip of a girl, on whom rested the responsibility of outwitting Norcross, walked as leisurely and calmly as if on parade at Nice or Deauville. There was no fear in her beautiful blue eyes. Her patrician English face, her pink and white skin and yellow hair, stood out in contrast with the dark, scowling faces of the Chinese around her. She walked slowly up to Tseng, and stood, one little foot almost touching the headless body, as calmly insolent as she had been in Carlton's office.

"Since when," she asked, coldly, "have Chinese war lords sent for English guests?"

Tseng's eyes widened at the perfect insolence of her voice. He had been one of Kweiliang's officers in the Army of the North, and in Peking he had met many English. They were all alike, these English, calm and sure of their superiority. His lips twisted into a crooked smile.

"I beg your pardon," he answered in perfect English, "I did not come to you because of pressure of affairs."

Her lips curled in derision, "A lord of one city," she mocked "and of five thousand swordsmen, to have affairs? Well, what do you want?"

She stood there, only a girl in years, but of the blood that went out in fishing sloops to meet the Spanish armada. Cold, calm, fearless and English to the tips of her little toes. Alone in the heart of a Chinese city, hundreds of miles from help or succor, with the toe of her satin slipper almost touching the body of a man slain by him, she openly sneered at Tseng.

His eyes widened again in admiration. There is nothing that the Chinese admire more than bravery.

"I sent for you, Miss Dudley, to tell you that Captain Norcross has arrived in Ningyuan, with six white men and over a hundred black men, and has taken the city from the dogs to whom I intrusted it—and killed a thousand of them in doing so. This one escaped"—he motioned to the body at his feet—"and brought me the news."

"That's another thing," she said. "In the future kindly bear in mind that I do not care to see the—er—evidences of your perverted ideas of justice. You Chinese have peculiar principles. Have this"—she touched the body with the toe of her slipper—"carrion removed. In the future see that this place is at least clean before you ask audience." She spoke as if backed by a British squadron.

"Your wishes shall be obeyed," answered Tseng smoothly; and he gave a curt order.

Two men sprang forward and picked up the body and head, and carried them

away. "Captain Norcross," Tseng continued, "has seated the Manchu princess once more on the throne of her ancestors. He has not as yet left the city for any of the shrines on the hill."

"Then, why disturb me? Am I to be brought before you to hear gossip?"

"It was because of the fact that I wished you to know that the time has come to plan how to take the tube from him; and also to tell you that when you have received the tube Captain Norcross belongs to me. He has killed Dimitri and a thousand of my men. He shall die the—"

"Send these slaves away," commanded Miss Dudley, and she calmly seated herself. "Are we to sit in council surrounded by dogs?"

Tseng smiled again and waved his hand. The swordsmen melted away. "My spies tell me he has not as yet gone to any of the shrines, but spends his time at the palace."

"Then, have your men watch every movement, and when he leaves the city for the shrine—"

"SERGEANT," said Norcross as Yancey reported to him, "have Sergeant Coudray, Corporal Moss, and two privates report to me at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Light marching order, without rifles. I'm going up to that shrine you can see hanging on the rim up there. That's all."

The little shrine, built on one of the smaller hills outside the city proper, but still inside the crater, was deserted and half fallen to pieces. The idols had been removed for some unknown reason, and it stood bare and desolate.

When Norcross and the men with him climbed the hill a party of Chinese wood-choppers, working in the thick woods leading up to the shrine, stopped work and bowed to the ground as they came by.

The city was hidden from view by the woods from the little path that wound gently up to the shrine.

In the shrine were still some grotesque carven figures, half human, half animal, left when the idols had been taken away.

"Turn them over," Norcross commanded. "What I am looking for is a little brass tube about as big as a seventy-five shell. It's underneath one of them."

Three had been overturned, with no results, when Sergeant Yaller Coudray, who had been making independent investigations, shouted: "Here it is, cap'n! I got it!"

Norcross took the tube and stood looking at it. Already it had cost lives. Many a good man had died because of it, this little seemingly insignificant length of brass.

Both ends were filled with wooden plugs and heavily coated with sealing wax.

"Put those things, whatever they are, back on their bases," he commanded.

Corporal Delicate Moss had been doing a little snooping around on his own account, and was in a little alcove at the rear of the shrine.

He called: "Capt'n, please, suh—can Ah take some of these here wood dolls?"

"What dolls?" demanded Norcross, who had gone to the door of the shrine.

"Dese wood dolls back here."

"Wait till I see what they are. You men wait here in front."

The rest of the men sat down on the crumbling stone steps and waited, talking idly. Finally Sergeant Coudray said, looking at his wrist watch: "Ma goodness, Delicate mus' be makin' dem dolls, time dey is takin'."

"Maybe dey foun' mo' dan dolls," suggested one man. "Ah wishes Ah had me a drink of dat rice wine."

Norcross came out, followed by Corporal Moss, whose arms were full of the little wooden figures. Norcross had an old dusty roll of parchment in his

hand. The tube was stuck in his belt, near his gun holster.

"I got some fo' each of you birds," announced Delicate.

"Ma Lord," said Sergeant Coudray, "look at de face on dat baby."

"Ain't dat somepin?" complained Delicate. "Yeah, I spends ma time pickin' out de prettiest, while de capt'n looks at de old book he finds, and now you houn's don't want em."

"Get goin'," Norcross commanded absently, looking at the scroll of parchment he had found by the dolls. The men started down the path, Corporal Delicate Moss with his dolls. About halfway down the woods thickened, and the little path narrowed and curved between the big trees.

NORCROSS was looking at the pictures painted on the parchment and grinning at what was to him the ludicrous proportions of the figures.

He was fifteen or twenty yards behind the men who were laughing and joking with Delicate about the dolls. There was no thought of danger, as they were inside the crater.

The path turned and twisted, but straightened out as the woods became thinner. Sergeant Coudray looked carelessly back.. He could see fifty or sixty feet up the path. His eyes widened and his mouth flew open. Norcross was not in sight.

The laughing, happy-go-lucky expression vanished from his black face. With an oath, his teeth bared in an animal snarl, he drew his Colt and ran back up the path. The reaction on the rest was as instantaneous. Delicate Moss dropped his armful of dolls, and, quick and light on his feet as a big black panther for all his two hundred and fifty pounds, caught up to Coudray before he had gone ten feet.

"Git in de timbah on de sides," he called back.

They hoped that Norcross had sat down somewhere to look at the parchment; but he hadn't. Back to the shrine they ran, searching it as men can search, hunting for something they love. On the way back they combed the woods on either side of the path for a hundred feet.

"I got it," yelled Corporal Moss, on one of the curves. "Come 'ere."

The rest ran up, their black faces grim and drawn with worry.

"Dey lay here, see, and den when he comes along here dey jumps him in some way dat don't make no noise, and den dey carries him dis way, see de broken branches."

"Come on, den—us gits him!"

"Come where, nigger? De woods end at dat windfall, don't dey? Where at is any mo' tracks? Ah can see fo' a mile dis way."

"Dat's de ones! Git back an' git de rest of de boys. Us finds him or us takes dis country apart."

"Ma Gawd," moaned Corporal Delicate Moss, as they ran down the path. "Us regulars—us lets him get took. How does us face de rest? How does us face de rest?"

"Goin' along," Sergeant Yaller Coudray took up the wail, "jest like de militia, an' de capt'n gets took. Oh, Lord! Goin' along, payin' no 'tention —an' de capt'n gits ambushed. Get outta ma way, nigger; you can't run."

"We gits him," panted the man beside him. "Ain't nothin' dat can hurt de capt'n."

Corporal Moss's wail seemed to settle on one thing. "An' us regulars! An' us regulars!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE WAR LORD.

CH'ENYAUN sat as if carved out of stone, her eyes cold and wintry as she listened to the big colored men gasping out their story. Before he had brought them to her, T'ang Wang had ordered out five hundred swordsmen to surround the woods and

search the city, and all the white men but Billy Gray were out, with all the men not on fixed post. Exits and passages were guarded. Even the little path that led only to the back country swarmed with her swordsmen.

The distress of the men in front of her touched the princess, and she did as she knew Norcross would have. She remembered that he had said they were only big children.

"It is not your fault. You were in my city. The Lord Norcross himself was not on guard. The fault is mine and his, not yours, as he will say when we find him."

"Yassum," answered Sergeant Coudray, "but us had him and us lost him. Don't make no differ—"

"You say that on the way up there were woodchoppers in the woods?"

"Yassum. An' when we comes down dey wasn't dar no mo."

Ch'enyaun turned to T'ang Wang. "The woods of the shrine—have the priests released them?"

"No, princess."

"Then they were Tseng's men. The prisoners that my lord took at the barracks and at the gate, where are they?"

"In the barracks."

"Who guards them?"

"Tackwang and his men."

"The people come and go, through the gate?"

"Yes, to the mines and clay field and the burying grounds."

"Tseng's spies come and go then, also. These prisoners—see that there is no more chance for them to escape. Close the gates. They may not have had time to get out with him."

"The captain of the gate says that only one party has gone out since noon. A burial—"

Ch'enyaun flashed to her feet. "A burial party—with the burial cart! Mount fifty swordsmen, T'ang Wang. Come, you men." As they came from the palace they met Red, the Boston Bean, and the Fighting Yid, who joined them.

The burial party was overtaken about three miles from the city. It consisted of fifteen or twenty men, one dressed as a priest. The long box-like little cart was drawn by a shaggy pony. Ch'enyaun's swordsmen surrounded them and she leaped from her horse.

The man dressed as a priest drew a sword from under his robe.

"You, Kung!" she gasped, and her sword licked out like the tongue of a snake. He whirled once then sank to the road, his head almost severed from his body. "Alive!" she shouted. The rest of the burial party were disarmed. The top of the box on the cart was torn off. It was empty.

Ch'enyaun turned, death in her eyes. The disarmed men stood, their arms already tied behind them, two of her swordsmen beside each of them.

"In a line," she commanded, pointing to them. They were pushed forward and lined up in front of her.

"Lingeh'ih," she said, coldly.

The prisoners were seized by the brawny swordsmen and held as in a vise. A man stepped in front of each of them and, without a moment's hesitation, tore open the loose blouse and cut a piece of flesh from the chest of his victim.

The men quivered, and one or two tried to shrink back. Again the razor-edged swords took a piece of flesh, not bigger than an inch across. Again and again they bit, not deeply, but each time a piece of flesh fell away. It was a lingering process, the "slicing to death."

AFTER the tenth cut one of them, the youngest, hardly more than a boy, screamed loudly and began to babble.

Ch'enyaun gave a curt command and he was roughly thrown at her feet, where he lay.

"Raise him." He was dragged to his knees and Ch'enyaun's sword flashed in his eyes. "Speak, dog. Where is he?"

"Tseng's men met us and took him," gasped the boy.

"He is alive?"

"Yes, oh, mercy, Princess! I am but—"

"Take this slave back to the city," she commanded, "and save him for me."

She looked at the line of quivering, bleeding men. "Behead them." They were forced to their knees, the long swords flashed up, then down, and the party rode on toward the city of Tseng.

Half an hour later they topped a little rise just in time to see some horsemen enter one of the narrow defiles. Ch'enyaun rode at the head of her men and, as she saw the riders, mercilessly flogged her pony forward.

Gray rode up beside her. "They waited until they saw us," he shouted. "It's an ambush. Don't ride—"

Ch'enyaun was past paying attention to anything. She thought she had seen a form thrown over one of the horses.

They raced into the defile between two of the big hills and Tseng's swordsmen and lancers poured around them, front, rear, and from both sides. They were foot soldiers, and the very speed of Ch'enyaun's party carried them far into the mass.

The four white men were close beside her, and their Colts literally blew a path for her. They had her between them before they had gone five yards. T'ang was close beside, his sword helping. The density of the men in the narrow place helped protect her also. Her men were of her personal bodyguard and of Manchu blood, and they fought with their lives for hers.

The Fighting Yid forced his pony against hers and swung it around. "Get back! Shoot the way out!"

There was a surge of mounted men around them and Ch'enyaun was in the middle of a score of her swordsmen. They did not understand what he said, but they saw what he did and the way he pointed. There was a rush, like that of the tide against the rocks, the hiss of sword blades, the falling of men and horses, and the steady *pow! pow! pow!* of the Colt forty-fives.

There was the feel of bodies under the ponies' feet, then the open country for Ch'enyaun, T'ang Wang, the four white men, and twenty of her bodyguard. The rest lay dead across the bodies of their foe. There was no attempt at pursuit. The sight of the rear guard of four grim white men with their smoking Colts was sufficient to stop any idea Tseng's men may have had of following.

"If he has been hurt," Ch'enyaun said softly to Gray, who rode beside her, "I will put the city of Tseng to the sword and make it a place for jackals and snakes to live." She turned to T'ang Wang: "Ride ahead with all whose horses are fresh. All men over fifteen are to be armed and ready to march."

TSENG came slowly up to where Katherine Dudley sat idly feeding the swans in one of the ponds in the gardens of his palace. His evil eyes seemed to feed on her blond beauty and graceful form.

She watched him approach, knowing that he desired her and that she was powerless to prevent his carrying out his wishes unless she killed herself. Yet she looked at him with an air of half amused contempt and did not even change her reclining position.

There was no other seat near the stone bench and not room for two on it, the way she was lying. It forced him to remain standing. She looked like some proud Roman empress receiving the report of a palace officer.

"Well?" she questioned.

"I have the tube of brass for you," answered Tseng, "and also I have Captain John Norcross—for myself. It is not customary in China for women to remain seated while men stand."

"Chinese women, you mean, who are the chattels of their lords and masters. In England, oh, lord of a

small village, the men stand. Give me the tube."

"There are first one or two little matters to be arranged," said Tseng, suavely. "You will pardon me if I send for a chair? My wounds are painful this morning."

"You have my permission. Our plans worked?"

"Yes," softly answered Tseng, pausing to snarl back an order to his bodyguard. "One by one my men entered the city as woodsmen and traders. He went up to the shrine with four men. When he came out he loitered behind them, looking at a parchment he had found. When his men were out of sight, a blanket was thrown over his head, he was beaten into unconsciousness and carried to the cave that had been prepared under the fallen tree.

"When the black men ran back to the city, he was carried to the burial cart and brought out. The Princess Ch'enyaun pursued, and if it had not been for the black men, I would have had her also. It may be that some day the gods will give her to me to—"

The chair was brought and Tseng sat down.

"Where is the tube? Remember, Tseng, this Captain Norcross is the agent of one of the richest and most powerful men in the world. So powerful that he sent a big ship, and the British government passed him through India. He can send enough men to wipe you out up here in the north; he is powerful enough to arrange at Peking that it will be ignored. If he sends an armed force for a little brass tube, he may send an army to avenge the death of his agent."

Tseng smiled his crooked smile. "America is far away—and so is England. To me he is only a well-made man whose body may last long enough under the slicing death to amuse me."

"I will give you," said Katherine Dudley, "double what I promised you for your help in getting the tube, for Captain Norcross, unharmed."

"You have the money with you?" questioned Tseng politely.

"You know I have not. Your slaves have already searched my belongings. But you knew my father and you know if I say the money will be paid that you will get it. Do you intend to carry out your agreement, or not?"

"To the letter. Our agreement was that I was to help you in any way to get the brass tube and after that a safe conduct back to the Indian border."

"Right," drawled Katherine Dudley.

"Here is the tube," said Tseng, producing it from one of the sleeves of his robe, "and it may be that you will not want the safe conduct afterward."

SHE felt cold all over as she read the intent in those evil eyes, looking at her body.

"If you have any such idea in your mind," she said contemptuously, "get rid of it. I am not for you, Tseng, unless you wish to amuse yourself with my dead body." She laughed, a slow, soft, little sneering laugh. "Do you think I would put myself in your power without means of extricating myself, if necessary?"

Tseng smiled, "Poison? But where do you keep it?"

Katherine Dudley laughed. "Oh, I know that even the maids who bathe me are your spies. And yet, O lord of a village, when the time comes, you will see me pass on high."

"It may be," said Tseng courteously, "but let us hope that you will not deem it necessary."

She had been turning the tube around and around in her hand. Suddenly she looked carefully at the blotch of sealing wax on one end. Holding the tube rigid, she twisted the top. The seal was broken and the wooden plug came easily out. Turning the tube up, she shook it, then felt and looked in it. The tube was empty.

Tseng's eyes followed her every movement, his face inscrutable.

Katherine Dudley slowly put the plug back in and patted it down with her hand, then she drew a long quivering breath.

"You dog!" she said coldly, rising to her feet, as did Tseng. "You Chinese pariah dog! You, a war lord, to trick a woman—you coolie!" and she flung the brass tube with all her strength into the impassive face within three feet of her.

Tseng swerved to avoid it, but one twirling end cut a jagged gash across his cheek. He staggered back, but recovered himself in time to check his swordsmen, who had flung themselves forward, their blades raised to cut down this foreign devil-woman who had drawn the blood of their lord.

His raised hand stopped them as their swords poised for the stroke. Then the hand, with the long curved finger nails bent a little back, and they came behind him.

Katherine Dudley stood, her hands clenched by her sides, her head held high, her blue eyes blazing. The Dudley temper had played her false, as it had played her ancestors in England and elsewhere for five hundred years, as it had played her father false.

Tseng slowly brought out a silken handkerchief and held it to his cheek. There was not a tremor in his voice as he said:

"I took the tube from Captain Norcross's belt myself and brought it here to you—unopened—as was our agreement."

She noticed the past tense of the words, but showed no sign. She knew she had offended beyond any hope of pardon or compromise, and that if he would compass it, she would die slowly of indescribable torture.

"The sealing wax was freshly sealed," she answered, coldly. "The tube has been opened in the last twenty-four hours."

"I regret," said Tseng, softly, "that you think I or my slaves did it, Miss Dudley."

There was only one course for her to pursue, and she knew it. "Where are his clothes?" she demanded haughtily. "He has concealed what was in the tube. The parchment you say he was reading—was that brought for you to examine?"

"The clothes shall be brought to you; the parchment also. It may be that before he dies to-morrow in the Temple Square he will tell us of what was in the tube—where it is. May I ask you to honor my insignificant self with your honorable presence in my poor audience hall?"

That she would go eventually, if not at the moment, to death by her own hand or by his torturers, she had not the slightest doubt; but she walked along beside him as calmly and coolly as it he were some Chinese diplomat at an English lawn party, and she the hostess.

CHAPTER IX.

ON TO TAIYAUN.

CH'ENYAUN sat once more on the throne of her ancestors, this time clad in the khaki made for her by the tailor. On the floor in front of the dais lay the bodies of five spies of Tseng, captured in the city. Before her knelt a boy, not more than sixteen, his clothes torn, his breath still coming in gasps.

"My father sent me—oh, lord of a city, to tell you that—the white lord lives—and that Tseng has set to-morrow—for him to die—the—slicing death in the—Temple Square—beneath the great gods—before all the city."

"Thy father, who was my father's friend, shall carry all the honors and riches I can give him," said Ch'enyaun, "and you also, little brother. How did you leave the city? Does Tseng fear attack?"

"The gates are closed and guarded; I know not what he fears. I came by a secret way that my father knew—

and I ran—all night." The boy pitched unconscious on his face.

"Care for him. Let him be treated as a prince of the blood," commanded Ch'enyaun, "and take these dogs away. All they knew, we know!".

Gray stepped forward. He had been standing behind the chair with the rest of the white men. They had watched the spies of Tseng meet their death with calm eyes. The taking of Norcross had stripped the veneer of civilization from them and they were as much savage now as the Zulus they had fought.

"May I make a talk?"

"Yes, but hurry."

"That's it," Gray snapped, "too much hurry. Norcross is alive. If he were here, he'd plan something. We aren't afraid of any swordsmen that bird's got or anything he has, but we must get to where Norcross is and it's going to take time to go through those swordsmen, even when we're in the city, with its alleys and narrow streets and stone houses. If they resist it takes time, and in the meantime, this bird's got Norcross."

"It is a long way from here to Taiyaun, Billy," said Ch'enyaun. "If you have a plan, tell it to us."

"I have. First I must know something, and that is—are those people over there as afraid of the Zulus as your people are?"

"Yes; for many years no people of either city dared go more than a few miles beyond the city gates. Twice in my father's time the Zulus came into the city of Taiyaun and slaughtered many and carried away women. Once, long ago, they attacked here, but were driven away."

"That's all right then. When we mopped up on them, there was plenty of shields and spears lying around. The headdress and lion skins, too. If they haven't taken them away they're on the ground yet. We send a party out on mules and get them. The men that just died, did they tell of ways of entering the city?"

"Yes," answered Ch'enyaun, her eyes shining. "There are many ways, even through the temple."

"Are the big idols on the square hollow like the ones you have here?"

"Why, yes, I think so. The priests must have a way into them."

"Well, then we get the stuff and we drift into the city and the temple, led by some of your men that know the way and then we put on the Zulu stuff for the front line. The rest take rifles and machine guns. The first rush will push them back long enough to get to Norcross; after that, we fight our way clear. You get enough men in there to jump the gates when the doings start and then you and T'ang Wang here come in with the army."

"My men can get in there," said Ch'enyaun, "as his men did in my city."

"When we get in we can open the gate for you if your men can't, and we can take some of the young men with us who can speak a little English so that when we get hold of the temple priests we can understand what they tell us about things."

"Oh," said the Princess Ch'enyaun. "Hurry, Billy—I know we can do it."

THE star had formed again in the square in front of the palace. This time there was no laughing or joking or standing at ease. The line was rigidly at attention, the faces of the men grim and taut, lips curled back like those of snarling beasts. The noncommissioned officers were in place. In the center, with the seventy-fives, were barely enough mules to carry ammunition boxes. It was a fighting unit, pure and simple, everything else thrown aside.

Sergeant Norton, at the north point of the star, had elevated his short, stocky body on an empty cartridge box so as to be able to see every man.

"Stan' at 'tention," he was commanding, "until de word is give. We gits de capt'n all right. De first man

dat makes a break outta de line, I kills. Can't no mob go an' git him. We goes right an' 'ten' to de business. I kills me niggers befo', an' I can do 'er agin.

"Dey is plannin' somep'in' in dere. Does you move agin dat way, big boy, I fills you fill of lead. I ain't talkin' now as any sergeant, either. Ma name is Norton, dat's my name, and I is a killer from Mobile, dat's who I am, a killer from Mobile. We gits him an' you-all stan' steady an'—"

A voice called from the rear line: "Too much talkin' wid de mouf. Capt'n hurt bad dere in dat place an' us standin' here!"

The line wavered a minute and seemed about to materialize out of the blue. "Drop yo' rifle an' pack, de man dat said dat, so as to git you plenty space to draw yo' gun; an' stan' out two feet."

A rifle clanged to the stone pavement and a big negro stepped promptly out of the line, his hands busy with his knapsack.

"Heah I is. Put dat gun back in de holster and us starts even."

"Boy," said Norton, doing as requested. "You eats lead wid yo' mouf in a minute, and de next you joins de nigger angel chorus."

As the knapsack joined the rifle on the ground, the party came out of the palace. Sergeant Yaller Courdray, who had been on guard at the audience chamber, saw and knew what was happening.

He walked slowly down the angle of the line, his body swaying a little from side to side, his feet stepping as if on eggshells. The negro, his eyes still on Norton, his hand on the butt of his Colt, sensed rather than saw him coming, and whirled to meet him, the fighting fury glaring in his eyes. Coudray began talking to him as he advanced, while twenty feet away.

"Gittin' uppity while I is away, is you, monkey face? Does you clean dem guns for a year an' gits yo' no mo' gin or corn licker for nine million, ef you ain't back in line by de time I gits to you. Better git dat rifle and sack offen dis dirty ground or you cleans it continual for a month."

The old familiar threat of commonplace punishment reached the negro's brain where a rush or a display of weapons would have started a killing.

"Ah was only funnin' wid him," he muttered, stooping for his rifle and knapsack.

"Do yo' funnin' when yo' is off duty den," said Courdray, passing by him. "Lemme catch yo' doin' dat agin, Slewfoot, an' I mounts yo' frame maself."

ON the side of the great square in Taiyaun, in front of the temple and the long rows of idols, was a wooden platform, raised about two feet from the ground. On it was secured a cross made of iron bars about an inch thick. In front of it, about ten feet away, was another platform, covered with costly rugs; on this one were two chairs.

In one sat Tseng; in the other by his side sat Katherine Dudley, her face white, but her head held high. Her tongue was continually feeling and loosening a tooth in the back of the upper jaw. It was on a pivot and could be dropped into her mouth by a steady push of her tongue.

On three sides of the platforms stretched rank after rank of swordsmen; behind them the people of the city, men, women and children, swayed back and forth, trying to get a glimpse of the platform on which the foreign devil was to die by "Lingeh'ih" for their amusement.

On the temple steps, broad enough for fifty men in line, were massed the temple priests. The housetops and windows were crowded with people, looking like great flowerbeds with the colors of the silks and flowers.

Norcross was led in through a door opening in the base of the idol next to the platform, his hands tied behind

his back, between four swordsmen. He was naked save for torn underwear and his head was caked with dried blood.

He had looked with a grin at one of the figures on the parchment, heard a twig snap, then something dark and heavy enveloped him, and he felt the pressure of arms and bodies, his head seemed to burst; then came utter oblivion.

He had regained his senses lying on the damp floor of a little room cut out of the solid rock, and his splendid body and clean living rapidly brought back his strength. How long he had been there he did not know. He went to sleep finally, to be awakened by the men who were with him and brought out into the sunlight.

They took him to the cross and bound his wrists and ankles to the bars. He stood there, his lean, hard, perfect body gleaming white, the bronze of his throat and face contrasting strongly.

Tseng leaned forward. "You are Captain John Norcross?"

"Yes, suh," answered Norcross courteously, with a smile on his lips and in his blue eyes, "I am John Norcross."

"You are the man who killed Dimitri and my men who were with him?"

"Yes, suh, I know I killed Dimitri, and if the men who were with him were yours, I reckon I killed them, too." His tone was the even, unconcerned one of a Southern planter chatting with a friend clubman, gossiping over the mint juleps. The Chinese nobles who had come on the platform behind Tseng, smiled and their eyes lighted with pleasure. They could not understand what was being said, but they knew when a man was unafraid. This man would take a long time before he broke and begged for mercy.

Katherine Dudley looked steadily at Norcross, her eyes wide, her little hands tightly clutching the arms of the chair. This man, this agent of Landess, whom she had trapped to his death, was standing there as a gentleman should stand.

"You are not of my country," went on Tseng, "yet you enter it with arms; you have killed Chinese and you have desecrated a temple."

"Well, suh," answered Norcross, "I reckon that's right. I've done those things."

"And because you have done them you are to die the slicing death. But it might be that I would order that one of the first cuts be made deep and so spare your knowing of the rest if you will tell me where the contents of the brass tube are."

"THE last I saw of the tube, suh, it was in my belt. You say it was empty? What was in it?"

The question was asked smoothly and in the tone of one asking for uninteresting information, not so much from curiosity as from a genial desire to avoid an awkward pause in conversation.

Tseng smiled; here was a man after his own evil but undaunted heart. "I do not know. That is what I am asking you. This English lady, Miss Katherine Dudley, sitting by my side to see you die, would like also to know. She came here to get it. It may help you remember to know that if you do not tell me, she will also stand where you stand, after she has amused me sufficiently."

Katherine Dudley leaned forward and spoke clearly. "Do not believe him, captain. I am in no danger from him."

Norcross smiled at her. "I'm right glad to hear you say so. Because—"

A rustle and murmuring came from the vast crowd. They feared and hated the cruel Tseng, but they could not understand the waiting. Was not the foreign devil bound to the cross? Why did not the knifemen begin?

"My people grow impatient," said Tseng. "It may help your decision if we commence."

He raised his hand and two men came up on the platform. One carried a tray of knives, the other a brazier of glowing coal, with red-hot irons to cauterize the wounds if they went too deep and touched an artery. The man with the knives set the tray down and carefully selected one of the smaller ones. He stood waiting for Tseng's signal to begin.

Norcross looked at Katherine Dudley, the sea of upturned eager faces, at the crowded housetops, then at Tseng.

"Cut your wolf loose, feller," he said, a smile no longer on his tightly drawn lips. He saw the top of one of the snowclad mountains. He would look at the cool snow.

In his line of vision was one of the big idols with a great tongue lolling out of a big grotesque, opened mouth. As his eyes came to it, they remained, the mountain top forgotten. From the wide leering mouth, just above the tongue, came the slim brown tube of a machine gun.

"Steady with that gun," he shouted, the rasp of command in his voice. "Down on the floor, Miss Dudley!"

As he shouted Tseng sprang to his feet and Katherine Dudley instantly slid to the floor, flat on her stomach, but with her head raised to see.

As the word "Dudley" came from his throat, the temple seemed to quiver with fiendish yells. A crash on the platform and two immense black men, with Zulu headdress, anklets, shields and broad-bladed spears landed beside him from the idol's folded arms above the platform. Their faces were diabolical in their fury, the whites of their eyes and their teeth showing.

The great blades flashed up and the two men on the platform went down, almost cut in two.

The machine gun from the idol's mouth swept Tseng's platform as a hose sprays a flower bed, and all on it that were standing crumpled to the floor.

The crowded square, swordsmen and all, gave up one frantic moan of terror and swayed with stark fear.

To them it seemed to rain great Zulus from the idols around the square and from the little balconies of the temple.

The priests on the temple steps surged forward, then parted, as the waves part before the bow of a ship. Through them from the rear came a wedge of big, naked black men, oval shields pushing the priests to one side, then the broad blades licking out to take their lives. Down the priests went, there was no place to run.

IN front of them the square was a tightly packed mass of people who had broken through the swordsmen. Behind the blades of the men dressed as Zulus came the rest of the white men with Norcross's outfit, with the machine guns and rifles. Two of the French seventy-fives were carried in the middle.

The steps were a mass of bodies when the wedge won through. Gray shouted an order and the machine guns were in place on the stairs, the rifles behind them.

The wedge, consisting of twenty of the biggest blacks, cut its way through the press beyond the platforms, then widened out and inclosed them in a ring.

The machine guns from the temple steps, two of them manned now by the Fighting Yid and the Boston Bean, and from the idols began to sweep the square as did the rifle-fire. The frenzied people burst from it on the three sides open to them, up the narrow streets leading into it, trampling each other into the ground, climbing over bodies, swordsmen and people inextricably mixed.

"Us got here, capt'n," said Corporal Moss, cutting the bonds that held Norcross, his broad face beaming.

"I'm sort of glad you did, boy," answered Norcross with a grin. "I reckoned you'd get here sooner or later."

A bugler jumped on the platform and saluted. Norcross looked at the frightful slaughter going on in the square. The machine guns, firing five hundred rounds a minute each, and the rifles were literally mowing the Chinese down.

Here and there a group of swordsmen, their first panic over, broke through the crush, their blades red with the blood of their own people, and charged. These were picked up by the machine gunners and blasted away. The housetops and windows, bright as flower beds a few moments before, with the gay silks of women and children, were bare.

"My God!" Norcross whispered, then yelled: "Cease firing!"

The bugle blew and the machine guns and rifles were stilled.

The Chinese left alive in the square, poured out of it, intent only on getting away from the death that was all around them.

Norcross walked over to the body of Tseng, which lay in front of his chair half off the platform. A stream of machine gun bullets had torn the head off. He stooped and from the body took the heavy quilted satin robe worked with golden dragons and blazing suns and then took off the high fur-lined boots and calmly put them on.

"Ho!" grunted Corporal Delicate Moss. "Dat man takes the capt'n's clothes and den de capt'n he takes hisn. Dat's fair enuff, ain't it, Slewfoot?"

"Dat's fifty-fifty," grinned Slewfoot.

"Look at dem daid, boy."

Katherine Dudley had risen as the line had encircled the platform, and stood motionless, watching the merciless sweeping away of the Chinese.

"You had better come with us, Miss Dudley," Norcross said quietly. "I don't know what your protection is, but I am afraid I have made it impossible for you to stay here."

"I will go with you, Captain Norcross," she answered, as quietly. "My protection was simply death at my own hands." And she tightened the pivot tooth that her tongue had been working loose, in which was enough deadly poison to kill her instantly, once she had bitten and broken the glass tooth.

"We'll take care of you. Stick close to me."

The square was empty now except for the dead and wounded, but from all over the city there came a hum like that of bees swarming.

"Ask Mr. Gray and Mr. Gunnell to come to me," Norcross ordered, and the bugler trotted away.

"YOU came through the temple?" he asked them as he gripped their hands.

"Yes," Gray smiled.

"From outside the city?"

"No, we got in the city through a garden from the south. Then from a house there was a tunnel that led us into the temple. From the temple we got into the idols where the rest of the machine guns are."

"Where is the Princess Ch'en-yaun?"

"She and the army aim to be outside the gates, and some of her people were to open them for her."

"Do you know which way the gates are?"

"To the north. This temple is in the middle, according to T'ang Wang."

"Right. We'll go straight through to the gates. Form your column in fours. Machine guns front and rear. Put those hard-boiled Zulus of yours in front to clear the way. Tell them if they howl as loud as they did before, they get two quarts of licker each. If they're attacked in force, have 'em fall back to the column."

There was absolutely no resistance as the column went down the narrow street, which widened out shortly into a thoroughfare leading directly to the main gates of the city. The stone houses were closed and shuttered with iron shutters—the shops also. The col-

umn widened out to platoon front with the synthetic Zulus howling and prancing from side to side fifty yards in front. The column would move forward a hundred yards, stop, let the rear guard catch up, then move forward again, not hurriedly and yet far from slowly.

Katherine Dudley walked beside Norcross just behind the first machine gun squad. She looked at him, walking there at her side, the gold brocaded robe, the collar high around his neck, the silken shoes on his feet, his lean, bronzed face and calm blue eyes.

He looked like some young tribune returning to Rome after his conquests.

The street slanted sharply upward and when the column reached the top, the gates of the city with an open market space a thousand feet square lay below them.

With their backs to the closed gates, a small group of swordsmen defended themselves desperately against the body of soldiers five times their number.

The Zulu contingent who had stopped howling while climbing the hill from sheer want of breath, waited for Norcross to come up.

"Fifty men," he commanded, "with bayonets. Take the Zulus along. No firing unless necessary—hard to tell which is which down there. You birds get one more howl out of you and you get the licker."

The Zulus drew a long breath and the howls they emitted were bloodcurdling as they charged down the hill with their spears and oval shields advanced.

The attackers turned, gave one look at what was rushing down on them, and for the most part dropped their swords and ran as from devils. A few, not more than a hundred, stood to meet the charge. They went down like corn before the scythe. The Chinese who had been defending themselves came forward to meet Norcross. Among them were two of the young nobles who had been with Ch'enyaun.

"Lord, we fail—the gates are still closed."

"We'll open them," answered Norcross. "How are they locked?"

He went to the heavy wooden gates, fourteen feet high and as wide. They were banded across and up with wide strips of iron and copper and fitted smoothly. No locks or keyholes were visible.

"Red, get those two French seventy-fives limbered up," said Norcross. "Run them back three hundred yards; we'll see what's holding these gates shut."

Five of the high explosive shells from the guns crashed against the gates before they fell apart, a mass of splinters and twisted iron.

"All right, clean up that scrap heap and get through. Tseng's men will be coming to it in a little while and jumping us."

WITHIN one hundred feet of the city walls and gates, line after line of swordsmen and lancers behind her, was Ch'enyaun. As Norcross stepped through the gates, she leaped from her horse and ran to meet him.

"Your head! The blood, John! Have they—did he hurt you?"

"Never touched me," grinned Norcross. "That's where I got hit when they captured me. It's only a cut, Ch'enyaun, let's be on our way now."

"Home?" she snapped. "With the gate of this dog kennel open and my swords ready? I will give Tseng the death he promised you."

She was Manchu now, cold and deadly. Her delicate nostrils had flared out as she saw the blood on his head, and her eyes were hard as adamant.

"Who is this woman, John?" she demanded, seeing Katherine Dudley for the first time.

"She is an Englishwoman, named Dudley, and was in the city. Tseng said that she was there to get the tube."

"I will give her a tube!" said Ch'enyaun. "One big enough to hold her and bury her in it. It was she who—"

"Steady!" said Norcross. "Let's get home first. Tseng is dead!"

"Dead! Then now is the time to burn and slay. There is no one to hold them together."

"In the square by the temple," said Norcross slowly, "there were thousands of women and children as well as swordsmen. Alive, dressed in their brightest gowns, flowers in their hair. Now there is nothing but rows of dead, heaps of human pain and suffering. There will be no more killing in the city of Tseng."

"You! You dare to tell me what—"

Norcross was looking at her, his eyes troubled.

She stopped, looked at the gates, open now; and then at her swordsmen, waiting for a word from this proud little Manchu princess.

"You are my honorable elder brother. O Lord John," she said.

There was no attack from the city. Tseng's death had stopped that. The nobles left alive were each striving to get control for themselves, and a combination of forces was impossible. The long row of Ch'enyaun's swordsmen parted to let the little column through, then took up the march behind them. T'ang Wang came up with a party of men with saddle ponies.

CHAPTER X.

THE TREASURE.

KATHERINE DUDLEY sat with Norcross in the garden by the lily pond. She had told him she had been sent for the tube and recounted her relations with Tseng. Norcross had not asked by whom she was sent, neither had she told him.

"We leave in the morning, captain?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Dudley."

"And the tube you were sent to get?"

"Well," answered Norcross with a cheerful air, "I reckon between the two of us, Miss Dudley, the tube is lost."

"You seem to take it very easily," she said presently. "If Tseng had what was in it, why didn't you search for it in Taiyaun?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I was not thinking about the tube, I was thinking about all the women and children and you."

"Why go back?" she asked, leaning toward him a little. "Why not cable that the tube is lost? I have friends in India that will have work for us to do. You surely—"

"I was hired in New York, and I'm going back and tell my boss how come," he interrupted.

"John," she said softly, "look at me. Other men have found me desirable, and I have never yielded yet. Do you understand what I am offering?"

"I reckon any man would," said Norcross courteously.

Corporal Delicate Moss, who acted as general shoemaker, halted ten feet away and saluted, a pair of puttees in his left hand.

"You'll pardon me, Miss Dudley," said Norcross. "All right, Delicate, bring them here."

"Please, suh, capt'n," said Corporal Moss. "I tightens the straps and sews de rip. I don't see how come dese double leather puttees come to rip dat way. De quartermaster sergeant he say why don't he issue you a new pair? Is dat all?"

"Yeah, that's all. Tell the sergeant that these are more comfortable."

Miss Dudley had risen and stood looking at them.

Suddenly she laughed, turned to him and held out her hand.

"I wonder—we are friends, captain?"

"I want to be your friend," Norcross said simply.

"Well, then," she went on gayly, "let's be friends even if we can't—work together. I'll get ready for the trip. The Princess Ch'enyaun has been very generous to me. Some day I will show you the gorgeous things she has given me. I'll be a rich woman in England, captain."

"I'm mighty glad to hear it. Then you will not go back to America?"

"No, I will stay in India for a little while, then England. You go across the border at Gilgit?"

"Yes, where we came in. Our steamer awaits at Karachi."

"Until to-morrow morning, then," she smiled.

Ch'enyaun came down one of the winding paths, her maidens and bodyguard following. As she saw Norcross sitting on the stone bench, idly examining the puttees, she turned and waved her attendants back. Norcross rose and went to meet her.

"She is gone?" said Ch'enyaun. "This English woman who was with you so long?"

"Yes," answered Norcross. "She was telling me why she came here. Some one else knew of the tube, and she was sent ot take it from me."

"And yet," said Ch'enyaun, her eyes widening, "you protect her!"

"Why not? See, it is a game, Ch'enyaun. She plays and I play, and if suddenly she can't play any longer, does that mean that she is my enemy, to be destroyed?"

"It would," said Ch'enyaun grimly, "to some."

NORCROSS lined up his men in company formation. "We start for the States in the morning. Any men wishing to remain here one pace forward."

The only man to step out of the line was Memphis.

"You reckon you're going to stay here, Memphis?"

"Yassuh, if de captain pleases. De princess she offers me de job of chef, yassuh. I ain't got no kinfolk back in de States. I stays."

"Ain't dat boy a regular scoundrel?" said a voice from the ranks.

They went down through the Zulu country without attack. Once in a while the sun would flash from the broad blade of a spear way up in the hills, but they saw no living Zulu.

The last camp was pitched within five miles of the Indian border. Katherine Dudley had said good-by there, to go through the pass to the right, leading toward the Karakorum range, where she said she had friends, escorted by T'ang Wang and a strong body of men. She turned and waved gayly to Norcross and Ch'enyaun and the rest, as she rode into the path.

Ch'enyaun stood with Norcross, watching the last of the escort file into the path behind her.

"She rides gayly away," said Ch'enyaun softly. "And yet she failed, O honorable elder brother."

"She thinks she hasn't failed."

"You mean, John, that she thinks she has what was in the tube?"

"Right! When the shoemaker brought me those puttees in the garden, and talked about a rip being sewed up, I could see that she was figuring something."

"How, John?"

"Why, by the way her head was held. She relaxed her body, but her head was rigid and turned a little. Then a couple of days ago my dog robber passed the word to me that she had been talking to him as he cleaned up around our tents, and told him if he would bring her my puttees, when he got them to polish, she would show him the way the English grooms polish leather, so that he could surprise me."

"But, John, I do not understand; why did she want your puttees?"

"She thought I had hidden the contents of the tube in them."

"But you did not have them on when you went to the shrine, John. I remember that you did not. You had on a pair of high laced boots such as Corporal Moss made for me."

"No; but she knew I had hidden it somewhere before I got captured, otherwise I would have torn Taiyaun apart to get it. She made up her mind then that Tseng hadn't got it."

"But the puttees, John?"

"Well, she figured that when I got back I would go to the shrine or wherever I had hidden it, and get it. When Delicate came along talking about rips and why not get a new pair from the quartermaster, the thought struck her that I must think a lot of those old ones, that they're valuable because I had something hidden in them."

"How do you know what she thought?"

Norcross laughed. "I've been a special agent myself and I know how they figure. Miss Dudley did figure it that way, otherwise why did she fuss around that scoundrel Oofty? I told him to take them to her last night after I got to sleep, and he did. They came back highly polished this morning, and the double thickness of the two leather strips that I had put in all the puttees was freshly sewed together again.

"Delicate told me that she had borrowed some waxed end and a needle from him, saying that she wanted to sew up a leather case that you had given her. He offered to sew it for her, but she said that she would rather do it."

"BUT she didn't find anything, John, did she? Then why is she so gay?"

"Yes, she found something. I had T'ang Wang take some of the parchment leaves of one of the old priests' books that I was going to take back as a gift. He said it was a list of food stuffs issued to the wongs," added Norcross, with a grin. "I put it between the two leathers so that she would not be disappointed. I don't reckon she can read Chinese."

"She thinks then that she has what was in the tube?"

"I reckon so."

"She thinks that she has made you fail, and she has ridden away with a smile," Ch'enyaun's eyes grew cold. "If she were mine, to do with as I pleased, I—"

Gunnell came up. "There is a party of four men, three of them English officers from the fort, halted by the princess's men down below. They came around the little hill. Do you want them to come up? They asked if it were your party."

"Why, certainly, George. Will you pass them up here to me?"

A car drove up, and three men in uniform got out. Two of them turned and helped a man out of the rear seat. It was Landess!

The three young English officers looked at Norcross intently for a moment, then all three grinned and saluted.

Norcross halted, returned the salutes, then went to meet Landess, while the three young officers bowed very low to Ch'enyaun.

It was almost morning before Norcross finished telling Landess about it all. Landess told Norcross that when his yacht had arrived at Bombay he had been told by his British connections that word had been received from the hills of a strong party heading down toward the border. A curt code cable from London had put the entire Indian government behind him, and he had hurried to the border.

Landess sat there, his eyes shining, and made Norcross go into details. As Norcross told of Katherine Dudley, he said: "But, captain, what was in the tube, and where is it?"

"I'll have it for you, suh, in a minute." Norcross went to the tent entrance. "Pass the word for Corporal Moss to report to me," he ordered a sentry.

Ch'enyaun excused herself to the British officers and came in the tent. Landess rose as she entered and Norcross went forward to meet her.

"Ch'enyaun, may I introduce Mr. Landess, from New York, which is in America?" Norcross said, holding Ch'enyaun's hand in his. "Mr. Landess, this is the Manchu Princess Ch'enyaun, War Lord of Ningyuan and of many swordsmen."

Landess looked at the lovely, smiling face and held out his hand. "I am honored in meeting the Princess Ch'enyaun. Captain Norcross has told me of the—"

Corporal Moss arrived and saluted. "Yassir, capt'n."

"I'll take it, corporal."

The big negro stooped and began to unroll his legging. Snugly tucked away between folds, wrapped in a red bandanna handkerchief, was a flat, thin book, incased in oiled silk. It was made of some kind of parchment or skin. He handed it to Norcross, saluted, and stood at attention.

"That's all, corporal. Roll your leggings outside."

"Yassir, capt'n," and Corporal Moss retired, his smile showing every one of his white teeth.

"HERE is what was in the tube, Mr. Landess. I opened it at the shrine. The oiled silk was around it, and I had Corporal Moss wrap it in his leggings for me. When I was taken, he gave it to T'ang Wang to keep for me. As long as Miss Dudley was in the party I didn't know of a safer place to keep it, so I let Corporal Moss carry it again. I don't believe he has had his leggings off for a week."

Landess took the flat little package and looked at the characters on the first page. There was no back or front cover of any kind.

"Hebrew," he said, "and very, very old. I wonder if—my knowledge of Hebrew is very small. Yet I have a little that was taught me by a scholar." He was examining the book as he talked, suddenly he gasped. "Merciful Heavens—it can't be—yes, I am sure. It is!"

He looked up and said solemnly: "Do you know what this is that I hold in my hand? Do you remember that when the books of the Bible were assembled there were many to choose from? Some were rejected and cast aside. For hundreds of years those rejected books have been sought for by scholars and scientists. This is one of them. It is the most priceless book in the world!"

His eyes were shining. "For this book," he continued breathlessly, "I would give—"

He paused, then abruptly, as if giving an order to himself, "It goes to the Patriarch of the Greek Church at Athens, even as I promised that boy. I must take it at once." His hands were clenched.

"Or you will be tempted to keep it for yourself," supplied Norcross with a shrewd and sympathetic grin.

"Yes," answered Landess simply. "I am."

"The Greek Church is poor now," Norcross reflected, "with most of its wealth in the hands of the Soviet. It may be that the Patriarch will sell it to you, Mr. Landess."

"Why, that is so. He need but name his price. I am heavily in your debt, Captain Norcross."

Ch'enyaun smiled at Landess. "My honorable elder brother has fulfilled his trust, O War Lord of America."

Landess looked down at the dainty little Manchu princess. "Yes," he answered gravely, "he has fulfilled his trust in all honor, O War Lord of Ningyuan."

"Then," Ch'enyaun, standing very straight, "Always the chair of the honorable elder brother shall be ready and waiting for him, in Ningyuan."

THE END

"Come clean, you stool pigeon, or you'll get the works right here!"

Hack Line

Pete Duffy had nerve, and needed it—for often in the New York taxi game none but the brave deserve the fare

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

THERE is a certain speakeasy in New York, on a street in the lower Fifties between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, which is patronized by ready spenders. It occupies the second floor of a small loft building, in a block of restaurants, theatrical costumers, garages and other speakeasies of various degrees of renown. The remaining floors at that address are given over to a wholesale furrier, a small time vaudeville agent, and a Persian rug dealer. "Pat Clancy's," the place is called, and any taxi driver in town might take you there. It has age and standing, much as Altman's or Tiffany's or the Grand Central Station.

Pete Duffy knew Pat Clancy's. He would grin slightly, amiably, when directed to drive there. He had never been inside, and had no particular desire to enter. But he coveted a place on the taxi line at the door, a line he had once played often but which, for certain reasons, he had for many months left severely alone.

It was a short line and an illegitimate one. Traffic rules forbade parking in that block. However, Clancy wanted to please his trade, the trade wanted taxicabs, the cabs wanted fares, and the cop on beat had a family which wanted many things, so the matter was adjusted to the satisfaction of all.

One day Pete got a break. On Columbus Circle he answered a hail from the curb, and was directed to drive to Clancy's. He proceeded to do so with eclat and a certain anticipation. Arriving there, he found the line empty, with no other cab in the block. This was as he desired. His passenger, a man with the breezy front of a real estate salesman, told him to wait, and went upstairs. Pete settled back in his seat, pulled a cigarette out of his pocket and waited. Something was going to happen soon, and he knew it. This was an old familiar game, one which he enjoyed.

It was summer and the street was warm in the quiet of mid afternoon. Up on Sixth Avenue the "L" roared by occasionally. Now and then an automobile, at the curb in front of a garage, backfired a couple of times as the chauffeur tinkered with the carburetor. These were commonplace sounds, of which one was scarcely aware.

But Pete was presently aware of a commotion which bore a peremptory meaning he could not ignore. Behind him a motor raced, rumbling like a hound at leash, and the hoarse bellow of a taxi horn followed. Pete looked around indifferently. A newcomer, a long, shiny new taxicab, had arrived, and the driver was waving for Pete to depart forthwith.

Pete opened the door at his side, and leisurely stepped out on the asphalt. He was a lean, wiry figure of a man, with an East Side New Yorker's abrupt readiness of movement and speech. He had a thin, firm-lipped mouth, and his blue eyes occasionally had a way of peering out from between half closed lids which made him look quite shrewd and undaunted. They were that way now. He was thirty, and had seen more than a bit of the world. By and large he thought it a pretty fair place, if somewhat shy on peace and quiet.

"Well, what's the matter?" he growled.

"Beat it," barked the second driver. "get rolling." The words were clipped short.

Pete walked alongside the seat of the other cab. The cigarette remained between his lips, while the smoke curled up past his eyes.

"Suppose I don't want to beat it?"

The newcomer eyed Pete. Square of face, with a combination of black eyes and light hair which impressed one as somehow odd, this driver was an aggressive individual. He swung out of his seat.

"WHERE ya from?" he asked.

"What's that to you?"

"Listen, big boy, get wise, get wise. This ain't your line, this is a closed line. If you don't want to get needled, beat it."

"I won't get needled," said Pete, undisturbed. "First place, I'll hack wherever I damn well please. Second, I got a call here."

"You got a call?"

The square-faced man walked around on the sidewalk. He looked at the meter on Pete's cab, observed the flag to be down in the "occupied" position, and, opening the door, thrust his head inside to see what might be registered on the face of the instrument.

"Well, all right," he said. Apparently he spoke with reluctance. "You got half a buck rung up, so I guess it's a rip. Don't you stick around here unless you gotta right to, or you'll get the works!"

Pete smiled. The square-faced driver lighted a cigarette with the abrupt movements of one looking for trouble and denied it.

"You got a corporation here?" Pete asked easily.

"Yeah, and it's a tough one."

"How about the cop on beat?"

"He's right." There was a trace of grim humor in the tone. "Don't you worry about us."

"No, I won't," agreed Pete, as one

to whom the other's worries were nothing.

"You're pretty wise, ain't you?" said the driver.

"Yeah," said Pete, inhaling on the cigarette. "What of it?"

The square-faced driver glared. But he said no more, and presently moved off and entered a white tiled restaurant next door. Pete could see him perched on a counter stool just beyond the plate glass window. Pete got into his seat again, and resumed his waiting. He wore a smile.

The doorway of the small loft building, a moment later, was almost filled with the bulk of a large man. He was none too sure of his feet, and he steadied himself against the side wall while he regarded Pete's taxicab. He spoke, clearly though with concerted effort.

"You busy there, driver?"

Pete got out of the seat.

"Where to, boss?"

"Never mind where to. If you ain't working, let me get in."

The large man came across the sidewalk, his bulk an unsteady burden.

"I'm drunk," he said, "but I ain't plastered. Don't you make the mistake of thinking I am. I ain't walking right, but the old head ain't gone back on me."

"Sure," said Pete agreeably.

"The old bean never goes back on me, and don't you forget it. I can't walk, but I can think straight, see what I mean? Well, don't you forget it."

"Sure," said Pete again. "Where to?"

"Get me to One Hundred and Fifth Street and Columbus Avenue in a hurry. I got an appointment, and its an important appointment, understand? I got to be up there in a hurry."

Pete sized up his new passenger. A face that indicated a liking for the good things of life, the easy things. A bit of a weak sister probably. Money written all over him. Good clothes, though they fitted indifferently. Diamond stickpin and diamond ring. Silk shirt. Well fed. Probably carried a roll that could buy the cab. And probably did not mind spending it. Well, let the real estate salesman go; this was bigger game.

"Hundred and Fifth and Columbus," said Pete. "Okay! Climb in."

Now Pete was a man of average honesty, even as taxi drivers go. Honesty, he had long since concluded, paid in the end. He also believed in minding his own business. Life had taught him the virtue of both beliefs. Crooks and cops alike were among his friends, and he was over intimate with neither.

But, as he often said, he was "out to make a dollar," and was no one to turn down a dollar that rolled into his hand.

This fat man was out to spend money. That was his business. If he spent too much, and it happened that Pete benefited, that was none of Pete's doing. Pete drove north, while the taximeter rang up more nickels, and he hummed a tune as he went.

INSIDE the cab the fat man, evidently a gregarious soul, continued to urge Pete to hurry. They rolled along the drives in Central Park at an illegal speed, avoiding the traffic on the avenues outside. Pete kept a sharp watch for motor cycle police, and saw none. They emerged from the park at the One Hundredth Street entrance, and soon drew to a stop beneath the thundering "L" on Columbus Avenue at One Hundred and Fifth.

The fat man peered down the side street to the west.

"Listen," he said, "I'm going to stay here. You go right up to that place where it says Excelsior Storage and tell them I'm here. Say Jim told you to tell them. Jim Parsons. Say I'm here and I'll stay in the cab."

"Right," said Pete.

He walked down the block from the corner. It was an average city street of flats and a few shops and this one

storage warehouse. The premises of the Excelsior Company had been in the past one of those private stables, scattered all over the city, which to-day serve a multitude of purposes. They are useful for garages, repair shops, bootleg cutting plants and, like this one, for storing goods. Due to the privacy with which they are endowed, they make admirable headquarters for those who handle goods of questionable ownership.

Pete knew this, and his interest quickened as he approached. It was none of his business perhaps, but he was curious to know what went on inside. Well, there was one way to find out, by keeping his eyes open and his tongue discreet.

The big center door was closed. Pete knocked on it. In a moment it slid open a little bit and a man looked out at him.

"Well?" he said.

"Jim's here," said Pete casually.

"Jim who?"

"Jim Parsons."

The man eyed him closely.

"Where are you from?"

"Clancy's," said Pete.

"Oh, I see. Why don't he come in?"

Pete grinned and jerked an explanatory thumb toward the corner.

"He's just been telling me he ain't plastered. Maybe he ain't. I wouldn't bet on it."

The man became angry. He was a dark, long-faced man with flat lips. He was young, and his eyes were blue and penetrating.

"Ain't he ever going to sober up? That fat slob has been drunk for a week! Bring him down here."

"Right!" said Pete.

He returned to the corner. The fat man looked at him questioningly from inside the cab.

"He says to pull up beside the place," said Pete.

The taxi moved around the corner toward the storage building. The door slid all the way open as it approached, and the long-visaged one waved for the cab to drive inside. Pete shifted to second, and rolled into the dark interior of the old stable. The door closed again behind him as he stopped on the empty, oil-stained floor.

To one side a partition set off a small cubicle used for an office. A short, swarthy young man leaned against the side of the doorway with a cigarette hanging from his mouth. He watched the cab in faintly ominous fashion.

"Where the hell you been?" demanded the long-faced man, returning from the door.

"I ain't been no place," said the fat man, climbing out. "I been to Clancy's. I been to Clancy's and had a couple of drinks. And if you don't like it, Henkel, that's just too damn bad!"

"Oh, it is, is it!" said Henkel. "You're cocky, ain't you? Well, get this, you fat head, if you touch a drink between now and the time we're through with you, you get the bowl beat off you, see?"

Jim Parsons bit the end off a cigar.

"Yeah? Bowl beat off me, eh? Who says so?"

The swarthy young man in the office doorway spoke. His voice rasped slightly.

"I said so, Parsons."

Parsons stared at the swarthy young man. His expression changed.

"Oh! You here, Scarpy? Huh!" He laughed and then swallowed his laughter. "I didn't know you was here."

"I thought so," said Scarpy. "Go ahead with the argument. Don't let me stop you."

"I ain't arguing," said Parsons.

"My mistake," said Scarpy. "Get in here. I want to talk to you."

THERE was a queer expression on the long face of Henkel as he followed Parsons and Scarpy into the office. It was menacing and even gloating. The door closed on the three.

Pete continued to look at the door for a moment. Then he set himself comfortably in the seat, and smoked a cigarette.

His eyes narrowed. He was thinking; and the chiefest of his thoughts was the virtue of minding one's own business. This, it would seem, was a fine place to practice up on the exercise of that virtue. He had managed to get inside, but perhaps it would have been just as well if he hadn't.

The interview lasted twenty minutes. When they came out again, the fat man was as one deflated and very much sobered, and the other two wore understanding smiles. Parsons and the long-faced Henkel entered the cab. Pete backed out, and Scarpy closed the door after him, bidding them good-by in that same rasping, slightly sinister voice.

"West Shore ferry. Forty-Second Street," directed Henkel.

They drove down Tenth Avenue, and the two inside talked. The window at Pete's back was open. While they were in motion and trucks and taxis rumbled alongside, it was impossible to overhear. But when the traffic control lights dimmed and turned red, bringing everything on the avenue to a halt, the two voices were quite plain.

It is a common fallacy among taxi patrons that the driver is beyond hearing, and oblivious of their conversation. But a man working in the solitude of a taxi seat is not without a certain inquisitiveness regarding his fellow humans. Right now Pete had more than the average. He sat aloof in his seat, and the back of his neck was as expressionless as only the back of a neck can be, yet he listened keenly.

Something was to happen on the morrow. Just what, Pete could not learn. It was to occur at noon. Further, it was to take place at Broadway and Forty-Second Street. Henkel was talking.

"—and ten minutes after it rolls, you give Scarpy a buzz from Jersey, see? And we'll be waiting in a wagon by some restaurant where Scarpy can pass us the word." Henkel was instructing the fat man regarding his share in the proceedings. "We'll pull it at Broadway, and we'll pull it clean."

"Huh," said the fat man, "of all the places to pick. Forty-Second and Broadway! My Gawd, why don't you take a brass band along?"

"Listen," began the long-faced man, "all we'd need is you. Then we'd pull a flop in the middle of the park at midnight."

"Aw, lay off of me! I'm doing my end of it, ain't I?"

"Yeah," said the long-faced man, with emphasis.

He said more, but the lights dimmed again, and went to green, and five ton Macks all about the cab shattered the comparative quiet with an enormous rumbling of motors. The traffic moved.

They swung around the great cobble-paved space before the West Shore ferry terminal. Here, where Forty-Second Street comes to an end, on the brink of the Hudson, a vast load of passengers and vehicles from New Jersey is landed every few minutes of the day. The fat man stepped out of the cab at the door of the ferryhouse. He seemed somewhat preoccupied, and his legs were now fairly steady.

"All right, Henkel," he said. "I'll give you word Okay."

"You better," said Henkel.

The fat man pushed through the doors to the waiting room.

"Back to Clancy's," said Henkel.

As he drove, Pete was somewhat worried. This bird inside was a crook if ever there was one. Suppose he asked questions of the regular drivers on the Clancy line regarding him, Pete? It was true that Pete had not declared himself to be a member of the corporation, but he had allowed them to believe so; nay, had encouraged the impression. Explanations would be difficult, dangerous.

It was with great relief that Pete found the line again empty in front of Clancy's. Sheer luck had saved him an uncomfortable few moments. Henkel paid the amount on the meter, added a tip more than generous, and went upstairs. Pete departed with downright alacrity. That was over! And thank his stars for a lucky break!

For the rest of that evening Pete avoided Pat Clancy's taxi line. He had a hunch that Henkel's eagerness to arrive at the speakeasy was caused by a desire to ask questions. He probably wanted to know how many drinks the fat man had consumed, and with what kind of talk he had regaled the other patrons of the place.

Jim Parsons was a talker, that was plain. He was no crook; he lacked the brains and the sheer courage; but evidently he was somehow essential to the operations of this gang. Pete knew enough about inside jobs to make a shrewd guess that the fat man was planted where he had access to valuable information. For this the gang paid him, and meanwhile despised him for a weakling.

The questions Henkel would ask were of no immediate concern to Pete, so long as they had to do with the fat man. But there was a fair certainty that Henkel would make mention of a strange taxi driver from Clancy's. And with that, since the corporation drivers seemed mixed up with the warehouse gang, Pete was much concerned.

Pete pulled in early, soon after midnight. His home garage was on Sixty-Fifth Street, just off Avenue A. He left word to have the cab ready to go out early next day, and walked two blocks to a dingy tenement house where he boarded with his brother's family. He went directly to bed.

IN the morning Pete was on the street again at eleven o'clock. He made several short trips about the city, and turned down one to Brooklyn. It is against the law, of course, to refuse any ride within the city limits. But what answer could be made to Pete's assertion that the gas tank was practically empty?

Ever since he had first awakened that day Pete had been debating whether to be at the corner of Forty-Second Street and Broadway at noontime, or to avoid that corner assiduously. He had plenty of arguments at hand to convince himself of the wisdom of the latter course. But within Pete there was a large share of curiosity, and he had seen and heard enough already to whet his appetite for more of this.

Something was going to happen, something planned in secrecy and fostered by crooks. It might be dangerous, but it would certainly be worth seeing.

Something was going to happen!

Pete, rolling leisurely along Lafayette Street, suddenly spun the wheel at the corner of Canal Street, and headed west. It was twenty minutes of twelve. He would just about make it in time. The motor throbbed valiantly as he sped along with the traffic.

At five minutes to twelve Pete drew to a halt close by the New Amsterdam Theater, where the tinted photos of the latest among Ziegfeld's glorified adorned the lobby front. He would not be permitted to linger here very long. He pulled out the heavy jack from beneath his seat, and inserted it under the front axle. He placed the lug-wrench on the sidewalk beside the front wheel. Then he walked away from the cab, and gave it no further attention. No prospective passengers would bother him, and the police would not interfere for the time being, at least.

Pete stood among the noonday idlers thronged about the corner, and he watched closely every eastbound vehicle which passed. He knew the one he must find would come this way, for surely it would travel from the West Shore ferry. He had several suspi-

cions, but could decide with certainty on none.

It came twelve, and passed the hour. One minute, two minutes, three. Street cars, limousines, delivery carts, taxis, ice wagons, trucks, were jammed in the street before him, awaiting the turn of the control light overhead. One by one other vehicles fell in at the rear. Pete watched them all.

Then he saw it happen.

A great lumbering truck drew up at the end of the traffic jam and stopped. A taxicab halted exactly beside it. The truck was all inclosed; it was painted a bright green, and bore on its side the name of Brickel & Austin, Wholesale Silks, New York City and Paterson, New Jersey. The taxi was occupied; it was of a type built with collapsible rear top, which, when closed, makes the interior dark and very private.

The taxi door opened. One of the men inside came out and stood on the running board. slightly to one side. He spoke casually to the driver of the big truck. The driver looked down. And he continued to look.

Pete could not see from where he stood what held the driver's attention so compellingly. No one but the driver was able to see it. But Pete could guess what it was. And he knew that any man facing the bleak twin muzzles of a sawed-off shotgun, trained on him from the shadowed interior of a cab, will do what he is told to do.

The driver, as if fascinated, opened the door beside his seat, and stepped off the truck. The man on the taxi runningboard, standing so that he would not be in the way of a blast of slugs from the gun, continued to talk casually to the driver.

The truck's driver got into the dark cab, and the man on the runningboard climbed into the truck seat behind the wheel. The doors on the two vehicles closed, and everything was as natural as a moment before. No fuss, no dramatics, and a truckload of something mighty valuable, whatever it was, had changed hands. The lights altered; shrill whistles signaled; and the traffic surged into motion.

"Whew!" commented Pete. "I'll be a son of an acrobat if I'd have believed it!"

A thin, mild-looking man alongside turned and stared at him. Pete was unaware. The man now driving the truck was the fellow known as Henkel. And the hackman at the wheel of the cab was the square-faced, dark-eyed gent who had warned Pete yesterday at Clancy's!

Pete ran through the crowd. He gathered up his tools, and flung them beneath the seat. In half a moment he was off, following the great truck which rolled ponderously less than a block ahead. The taxicab with the collapsible top had vanished. The truck turned north at Sixth Avenue. Pete did likewise. And uptown they drove together in the shadow of the roaring "L."

THAT night Pete made a point of being at his brother's home for supper. It was not often he did so. The brother, a machinist, who was a ruddy, contented family man with a pleasant wife, welcomed him. Later they sat alone, while the wife was busy in the kitchen with the dishes.

"Dan," said Pete earnestly, "what would you say about this?"

The brother looked up from his paper. "What?"

"Listen. Suppose you accidentally got next to a crooked job that was going to be pulled. Suppose the gang pulling it was pretty tough. And suppose you happened to see it pulled, and was the only guy outside the gang that did see the job done. What would you do?"

Dan drew on his pipe while he looked at Pete.

"I think I'd keep my mouth shut. It ain't none of your business, is it?"

"Well, no. It ain't."

"This gang know you saw them?"

"Nope."

"Do they know who you are?"

"They could find out. They know my face and my rig."

"Then they'd know where to go if the cops was tipped off?"

"Well, they could guess."

Dan was decisive. "Keep out of it. Don't you open your mouth to nobody."

Pete reflected on this. His fingers drummed on the table.

"Dan," he said, "I been around. I know how to keep my mouth shut. You learn that pretty quick in my business. But I can't just get used to the idea this time. It looks to me like there was times when a guy that has any courage can't lay down on the job."

The brother started to speak.

"Wait a minute now," put in Pete. "Look here. These birds don't mean anything to me. I wasn't asking to get in on their racket. Why in hell should I protect them?"

"You saphead!" remarked Dan mildly. "Because they'll bump you off."

"Suppose I don't let them?"

"That's what a lot of other guys have said. Listen here, kid. Get some brains. You know sure as hell they would never stand for any stoolie giving them away. And if they know the license number of your rig, they'll sure find you. Go on about your business and keep your mouth shut. You won't be out anything."

"No," said Pete. After a moment he grinned. "Well, I don't know. We'll see. It's a tough break for a poor but honest hack driver."

THERE was an account of the holdup in next morning's papers. It reached the front pages in every case, for New York had known no such intriguing instance of criminal boldness in some time. The truck driver had been driven around for two hours before his captors released him, with warnings. There was something almost romantic in the notion of stealing a truck at one of the city's busiest crossings.

Pete was not oblivious to the romance of it. He felt a considerable admiration for the sheer nerve, the skill displayed by the gang. After the fashion of those who dwell in the half world that borders both on respectability and crime, Pete was very tolerant of the shortcomings of others.

If those birds chose to risk life and liberty for a precarious livelihood, that was their business. Pete regarded them as foolish, but saw little difference between them and the sleek, unctuous men of business who rode in his cab every day. He listened to the talk of these latter, harkened to their pride in sharp business deals, in law evasions, in false income tax reports, in the illicit liquor they obtained. The world of successful men was a predatory place as Pete saw it, and one got small thanks for attempting to elevate its moral tone.

Yet despite his tolerance, Pete was uneasy. It was all very well to ignore peccadillos in one's fellows, but to condone outright crime, committed with threat of death, was a strong dose to stomach. As he told his brother, he would have to see. All that day doubt had plagued him, and as the evening wore on it continued to abide in his soul.

What Pete might have done after a night's sleep on the problem is to remain forever unknown. For certain things happened before midnight.

The orange taxi signals were flashing on the street corners outside Pennsylvania Station at ten o'clock. These inconspicuous lights are not even noticed by the casual passer-by, but hackmen see them and pay heed from blocks away. Pete rolled up to the entrance of the great ramp leading to the cab stands of the terminal, and glanced into the depths.

The concession company's taxis had

been swamped by the incoming train passengers, and no more were to be had. The "Pen Hole" was free to all. Pete twirled the wheel and sailed down the incline into the maw of the great depot. And with him came a charging horde of cabs.

They crowded together down below, three abreast, creeping ahead slowly while porters wrought mightily with shiny luggage and loaded cabs shot off one by one. Pete knew the contentment that comes like a benison to every hackman when a trip is assured, and eager riders clamor for his services. And then abruptly that satisfaction ended, and a curious tension seized him. At the wheel of the cab alongside sat the tall, square-faced driver whom Pete had defied yesterday, and who had driven the holdup car this very noon.

The man was looking at Pete; studying him, one might say. When Pete's gaze crossed his, the man smiled. It was a smile of mysterious significance, an unpleasant, crooked smile. The man leaned out of the cab and shouted through the din of roaring motors and horns:

"Be at Clancy's at eleven o'clock!"

Pete stared, eyes grown narrow.

"You hear me?" cried the other driver.

"Yeah," Pete shouted back. "But why should I be at Clancy's?"

"You'll find out."

The cabs ahead shot forward. Gears clashed all about them; the mad din increased; and Pete and the square-faced driver were swept apart. In another second they were able to give each other little further thought as they pulled up to the curb and were assaulted by the impatient crowd. Pete drew a Columbia Heights call, and soared up out of the ramp and into the night.

Pete knew from the instant he had received the order that eleven o'clock would find him at Clancy's. His curiosity, at work again, was sufficient to bring him there. Besides this there were other reasons of even greater importance. There was his own health and well-being, for instance. That guy had meant business.

Pete understood. They had compared notes. They had discovered that through the sublime fat-headedness of Jim Parsons, a stranger had been rung in on their holdup. Yesterday they had taken Pete at face value, accepting him unquestioningly when he came accompanied by one of the mob. Now they were nervous, wondering who he might be, whether casual hackman or ingenious detective. That the square-faced man continued to drive his cab after stealing a fortune demonstrated his anxiety to preserve an alibi. Pete, rolling back from the Heights over Brooklyn Bridge, reflected on their probable discomfiture, and found therein sufficient humor to laugh aloud as he went. Yet it was grim laughter.

THERE were no cabs on the line at Clancy's, and a pair of genial celebrants stood at the curb vainly trying to halt the loaded taxis which flew through the street from the theaters further west. Despite this, two cabs were parked in idleness before the white tile restaurant beyond the speakeasy. Pete drew up behind them, refused to heed the pleas of the somewhat befuddled pair on the curb, and stepped out of the seat. The drivers of the two cabs were visible within the restaurant. One was the square-faced man. Pete entered, and joined the pair at the counter. It was ten forty-five.

"Coffee and a combination," Pete said to the waiting counterman. And to the square-faced driver at his side he said: "Well, what's it all about?"

The man glanced at his companion, and some secret meaning passed in that glance. The two eyed Pete, calm and unhurried.

"You're early," said the square-faced one. "Wait till the boss gets here."

"There's a flock of calls to be picked up outside," said Pete. "Why wait?"

"You'll see."

That was what the man had said before. He seemed to regard it as sufficient. There was an ominous ring to the words. And as the hair along a dog's back will rise at the scent of danger, so Pete's eyes grew narrow again and his mouth became thin. But he said nothing more. It was not his turn now. The moments went by in tense silence.

At five minutes after eleven the door opened. A man entered and stood just inside, looking about. All three drivers glanced at him, and waited. It was Scarpy, small, compact, thin-mouthed, dark of visage, and quiet with the velvet alertness of a tiger.

Scarpy joined them, walking with hands in topcoat pockets and seating himself casually on the stool at Pete's left. He nodded to the furthest driver. To the square-faced man he said, in his softly rasping voice: "'Lo, Stull." On Pete he bent gaze both inscrutable and slightly chilling.

"Well," he said, "so we found you."

There was a lot implied in that statement. And much might rely on what Pete chose to find in it. It was like playing a game, a subtle and very dangerous game.

"Oh, yeah?" said Pete. He returned the stare evenly. "Just what do you mean, found me?"

"You didn't know we wanted to talk to you?"

"Me? How should I know?"

"All right," said Scarpy. He rose. His hands remained in the coat pockets. It was a fawn-colored coat, Pete observed, with large pockets.

"Take me for a ride," said Scarpy. "I want to talk to you."

Pete watched the man's eyes. They met his, unwavering, smoky, with opaque, gleaming pupils. Pete could hear the breathing of the man behind him. For a moment no one spoke or moved. And suddenly he knew what it was to be afraid, to feel the coldness of death hovering close by.

"Listen, brother," said Pete. "Some way you got me wrong. There ain't much talking to be done. If you got any questions I'll answer them here."

"I said come and take me for a ride," Scarpy repeated.

Pete said nothing more. There was nothing to be said. Scarpy's hand remained in that large, fawn-colored coat pocket. Pete slid around on the stool and walked to the door. Scarpy came at his heels, as one treading on velvet.

Outside the restaurant they halted a moment. From a shadowy doorway close by another man joined them. It was Henkel, watchful and silent.

"Let's go," said Scarpy.

That was not a long ride, but it was one no man would want to take more than once in a lifetime. It was not the sort of ride one might be privileged to take a second time. In the cab behind him, Pete knew, were two guns. They were in the hands of men who bore for him a certain fear, a fear not to be confused with fright. Theirs was a ruthless, reckless fear which knew but one way to eradicate itself.

"Cross Fifty-Seventh Street," ordered the soft, rasping voice. "Go north on Avenue A. Stop under the bridge at Sixtieth."

They crossed Fifty-Seventh. North they went on the broad smartness of Sutton Place along Avenue A. Abruptly they were in the shadows of the great Queensborough Bridge. Here it was still, deserted. Pete pulled to a halt at the curb, and jerked on the brake. He swung about in the seat and spoke into the darkness of the cab interior.

"Well? Now what?"

THE two inside opened the door and stepped out on the pavement. Pete did likewise, moving with a tension that made him awkward. His gaze shot up and down the avenue. It was almost empty. Only a large, black sedan was in sight, coming toward

them after turning the corner at Fifty-Seventh. It rolled slowly, and finally stopped at the curb a block off.

Pete grinned mirthlessly, with a cold drawing of the lips. The black sedan was the get-away wagon! The get-away wagon—

"Gosh!" he said suddenly. The word seemed to leap involuntarily from his lips.

Scarpy was close to him, peering into his face, his voice cruelly eager.

"Talk now, you lousy rat! Tell your story, and say it fast."

Pete licked his lips. Somehow they were dry and harsh. So was his throat dry and harsh.

"I got nothing to say. I'm making a living driving a hack. Once in awhile I play Clancy's line. I took a guy from there yesterday. I don't know him. He told me where to go, up to One Hundred and Fifth Street. I came back with that guy in back of you. That's all I know."

Henkel stepped closer.

"Didn't you say you was from Clancy's line?"

"I did not."

"I asked you. You said yes."

"I said yes, I got the fat guy there."

"You told me you was from Clancy's."

"I didn't!" said Pete. "I—"

Henkel delivered a sudden backhand slap that cracked solidly against Pete's face. He recoiled against the taxi fender, and stiffened there, half crouching. Scarpy held Henkel away, and spoke. There was ferocity in his voice.

"Come clean, you stool pigeon! Come clean or you get the works right here."

Pete said nothing. Words alone could hold them back now, and there was not a word in the language that Pete could utter. His muscles seemed frozen. His hands held the steel of the cab fender, and no feeling was in their grip. He was conscious only of the smoky whiteness and the opaque, gleaming black of those eyes before him.

"Give it to him!" Scarpy was saying. "*Give it to him!*"

Desperation created in Pete's frozen body an explosive madness. He flung himself from the fender squarely on the drawn guns. He cursed, shouting hoarse oaths, and he struck frenzied blows. With the same impetus he was through them and off, running along the avenue toward the haven of Sixtieth Street. Garages lined one side of the street, and light shot over the pavement from their open doors.

Light and doors, and behind him the sudden, splitting sound of .38 automatics in action.

Then he was on the ground, sprawling with an impact that dazed him. He clung to the pavement numbly while the lights and the open doors spun about his head. He was cursing, not knowing what oaths he uttered, his whole being possessed of a mad, futile rage against that pair back on the avenue. The fusillade had ceased, but the deliberate barking of a heavy revolver somewhere echoed in his brain like repeated shocks. There came the pound of heavy shod feet. The street ceased to whirl.

"THEY get you, bud? You hit bad?"

A man spoke breathlessly into Pete's ear. Pete was astonished beyond measure that the man should be a policeman. Funny he had never once thought of the cops!

"Where are they?" he demanded in a rush of words. "Don't let them get away! Get them, for God's sake, get them!"

"They're gone," said the officer. "Hell bent for election up the avenue. I can't chase them now. I asked you, are you hit?"

"Never mind! Get after them!"

"Easy, bud. Take it easy. The department 'll pick them up to-morrow. Let me look at you. Up with you!"

The policeman knew his business. He aided Pete to his feet, while more than half expecting riddled legs to give way beneath him. They were both surprised to find that Pete could stand. Next the officer felt expertly over Pete's body. Not a bone was broken. No blood spread into view.

"What happened to your head?" asked the cop.

Pete examined his head. His hand found a rapidly swelling bump in the center of the forehead. A bump, no more.

"What the hell!"

The cop suddenly laughed outright.

"Oh, boy, what a break! Look!" He pointed to a crooked length of wire still entangled in Pete's legs, almost invisible in the dim light. "Two gunmen popping away at you, and you pull a Brody on a hunk of wire! And all you get is a bump on the bean. Say, guy, if I had your luck!"

Never in a lifetime had Pete been so grateful for a bruise on his forehead. But certain abrasions of spirit still remained.

"If you had my luck," he said, "you'd go jump in the river. What do you call this, a picnic or somthing?"

"Not exactly," said the cop. "Well, tell me about it."

Pete learned from the policeman that the shooting had been interrupted almost as it began.

He was the cop on this beat, and had been standing in the shadows on the street corner, when the taxi pulled to a halt. He had watched, sensing something untoward in the proceedings.

When Henkel struck Pete, he had started toward the taxi to interfere. And when the two began shooting, he promptly had followed suit, opening up on them in turn. The big sedan a block away had shot forward, picked up the pair, and had raced off at terrific speed. With no auto in sight to give chase other than the slow and quite useless cabs, the cop had merely taken note of the license number. Then he had run to the aid of the victim.

Pete told all of his story. He described the gang, the holdup, and the warehouse on One Hundred and Fifth Street. The narrative was embroidered with fervent oaths. The cop heard him through. Then he took Pete on the run to the corner of First Avenue and Sixtieth Street. There, at a police call box, he phoned in the story. After that he listened while staccato instructions came over the wire.

"Well?" demanded Pete. "What's the verdict?"

The policeman hung up the receiver and closed the box.

"A squad from headquarters will take the job. They'll be along here in ten minutes to pick you up. I got to hold you till they come."

"Hold me!" repeated Pete. He smiled thinly, and his slitted eyes gleamed. "Boy, you couldn't shake me. I'm seeing this through."

The squad arrived from headquarters in record time. They came racing up First Avenue in a long, black touring car, the siren under the hood sending a weird, thrilling warning ahead through the night. The car stopped on the corner where Pete and the cop stood waiting. It was loaded with men in civilian clothes, great two-hundred-pound men with shrewd, blunt faces. Pete jumped in the back, and they were off. One of the detectives questioned him, and Pete told his story a second time. The rest said nothing, riding easily in the swaying car, smoking cigars and listening. They were a formidable lot.

At One Hundred and Fourth Street and Columbus Avenue they were flagged by three uniformed patrolmen from the local precinct. The cops jumped on the runningboard, and they rolled to One Hundred and Fifth and turned the corner. Two doors from the Excelsior warehouse the car halted. The man beside Pete glanced at the place, and issued a brief order. In-

stantly they piled out, and moved to their appointed tasks.

FOUR of the detectives entered the basements of the adjoining flat houses, two to each house. They were to proceed through and guard the rear. One man remained at the wheel of the black touring car, while all the others approached the high front door of the warehouse.

The detective sergeant tried the door. It was locked. He beat on it firmly. The other members of the party ranged themselves close against the wall as inconspicuously as possible.

In a moment the door slid open a few inches. Only darkness was revealed, and a face dim and nebulous.

"What do you want?"

"Open the door," ordered the sergeant.

"Who for?"

"Shut up and do as you're told!"

"I will like hell! Who do you think you are?"

"I'm a sergeant of detectives from headquarters."

The door abruptly slid shut. But not all the way. The detective detained it with a foot thrust in the opening. The face disappeared. A couple of the officers fell on the door, and strove to pull it open. It slid freely a few inches, and jerked to a stop. A heavy chain trembled taut across the narrow space, holding it. Inside there was a cry, a shout of warning.

"Come on, bust it!" ordered the sergeant.

They seized the door, shoved it almost closed, and then pulled mightily. The chain held. They repeated the effort. On the fifth attempt the links parted and the door slid wide open on the yawning darkness. They hesitated, peering into the place.

A flood of dazzling light burst before them. There was the crack of a pistol, and instantly the roaring surge of a powerful automobile engine. In the midst of the blinding radiance from the great headlights they saw red jets of flame from many guns. They scattered. Pete had once that night escaped from a hail of lead, and he was of no mind to strain his luck. He threw himself on the sidewalk to one side, and crouched there. This was not his battle.

The detectives now had their guns out, and they turned them on that dazzling light. One headlight abruptly went dark. And the other, undiminished, leaped for the door, the auto horn shrieking above the clamorous reports of the guns.

Right there the battle was fairly lost. The gunmen in that car were in deperate straits. Given a minute, and they would be gone into the night. Pete noticed, with the intensified powers of observation that visit a man in such moments, that not an officer seemed to be hit. He had seen right. The gang sought only to scatter the raiders from their path. In ten seconds more they would shoot to kill.

And the escaping car shot out of the warehouse door with roaring motor, risking everything on a blind dash.

A man will do strange things under stress. This gang, surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered, was attempting what they would never dare to do had they time to think it over. Pete, when wrath at their escape flamed suddenly in his veins, accomplished a feat, no amount of sober persuasion could have induced him to try again.

He leaped from his crouch on the pavement and threw himself at the car as it passed him. His clutching hands gripped the side of the open windowed sedan, and in madness they sought the throat of the driver. And they found it; how, Pete will never be able to tell. All he remembers is that they held on with terrible intensity.

Th car, instead of turning in the street, shot with tremendous power straight across and crashed into a solid brownstone stoop with a great sound of tearing metal and shattered glass. It

seemed to settle there in collapse, silent but for the trickle of escaping water and gasoline.

The detectives ran across and swarmed upon the wreck. Another episode in the annals of metropolitan crime had ended.

That night they bagged the entire gang. The leader, Scarpy, was pulled from the car, unconscious. The warehouse was found to contain a fortune in loot, all merchandise of various kinds.

The Brickel & Austin silks were intact, still in their original trunks of shipment. And Brickel & Austin, with much surprise but vindictive satisfaction, turned over to New Jersey officers the man who had betrayed their trust in him, one Jim Parsons. That terrified individual turned State's evidence promptly, and was invaluable in the subsequent trials. And, one might add, in the convictions.

PETE carried two painful bruises for several days. The second he received when the bandit car crashed and flung him to unconsciousness. The silk concern gave him a small reward and on the strength of it he took a week's vacation, recovered and wearied of idleness. One morning found him back on the street again, with the ticking of the meter quiet music in his ear.

For a day he avoided Clancy's line. But he found it impossible to deny himself the satisfaction of the inevitable visit. The following afternoon he rolled slowly along that busy and familiar street, and pulled into place at the curb before the door. Not another cab was in sight. And though he waited, not a cab came there. The corporation, apparently, had vanished into thin air.

Pete read a newspaper, sitting at ease in the seat, but presently he was aware of a blue shadow standing on the sidewalk beside the car. He looked up. It was a sergeant of police, big, genial, and shrewd. No mere patrolman this, but a commander of men. The two studied each other.

"Well, how's the hacking?" asked the sergeant.

"Pretty fair," said Pete. "Last couple of days especially."

"Yeah?" said the sergeant. He rumbled inside with good humor, and Pete grinned.

"You know it's against the law to hack here?" asked the officer.

Pete flipped the flag on the taximeter down to the occupied position.

"Sure," he said. "Only I got a call, see."

"So I noticed. You get a lot of them here, I suppose."

"Yeah."

The sergeant leaned confidentially into the cab.

"Well, I'm supposed to keep the streets clear. But I guess I can't chase a hard-working young hackman who has a call." The officer stroked his rugged chin thoughtfully. "Listen here, young fellow. I know all about that warehouse job uptown. I come around here to see if you were playing this joint. You're in right with me and with the department, so you can play it all you want. But why don't you give up hacking and get a man's job? Why don't you join the force?"

Pete's eyes were wide.

"The cops? Me? Nothing doing! Sarge, I'd be a nervous wreck in a week. There's too much excitement for me in a cop's life."

"Well," said the officer, grinning, "think it over. And if you need a hand any time, drop over to the house and see me."

"Sure," said Pete.

A stoutish, well dressed form emerged from Clancy's door. It wove its way across the sidewalk, came to a sudden halt at sight of the blue uniform, and attained a fair state of steadiness and dignity. The sergeant gave Pete a discreet wink, and retired.

THE END

Straightway each Norseman became galvanized into a fighting demon

He Rules Who Can

War clouds hover over Sicily as Harald's Varangians and Georgios's Immortals approach—but the most deadly conflict is between those two great warriors, with wealthy Constantinople as the prize

By ARTHUR GILCHRIST BRODEUR

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HARALD SIGURDSSON, exiled Norwegian prince, arrives in Constantinople — which the Norse call Mikligard—in 1038, with five hundred trained fighters. After a fight with Georgios Maniakes, Prefect of Police, over a dancing girl, Cyra, Harald is thrown into prison, but John the Eunuch offers him command of the Varangian Guard, the Norse half of the emperor's bodyguard. Harald, though doubting John's sincerity, accepts, on the understanding that he serves the emperor alone.

John, whose brother Michael married the widowed Empress Zoe, is the real ruler of the empire, playing one faction against another. He sends Georgios, with his Immortals—the Greek half of the emperor's guard—to quell a Bulgarian revolt, leaving Harald in charge of Constantinople and its devious intrigues. John has secretly had the girl Cyra stolen and sold to the Emir of Sicily, but Harald takes the girl off the ship of Yusuf ben Mirza, the Sicilian envoy.

He places the girl in care of the

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Patriarch of the Eastern Church—who tells Harald that John and Michael are usurpers, who poisoned the old emperor; and the Empress Zoe, whom Harald sees in secret, says the same, though John has charged her with the crime. Zoe, vain and hungry for admiration, tries to get Harald to kill John and Michael, seize the throne and marry her. But he despises her, and, besides, he is too greatly fascinated by Maria, one of her retinue. Zoe guesses he is in love. Suspecting Cyra, whom the Patriarch has placed in her service, Zoe sends the girl with a pretended message to Harald, knowing that John will catch her. John does, but knowing Harald has been protecting her, he plans to release her; but his younger brother, Constantine, whom John is grooming to succeed the ailing Michael, steals into her cell, with a torturer.

Meantime Sicily has declared war, and John, still balancing Harald against the too ambitious Georgios, appoints the Norseman commander of the fleet and Georgios commander of land forces, and orders them to make a joint attack on Sicily. And he secretly orders Harald to bring Georgios home in chains after the war is won.

CHAPTER XIII *(Continued)*.

THE EBONY COFFER.

JOHN awoke late, his head throbbing with the fumes of wine. At his summons a servant came running.

"I order the release of the girl Cyra!" spoke the Orphanotrophos. The servant bowed, and withdrew. He was back within the quarter of an hour, pale and trembling.

"Most bountiful one!" he wailed. "Most serene!"

John leaped from his bed, a vision of ludicrous fury in the wrinkled nightrobe that fluttered about his thin shanks and showed the round eminence of his belly.

"Speak, fool!"

"Most excellent, the girl is dead!"

Seizing the man's shoulder, John shook him savagely.

"Dead, knave? How? By whose order?"

"I—indeed, I know not! I found her in her cell, stone-cold, the bandages torn from her arms."

"Bandages? What bandages?"

"Most magnificent—her hands, which had been cut off by your order—"

John screamed with rage. "Fetch me Constantine. At once!"

The servant ran like a frightened deer down the long corridor, down the grand staircase, not knowing whither he went. John himself, fighting for self-control, shot back the panel that gave into Constantine's chamber. It was empty. The room was a welter of disorder.

John stared at the chaos before him: at the garments strewn about the floor, the scattered books, the broken alembic.

"Has he fled?" he muttered. "The serpent! The beast! The fool!"

He returned to his own apartment. Fumbling in his cabinet, he drew out a cup and a flask of wine. He was about to break the seal when he stopped thoughtfully, and held the flask to the light.

"It looks untouched," he whispered, "yet there was a nick in the seal, and this is unscarred."

He broke the seal, poured out a cupful, which he left untasted, and waited. It was not long before the servant returned.

"I have given order that the palace be searched, most glorious," he faltered.

"You did not find him?"

The frightened man crept back toward the door. "He—indeed I do not know—"

Forcing a smile, John beckoned him nearer.

"I did not mean to frighten you," he said, in gentler tones. "You are weary with running. Drink!"

The servant thrust out a shaking

hand, took the cup, and raised it to his lips. One moment he hesitated, glancing anxiously at his master.

"Drink, drink!" John repeated. "I give you permission."

The man gulped down the wine at a draught. John watched him narrowly. At first the servant stood as before, the color stealing back into his cheeks as the alcohol warmed his veins; but after a little he gave a violent start. His eyeballs grew rigid, contracted, and stuck out. With a howl of pain he clutched at his stomach.

John sat, his lips drawn thin in an evil smile.

"So I thought," he spoke aloud. "I knew that seal."

The servant quivered once, all over, and fell to the floor.

John, rising, paced up and down, paying no more heed to the wretch stiffening before him.

"The dog!" he muttered. "The ungrateful viper! When I lay my hands on him—"

He burst into an agony of tears.

"How I loved him!" he groaned. "How I loved him!"

DAY after day the weather held fair, with a following wind. The great fleet held on its course for Sicily, its eagle-flaunting banners stiff in the breeze, its hundreds of sails patching the blue Mediterranean.

For greater safety, the expedition passed the hostile straits of Crete at night, all lights out. Even so, as morning saw the western shores of that Moslem island a mere blur behind the rearguard, a tiny flutter of white to the south of the huge flotilla revealed the vigilance of the heathen outposts. No use to send even the swiftest pamphylian after the distant sail: the lean, rakish Arab galleys were no less swift than the Greeks.

Harald, by the steering oar, watched the tiny patch of white dim out against the azure sea.

"So many ships cannot pass unseen," he spoke. "Even the sea birds would betray it; and the Saracens have as keen eyes as they."

Harald turned away, and fell to pacing the poop deck. In the four days of the voyage he had had his first leisure to think calmly of those things which had befallen, from his interview with Zoe in the gardens to the last feverish preparations for war.

As he gazed back over the warm blue water, sprinkled with the flashing sails of his fleet, and felt the power which he commanded, he realized more than ever the true might of Constantinople. Here was a flotilla such as he had never dreamed of, going forth at the command of John to crush the heathen—and intrusted to him, Harald, who but a few short months before had been an unknown adventurer.

He felt a sudden warmth as he recalled how much, how constantly, John had trusted him. Aye, he had had trust, despite the army of spies John set on all within the walls, even on Harald himself. And at this thought Harald was struck with a sense of John's own greatness. Aye; upstart and rascal as he undoubtedly was, the Eunuch was yet a leader of men: one who ruled them well and strongly.

"And I have promised to slay him!" Harald thought, with sudden remorse.

"I have promised to slay him—because a girl gave me her lips! Because an empress unfit to wear a crown hates him! Is this a deed worthy a man?" The more he thought on it, the less manly it seemed.

A promise bound Harald to kill him; his promise to John bound Harald to be true to him. In vain the Northman reproached himself, in vain sought an escape from his dilemma. He had pledged his word both ways. The words of his sainted brother, Olaf, before his last battle, came back to him:

"I am called a hard man, yet have I never oppressed the weak, nor been false to my word. If I die now, I die with clean hands, hard though they be."

Staring moodily at the creaming wake of his flagship, Harald pondered these words. How could he make them true of himself?

At the companionway he stopped, confronted by Thiodolf. The skald bore in one hand a small, richly carved ebony coffer.

"What is that?" asked Harald.

Thiodolf handed over his burden. "From John the Eunuch. Constantine, his brother, gave it me before we sailed. I was not to deliver it, nor speak of it, till we left Crete behind. I have obeyed."

"Some secret order," Harald guessed, thinking of his commission to arrest Maniakes. He broke the sealed silk that bound the box, and raised the lid.

THIODOLF, waiting, sprang forward at sight of the frightful change that came over his leader's face. Harald's eyes glared; a cry so terrible broke from his lips that the very house-carles rushed aft, thinking some treachery had befallen.

In the coffer lay a woman's hands, severed at the wrists. Small hands they were—very small and very beautiful. On one right forefinger was a little mole.

Harald stared long at them, unable to look away. At last he flung the coffer into the sea and, turning, faced toward the east. In one swift motion he stripped the ax Hell from his shoulder, shook it aloft, and cried:

"Thanks, Eunuch, for breaking the covenant between us! Thou hast made the way before me plain!"

Thiodolf wheeled on the house-carles. "Get forward!" he ordered.

As they trooped away he approached the stricken Harald and laid a hand on his arm.

"It was Cyra," he guessed. "None other had such hands. But why?"

"Speak not of it," Harald said in a smothered voice. "But, by my brother's soul, I will repay!"

The skald smiled frostily. "It takes no longer to sail back than it took to come thus far. We can come about after dark and slip past Georgios in the night."

Harald grasped his friend's hand.

"That is my will, comrade, but not my way. If I turn back now, have I the right to ask these Varangians to follow me? They have taken the rich wages of the Eunuch so long, have worn the emblem of the Greek emperors so proudly! They are athirst for the war and loot of Sicily; how can I deny them? Nay, first I must lead them in battle, must shed my blood with theirs, that they may know me and I them. Then will I pay my debt to John, and may God send me evil if I pay him not in full!"

Thiodolf went below, and was by himself for many hours. The stars were out when he came on deck again, and the moon revealed the rocky shore of Zante far to starboard. The skald leaned over the rail, watching the phosphorescent water washing the side. He was humming lightly to himself, his right hand striking the rail in rhythmic cadence.

After a little he straightened, and the skald's great voice boomed out in the first song he had made since he had worn the Emperor's coat:

"Keen is my king's ax,
Keener his hatred.
Hard does it bite, when
His heavy hand swings it;
But harder and deeper
And deadlier it cleaveth
When held by the severed
Hands of a woman!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WAR.

THE moon filtered from under a low cloud-bank and silvered the whispering reeds. The stench of stagnant salt water poisoned the night, so that the troops pouring ashore from

the first beached pamphylians drew their breaths short. This, then, was Sicily the Beautiful, this land of muddy lagoons and sickening stinks!

As fast as they disembarked Harald drew up his men in companies on the low shore, advancing his ranks little by little to make room for those behind. By command of Georgios, supreme on land, Harald emptied each pamphylian, save for an anchor watch of twenty men and the crews.

"It is madness, leaving the fleet undermanned," Harald protested. "We are near a great port, perhaps filled with Moslem galleys. It were best to leave a theme to guard the ships."

"Know you not that yonder mountains may swarm with men, too many for us to deal with?" Georgios barked. "We must first break a way through, ere we can spare good troops to stand idle by the shore."

"What if the Saracens have a fleet in Messina Harbor?" Harald suggested calmly.

Georgios laughed, and not politely. "Why, so they have! We shall march from here on Messina, seize the town, and destroy the ships. We are now behind the town. There is no danger till they know we are here."

"What if they know already?"

Georgios, never too patient, glowered at Harald's insistence.

"If you dare not face them," he sputtered, "I will let you take your mailed maidens and watch the ships till we return with the spoils."

Harald stiffened. "Lead on!" he answered. "I will go as far as any Greek that ever bore sword."

In a foolish hope of attaining a surprise, the drums were silent, the trumpets mute, orders being passed from mouth to mouth along the host. Up, and ever up, skirting ravines, swarming through orchards, clambering over rocks, they made their way painfully eastward toward the walls of Messina.

As they debouched through three defiles into the peak-surrounded valley of Rametta the watchfires of a great army sprang into view below them.

"The Saracens! The Saracens!"

The cry ran all along the lines. Rank after rank swung into the plain, took order, formed in a long line facing the hostile camp. In the Saracen lines, long aware of their advance, men cried aloud, horses neighed, armor and nakirs rattled, commands rang out in guttural Arabic.

But neither side dared to strike in the dark. Dimly the Christians could see their foes forming.

Dawn came at last, and with it pandemonium in both camps. The drums burst into roll on roll; the trumpets sang like an army of embattled cocks; ranks were closed. Then, slowly at first, with short, sharp cries of exultation, the Saracens advanced.

Their cavalry led the assault, and at its vastness Harald marveled. They rode neither in column nor in line, but in a great conglomerate swarm, shaking lances, tossing turbaned helmets, their nakirs throbbing incessantly. At long arrow-range they burst into tumultuous cries:

"Allah-il-Allah! Allah-il-Allah! Allah-hu! Allah Akhbar!"

The Christians had their backs against the bulwarks of the hills, with the three defiles behind as a means of retreat. In default of cavalry, Georgios had stationed the Varangians, in their favorite wedge formation, in the center; and held his Immortals in lines five deep on either wing.

Knowing the total number of the Greeks—counting out those left with the ships—less than thirty thousand, Harald wondered at this seeming recklessness of Georgios. That vast army of Arabs, strung out along the entire eastern rim of the valley, must be at least fifty thousand strong; their cavalry alone was well-nigh half that number.

It was almost on the Varangians now, its front expanding till it outflanked the Greek line; the lean horses

galloped belly to earth, the riders leaning far over their saddles, yelling and whooping wildly.

HARALD bellowed a last command:

"Stand fast! Shields up! Hold, though ye die!"

His shout was drowned by the clamor of the Arabs. With one final yell they bounded in to close quarters, and the storm burst; but not as Harald thought. A sudden hail of darts and arrows smashed into the unmoving Christian ranks. The horsemen wheeled, almost in the very faces of their foes, and darted back to their waiting infantry.

This was astounding to Harald. The great Greek strategists, whose works he had studied so diligently, had never faced Arab cavalry, and so had given him no preparation for such tactics. He had expected a charge that would roll over his lines, or at best break after cutting half through them. No time was given him to scan the effects of their onslaught; from the right wing came the peal of Georgios's trumpet, sounding a counter charge.

The Greeks sprang into instant action, leaving their dead strewn as they lay. Closing the many gaps left by the Moslem shafts, they came on in a dense phalanx, too narrow by far, but deep and strong. And in the center, all his Northern ferocity unleashed by the ring of Georgios's trumpet, Harald led his Varangians in the terrible Northern wedge.

He saw the Arab cavalry divide and ride away through a score of lanes opened for it through the Moslem infantry. Then, with short, deep shouts, the whole Moslem infantry host moved forward to meet its foe.

Suddenly the Northmen were lost in the thick of a forest of spears, which thrust, lifted, and thrust again. Scimitars flashed, blades rang on shields.

The Varangian wedge hit something that felt like an iron wall, save that it held, gave before them, gathered, held like masonry, and gave again. Then all was a welter of flashing steel.

Manfully the Arab infantry stood against the onslaught, though where their center stood the brunt of the Varangian charge they stood not long. The heavy Northern axes bit through mail and bone, lopped hands, divided arms from shoulders; the fearful wedge of huge bodies and mighty limbs gored them in one fierce forward surge after another. Wherever those axes fell, all gave way before them.

The Saracen center melted like mist before the sun. Harald found himself faced by nothing but the plain, strewn with corpses and dotted with fugitives; beyond, the hills and the sun-washed walls of a city far in the distance—while a swarm of desperate men, lean, lashing out with reddened scimitars, hung on his flanks.

But now the Saracen cavalry came on again at the gallop, determined to force the issue. As before, they hurled a volley of darts, then followed it with a headlong charge.

Now it was the Immortals who held best. Their fivefold line, hedged and bristling with long lances, flung the light Arab horses back.

Georgios sounded his trumpet, and on both wings the Immortals gave pursuit.

The Varangians, ranked but two deep, had been hurled aside by the shock of the fiery horsemen. If they had had spears, they could have held; but their axes were all too short to reach the riders ere the impact of meeting broke their nakirs. With loud cries of triumph the Arabs rode round and through their ranks, thrusting with slender lances, hacking with curved blades.

THEN the Arabs found out what it meant to come to close grips with Northmen. Though thrice outnumbered, and on foot, Harald's men fought to better advantage half

surrounded than against the sheer shock of the mass charge that had just broken them.

Each man, at most groups of two or three together, lashed out desperately with two-faced axes and long, heavy swords. Their big bodies, long limbs, and great strength told heavily against the lighter, weaker frames and thinner mail of their foes. One Norseman against four Arabs was but the odds Varangians liked.

The fight in the center resolved itself into a thousand swirling groups, half-hidden by dust, from which the flash of ax and scimitar gleamed like lightning.

And for every slice of a scimitar through Varangian armor the Northern ax bit thrice through mail and bone and life.

Neither Northman nor Saracen heeded the outcome of combat on the wings. The flying dust-clouds shut them off, obscured their vision, filled their nostrils; the fury of fight gave them nor time nor chance to see more than the flash of stroke and parry. Each man cut and stabbed at the foe before him, nor could any have done otherwise and yet saved his life.

But it could not last. The weight of their armor and the continual stroke and parry wore the Northmen down at last. Faster they fell, giving ground foot by foot. Harald sounded his horn again, four long blasts.

This was a signal to his own house-carles. Though less used to discipline than those who had served longer under the Emperor, they had fought under Harald in three countries, and understood his ways.

Straightway each became galvanized into a fighting demon, smashing down all before him, fighting with every ounce of strength to do that which his leader ordered. Slowly at first, one at a time; then faster, by twos and threes, they shook off their clinging foes and battered their way to the center of the reddened field.

As fast as they reached the spot where Harald fought, they grouped about him. Man by man and group by group, they formed the shield wall. When all were together, a little hollow square that faced four ways, a great voice rose in a song that outdinned the very din of battle, and made battle-mad those who heard it:

"Our prince has gone hunting,
And harries the heathen:
'Hell' waits them, 'Hell' bites them,
They cringe from his hatred.
The raven flaps o'er us,
The ravening wolf howls;
Their thirst Harald sateth
With Saracen corpse flesh!"

Once, twice, and again the song roared forth; and the house-carles took it up, slashing in time to its thrumming beat. On all four sides the Moslems clung to them; but before the mighty, terrible joy of that song and the redoubled strokes it inspired, their resistance weakened.

The singing grew till all the Varangian host heard and took heart. Wherever Harald's men fought, they took up the song, chanting in pulsing rhythm, their swelling hearts sending new strength to tired limbs.

Suddenly panic rose in the Arab ranks. New sounds hummed in their ears, a diapason to the chanted song: the beat of Greek drums. The plain shook beneath advancing feet; new shouts rang above the clash of blade on mail. Here and there a Moslem officer looked behind him, and shouted frightened orders. All at once, as vultures rise when frightened from carrion, the Moslem horse scattered.

THE Varangians did not follow. Each man kept his stance, chests heaving, sweat rolling from reddened faces. A few breathed sobbingly, drawing in the air in great gulps. The song ceased. Not a man had breath or strength for pursuit.

Having hurled back and crushed his own assailants on either wing, Georgios had fallen back to the original field, and

then caught sight of Harald's plight. It was his drums, the tramp of his themes, that had frightened the tattered remnants of Harald's foes back to their rocky nest across the plain. Not a living Moslem held his ground! all, save the dead, were in the thick of the vast dust cloud that fled, as before a storm, toward the walls of Messina.

Georgios rode up on his third horse of the day, man and beast fairly sobbing with fatigue. The charger's head drooped almost to its knees; but Georgios held his chin high, and his dark eyes glared fiercely. His shield, shot full of arrows, hung on his left arm; his right hand still clutched his drawn sword, broken almost at the hilt. Blood welled from one shoulder; both hands and arms were crimson.

Straight to the Varangian ranks he rode, and almost fell from his horse at Harald's feet. Harald, waiting, could barely hold himself erect. His helmet was gone, his mail slashed to ribbons, the ax Hell dull and streaming.

Proudly Georgios straightened his exhausted body; as proudly Harald stood before him. He shifted his ax into his left hand, and held out his right.

Georgios ignored it. His mad eyes rolled in his back-flung head.

"I like you not!" he panted. "But, by the sacred blood, you and yours are men!"

Harald surveyed the bleeding, battered figure.

"You are as good as any, Greek," he answered.

They stood confronted thus, while, each behind its leader, the masses of Varangians and Immortals, as exhausted as their commanders, stared at each other. The Northmen, still as the fight had left them, were in ragged companies, each man standing as weariness and his own will bade him; while the Immortals, coming fatigued from a stricken field, held themselves by sheer force of will in perfect alignment.

Here and there looks of admiration, or weary grins, were exchanged. In this first desperate battle they had been welded into one army—comrades, as long as their leaders kept peace together.

Harald turned to his house-carles.

"Who made the song?" he asked.

From the company on his right, Halldor the Icelander thrust himself forward, his green eyes flashing.

"It was Thiodolf!" he cried. "Thiodolf, your brother's skald, who to-day opened his lips in battle for the first time since Olaf's last fight."

Looking about him, Harald caught sight of the skald in the center of the right flank of house-carles.

"Well done!" he applauded. "When we return you shall have a gold shield for that."

Georgios laid a hand on his shoulder. "Rest your men an hour," he ordered, "then speed back to the ships, and watch the coast."

"And you?" Harald returned coldly. He liked neither the command nor the tone in which it was uttered.

"I press on to take the town. The fugitives from this fight, mayhap the entire garrison, will take ship at once for Palermo. You are to cut them off. When you have them, join me at Messina."

Harald understood. Georgios meant to have entirely for himself the glory of taking the first Sicilian city. He had to obey: on land Georgios outranked him.

"We will take our rest on shipboard," he answered. "Turn, lads! To the ships!"

HARALD reached the reed-grown lagoon just as the setting sun was staining the water a red as deep as that of the field of battle. But the ships were no longer anchored by the shore, or drawn up on the shelving beach. Their masts rose, like a forest, from the deeper water, crowding the throat of the Straits.

At his hail a pamphylian put in. She

shot into the lagoon like a bird winging to its nest. As she beached, Rotlieb the Frank thrust his red mane over the rail. His eyes were furtive.

"Too late, Prefect!" he bawled. "The Moslem fleet came past us ere we could thrust out. We followed, but they outdistanced us; wherefore we returned here to wait word from you."

Harald was astonished and angry. "Ye had no lookouts?" he questioned. "Not one keel on the water?"

Rotlieb shook his head. "What if we had?" he retorted. "We have but an anchor watch aboard, not enough to meet them in battle. It was safest to lie ashore and let them pass."

"But ye followed?"

"Aye, hoping to reach them from the rear with our fire-tubes."

Harald's eyes became twin points of flame. "Could ye not have met them on the water, barred their way, and swept them with the fire tubes ere they passed?"

"We are too weak," Rotlieb insisted stubbornly. "It would have meant the loss of the fleet; and how then would ye have reached Constantinople again?"

"While you skulked, your comrades have been dying," Harald answered bitterly. "It was ill for me that I left you in command. Henceforth, you fight in the ranks. Bring the ships in!"

Rotlieb scowled, and withdrew. Slowly the fleet moved toward shore: one by one the tall prows beached, and the Varangians embarked. There was nothing to do now but rest, and lay to till morning; then make for Messina Harbor, a dash of a few miles. The great chance to take all that was left of the first Sicilian army was lost.

Rest was sorely needed. The Varangians dropped on the decks and slept where they fell. In the morning there would be more fighting.

At dawn they bore down on Messina, the doomed water gate of Sicily. The sun was just paling from rose to lilac as they worked into the sickle-shaped bay. Swiftly the pamphylians thrust their prows into the shingle, and the troops poured overside.

High above them, crowning the cliffs that closed in the low sands, frowned the battlements of the Moslem citadel. To right and left of the bulwarks crowded the pink and white and yellow houses of the town.

The cliffs rose too high for the fire-tubes to reach; but there was a way round at one extremity of the harbor.

Before advancing, Harald provided the men with spears out of the reserve stores of the Immortals. He had learned his lesson of the day before. Georgios would rage when he knew of the requisition; but Harald was within his rights as fleet commander.

Since the battle of the previous day had been waged on the landward side, Georgios must now be beleaguering the city from the rear. Marshaling his men on the sands, Harald left Halldor with three ships' crews to cover the advance. As he waited for the fire-tubes to come into action, he was intently forming his plan of attack.

HALLDOR wasted no time. At his command the compressed-air tanks were opened with a hissing roar: the blended sulphur, phosphorus, and naphtha, readily ignited at low temperature, burst into flame with the heat of friction, and poured from the lean muzzles of the fire-tubes. Tilted to high elevation, the bronze mouths spewed forth their glowing load in streams that, at first slow and drooping, gained force till they shot straight out and fell across the battlemented ramp by which alone the Moslem defenders could make their way to the beach.

Six tongues of fire from the bow and port tubes of three ships, played steadily across the ramp; and though they could not ignite the stone, the flames clung and blazed wherever they struck, with a long-lived tenacity that was appalling. "March!" Harald command-

ed; and his house-carles led the advance straight over the low neck of land. The few missiles hurled at them from catapults fell short.

Nakirs were beating the alarm within the citadel; but from the other side of the tableland on which it perched came the clash of steel and the shouts of many men.

"Georgios attacks!" exclaimed Harald. "Come! We will strike here while he engages them in the rear."

Forming hastily, the Varangians left their scarce-begun trenches behind and scrambled up the hill. As they came on, watchful eyes saw them. Fresh alarms sounded within the town: stones and heavy darts flung from catapults began to hurtle among the ascending column. Here and there a man, transfixed, spread wide his arms and crashed to earth, rolling among the loose stones; little groups, blotted out in one destruction by a crashing rock, lay smashed and bleeding. But the column wound on and on, determined, thirsting for fight and loot.

Now they were within arrow flight, and the barbed Moslem shafts flickered in. Casting a rapid glance at the ramparts, Harald noted that the javelins and arrows came thinly, though the masses of rock hurled by the engines were as frequent as so strong a fortress justified.

"They have enough men to handle the catapults," he concluded, "but all too few to meet an assault with hand-arms on two sides at once."

The storm of stones grew thicker, the slender stream of arrows wrought more deadly havoc, as the Varangians swept closer. There was but one way to pass that too high and massive wall —through the gate, stout and barred as it was. If Georgios kept up his assault on the other side, it was possible; but possible only because the defense lacked strength. Harald guessed that the garrison was only a determined rearguard, left behind to work what damage it could, while the main Saracen army, beaten on the plain the day before, fled for Palermo.

Into his mind flashed a trick, one of those his Greek clerks in Constantinople had read to him from the imperial works on siege craft. It was a simple thing, such as an army without engines might use against a place not too strong.

"THE tortoise!" he bellowed through cupped hands; and his captains relayed the command. Immediately his men charged for the base of the wall, increasing their pace to get under the arc of the catapults the sooner. It was a costly maneuver; but it had been far costlier to bide where they were, in full range.

A hundred men were smashed to pulp on the white hillside ere they gained the brink. Once there, they formed under volley on volley of arrows; formed in a compact group of solid squares, each man crouching, shield raised above his head, the rim of one man's shield overlapping his neighbor's. Thus they were protected against arrows by a solid shell like that of the creature whose name their formation bore.

"Archers to the rear!" shouted Harald. The only archers he possessed were two hundred of his own house-carles, for the Varangian carried no bow. Swiftly the Norwegian bowmen ranged themselves behind the serried group of tortoises, in open order, loosing arrows as fast as they could to cover the advance of the shielded phalanxes.

Their work was well done. The archers on the wall were more numerous; but the light Arab bow was no match for the long, tough elm staves and three-foot shafts of their foes. Though the Saracens clung stubbornly to their posts, they were driven back till scarce one dared show his head between the merlons.

"Now!" shouted Harald; and one of the tortoises surged forward, cum-

brously, but gaining force as it advanced. A tree trunk grasped in a dozen pairs of mighty arms thrust the blunt snout ahead of the tortoise and, impelled by all the weight of the phalanx, smashed against the stout gate. Having delivered the blow, the tortoise retreated, stepped aside, and made way for another, which repeated its tactics.

The gate was of massive olive wood beams, bound together with iron bands, and studded with thick plates of iron. Strongly it held; but at each repeated blow it quivered more and more. Bands gave, hinges groaned and tore away. At the sixth assault it gave, and the phalanx that struck the final blow, unable to check its impetus, surged in above the fallen framework.

At once Harald drove one phalanx after the other through the breach, urging them on so fast that there was scarce a gap between. On the heels of the last came the bowmen, eager to be in at the death.

As more and more of the Northmen poured in through the ravished gate, the Moslems, outnumbered and driven against the house-lined sides of the narrow streets, fell back farther and farther.

Then Harald himself, his troops in full cry behind him, made down the main thoroughfare to a wide plaza or parade ground in the very center of the town, turned, and sped for the landward gate. Seeing his purpose, the foremost of his men raised a thunderous yell, and rank after rank, company on company, sped at his heels.

Caught between walls of stone and walls of steel, the Saracens struggled for one brief, fierce moment; then, borne down by sheer weight, gave way.

The gate burst open, and the Immortals rushed in like a river in spate.

THIS time Harald did not wait for Georgios. His work was done. Amid a knot of house-carles, he ascended to the battlements over the newly forced gate.

On the parapet, gazing out upon the moat below, the slope beyond, the fields reaching to the distant hills, he exclaimed in dismay. The earth was strewn thick with the bodies of Immortals.

It had cost the Greek not less than a fifth of his host to reach that gate; and even then he had not won it till cooler heads and stronger arms came to his relief. Harald was astounded at this revelation of his colleague's headlong fury. In the battle of the day before, Georgios had fought with skill as well as heroism; but here, confronted with a foe infinitely weaker, he had thrown away lives in a mad frontal attack, not against an already beleaguered city, but on sheer walls and an unpreoccupied enemy. The truth was that Georgios, cunning against odds, was recklessly contemptuous of a force lesser than his own.

So appalled was Harald at the slaughter below him that it was some time before the tumult raging in the city caught his attention. He sprang down the stone stairs to the city streets, to find a massacre in progress. The last of the garrison, herded like sheep between hedges of Greek spearmen, were being struck down without pity.

Georgios, once more mounted, towered above his men, urging them on with bellowed oaths. Harald found himself wedged in by the mailed backs of the slaughter-mad Greeks, unable to reach the frantic figure on horseback. Not till the last Saracen was down did the ranks make way.

His blood seething at this butchery of surrendered men, men who had fought heroically against hopeless odds, Harald pushed through the crowded warriors to confront the Greek. When he had won clear, and only the reddened pavement stretched between them, Georgios saw him. With a roar he spurred his horse forward.

Before the whole host, or such as had not scattered to loot, Georgios reined his horse back almost in Har-

ald's face, and sprang quickly from the saddle.

"The ships?" he boomed. "Did you intercept them?"

Varangian and Immortal alike stood by, riveted by the tension in the air. All sensed that a conflict was impending: a conflict between generals. Silence settled over them, amid which the distant shouts of the looters rang sharp and clear.

Harald shook his head. "They had passed before I came up," he answered. "Rotlieb deemed his force too weak to challenge them."

"Dog!" Georgios blared, his eyes fairly starting from his head. "You let them go!"

Harald's own wrath, already stirred by the massacre, flamed hot at this injustice.

"Not I," he began; but got no further. Georgios, smarting under the losses his own rashness had brought upon him, was the less able to control his hate for Harald, which mounted on the instant into ungovernable rage. His heavy right hand shot out, the knotted fist striking the Northman full in the mouth.

As Harald fell, a mighty howl of rage rose from the Varangians, and an equally mighty jeer from the Greeks. One moment each side stood glaring at the other; then the Norse surged forward, steel out and flashing. The next instant the two corps would have been at one another's throats; but even as they rushed Harald picked himself up and ran between, flinging out his arms.

"STAND, fools!" Harald shouted at the oncoming Varangians.

They recoiled, but came on again. Snatching out his dagger, Harald placed it against his own breast.

"Back, or I slay myself!" he threatened.

The Northmen fell back in earnest this time, puzzled and enraged. Why should their leader balk them of the vengeance they meant to take for him? They stood irresolute, waiting.

Harald whirled to address the Immortals. "My men are in hand now," he said, and his eyes drew theirs to him. "See to it that ye provoke them not again. Ye have suffered heavily to-day: so heavily that ye no longer outnumber the Varangians. If ye anger them, most of you will never see your homes again. This quarrel is between your commander and me: leave it to us to settle."

A murmur rose from the ranks; but they stood, and sheathed their weapons. Harald stepped up to Georgios.

"It was due to your own folly that we did not intercept the Saracen fleet," he said coldly. "Had ye left behind a force strong enough to man the ships, as I advised, not a galley would have won past them. To-day you have shown yourself a fool again, in seeking to storm these walls before I could join you. Your thirst for glory has cost the lives of four thousand men. You have murdered prisoners, who had yielded themselves. Now you dare to strike the man who has won this stronghold for you.

"The feud between us has gone so far that it must go to its finish. Draw sword, and put an end to it!"

Georgios stood poised on the balls of his feet, his right hand fingering his hilt, his face crimson with rage; and the muscles on his huge bare arms rippled and swelled for action. Yet he spoke not, and he did not draw his weapon.

Incredulously Harald stared at his foe. He knew Georgios was a brave man; yet, challenged before his troops, he shamefully hesitated. If he did not draw he would be shamed in the presence of his troops—the troops who idolized him. Instinctively Harald knew it was not fear that held Georgios back.

Harald's face was stinging with the pain of the blow; but his soul hurt worse. Unless Georgios would fight,

there was no way to remove the shame the Greek had put on him. He knew not, for the moment, how to act to avenge the insult.

At last anger triumphed. Swinging his ax across his shoulders, out of his way, he drove his open hands, one after the other, into the Greek's face. The blows came mightily, with all the force of his strong arms and shoulders behind them, and cracked resoundingly against Georgios's crimsoned cheeks.

Reeling, the Greek fell back, recovered, and again only glared at his enemy.

Harald could not understand it. What force, in all the world, could restrain Georgios from trying to wipe out the insult in blood? Instead, the Greek only gritted his teeth till the gums bled, turned on his heel, and walked away.

The Varangians raised a frantic cheer. Their leader's honor was clean again, his enemy cowed. But Harald knew Georgios was not cowed: for some mighty reason of his own, he had refrained from that duel to the death for which his soul longed. Light dawned on Harald slowly, but it came at last. He stood where his foe had left him; and Eilif, Thiodolf, and Halldor came to him.

At last his face cleared; he met their eyes, his own twinkling.

"It has come to my memory," he said softly, "that Georgios desires to be emperor. A man may easily get his death wound in a duel, and a dead man cannot wear a crown."

"H-m!" grunted the skald. "There are things I would not give to be emperor."

Halldor thrust his keen face forward. "Aye; but a Greek knows the way to be emperor, and to take revenge afterward. Or perhaps before, if revenge comes safely. Henceforth we shall stay closer by you, Harald, lest you leave your back unguarded."

"Two strokes for one! Hard measure, that!" Eilif chuckled; and ever after that Harald was known as "Harald Hard-measure."

CHAPTER XV.

TREACHERY.

THE spoil of Messina was not great, the Moslems having themselves taken and looted it too recently. The army was discontented. The general gloom fed the jealousies and strifes already fomented by the quarrel between the leaders.

Both commanders saw that, unless sharp measures were taken, the expedition would be shattered ere it was well begun. It was Harald, anxious as he was to return and take vengeance on John, who took the first step toward reconciliation. He visited Georgios in his tent, and offered his hand. Whatever the Greek's feelings, he was too much the soldier this time to refuse. Next day the whole camp knew that the generals had officially buried their quarrels.

Georgios summoned Harald to him on the eve of departure.

"Such is the rancor between my men and yours," he said, "that it were best to move separately. I will march overland, while you take the fleet south by sea. Occupy the greater harbor of Syracuse, and inflict what losses you can on the Moslems till I arrive. Then you shall lay siege to Ortygia, while I invest the western or landward wall."

So Georgios led his Immortals across the Pelormitan Mountains, past the wide-flung flanks of smoldering Etna, over a countryside once as rich as any in the world, now bare and deserted after centuries of fire and sword.

And now the illfed Immortals learned to draw their gilded belts tighter; for nowhere in the four-day march did they find food or wine of decent quality or sufficient to appease their hunger.

The Varangians fared better, since

each ship carried ample provisions for her crew and fighting men; and they had but a two days' sail along the coast.

Near noon of the second day they raised the Thapsian shore, passed the outsweep of a bold promontory, and sighted the first of the outer defenses of Syracuse. This was a great wall, set all along the coastal bluffs of Achradina, commanding beach and anchorage.

For one entire league that frowning wall, shimmering with spears and the crests of turbaned helmets, smoking with caldrons of oil, pitch, or molten lead, lowered at them from the shore. At last it receded in a long reëntrant angle, its battlements rising higher, its parapets resounding with the fevered clash of cymbals and the shrill of horns.

"Syracuse!" the pilot called. "The little harbor!"

Harald cast one glance at the narrow port, its converging walls swarming with warriors, the arms of its catapults dipping from sight as the garrison turned the creaking windlasses—and gave the order to sail on. Well, he knew he could not force an entry. The ramparts were too high for his fire-tubes, and commanded his decks with their fearful engines.

As soon as the island no longer cut them off from sight of the port, they saw a sight that set their pulses hammering. In the northern arm of the harbor, protected by a palisade of piles sunk in the shallow water near shore, lay three score Moslem galleys. From every masthead fluttered brilliant silken streamers. Every slanting yard was decked with pennants; but no man moved on their decks and no sound came from them. They had done their work, and their masters had no more need of them.

The Greek pilot fairly danced up to Harald, his sea-tanned face working with rage.

"Africans!" he screamed. "Those are Tunisian ships; I can see by their rig! They have poured reënforcements into the city. Burn them! Burn them!"

HARALD smiled thinly, concealing the anger that suddenly flamed within him. The Aghlabite Emir of Tunis, vassal of the Egyptian Caliph and nominal overlord of Sicily, had sent those galleys to save the garrison; and this he had done because Cyra had been denied him by Harald, when Yusuf ben Mirza went to claim her. Cyra! Harald remembered two tiny severed hands; and because his tortured heart must have relief, he poured forth his wrath on the empty Moslem ships.

His flagship backed water, veered to starboard, and, out of range of the walls, trained her fire-tubes on the single narrow opening in the palisade. A hiss, a sulphurous breath, and streams of fire shot across the water. Down on the stern of the nearest galley the roaring naphtha poured, and a sheet of smoke-shot flame rose from the Moslem decks. The tubes rose, and at a higher angle raked the galleys on either side. Soon the whole Arab fleet was one crackling, seething conflagration.

Screams of anger rose from the walls; but no missiles answered the fire. The heat from those vast sheets of flame was so terrible that the defenders ran from the wall, leaving catapult-gut and the wooden arms of the engines to smoulder as they would. The Varangians might almost have stormed the battlements, had not the very flames they had kindled shut them off.

But one thing they could do—land. The low coast south and west of the harbor was unguarded, even unwalled, for there the Greeks had left no walls that their conquerors might restore. Into a cove, the Bay of Daskon, Harald sent his prows.

Beaching, he ordered seven thousand men ashore, with food, planks, tools, and fifty light siege-catapults. The remainder of his force he distributed among the ships, leaving Eilif in com-

mand of the fleet, with orders to cruise off Ortygia and Achradina, lest fresh succor come from Africa for the besieged.

Marching northwest along the strip of firm land west of the swamp, the Varangians threw a plank bridge across the thirty-foot wide river, and crossed.

On the other side they camped. South of them was the river, too rapid to ford, accessible only by such a bridge as they had built, and dominated by their missiles in case of attack. Northward lay the swamp, draining into the bay, whose waters, under the guardian fire-tubes of the fleet, protected them on the east.

Only on the west lay open country, and from this direction no attack was to be anticipated. Nevertheless Harald ordered entrenchments thrown up all along the west side, across the road, and dominating the bridge-head.

On the night of the fourth day, the camp was alarmed by the sight of myriad points of light twinkling from the hills to the northwest. The Varangians scurried to line their trenches, posted guards along the river and the rim of the swamp, and prepared for whatever might be in store. Yet in truth there was little chance that the distant camp fires were those of Moslems. Whatever doubt Harald had vanished at midnight, when a blue flare shot up from the hills. Georgios had come.

The signal was answered, once from the Varangian camp, and once from the fleet. The latter revealed the position of the ships as off the south coast of Achradina, just above the city. The investment was almost complete.

At dawn a mounted Greek dashed into Harald's camp, with a written message from Georgios, which Thiodolf the Skald read to his commander:

"Attack the mole at noon, from land and sea at once. I will storm the west gate."

Harald frowned, remembering Georgios's futile assault on Messina.

"Bid your Strategos send me a force strong enough to escort to him half of my siege-engines," he instructed the messenger. "Otherwise he will waste many men on that gate. I will attack at noon as he orders."

Before he could obey, he must get word to the fleet, and time for that was short. A single company made all haste back to Daskon, where they had landed, and sent out one of the galleys moored there with orders for Eilif. The Saracens, their own ships burned, could not intercept the swift pamphylian; but she must make speed if Eilif were to bring the fleet around in time to coöperate in the attack.

HARALD did not like the plan at all. The mole, an artificial tongue of land connecting Ortygia with the mainland, was fortified with a wall on both sides; and from the Great Harbor, Harald had seen the towers of a higher wall to the north, shutting off the entire mole from Achradina. His ships were ill fitted to approach those catapult-lined ramparts. There were two possible directions of attack for the fleet: it might either risk the perilous Little Harbor, thus menacing the east side of the mole; or it might return to the Great Harbor and assail the southwestern side.

The first alternative would expose the ships to missiles from the walls on three sides, and so bring about their certain destruction. The second involved less danger, since the only wall confronting them would then be on the northeast; and on the east the fleet could make contact with Harald's own position. His orders to Eilif were to attack on this side.

Harald marched three hours, reaching his assigned position before noon, so that he might have time to throw up rough entrenchments in case his intended assault were beaten back.

He saw with a frown of amazement the point where Georgios meant him to attack. It was a bad position, well-

nigh untenable. He must camp in the ancient grass-grown stone-paved marketplace, where he had just halted.

He was fronted directly by the angle in the wall where the defenses of the mole joined the main rampart of Achradina, the latter bending sharp northwest at this point. This might have been a weak point in the Moslem line but for a second great reëntrant angle a quarter mile beyond, where the Achradina wall made a salient that threatened the whole north side of the Varangian position.

South and southwest of him lay the swamp, effectually cutting off his retreat save for a narrow space between swamp and wall to the west. This was so narrow that an effective sally from the salient might throw the Northmen into the swamp before they could make good their escape.

Georgios had not yet sent for the catapults, and the morning was passing. Harald wandered about the camp, scrambling over heaps of tumbled ruins, surveying the menacing walls for any signs of weakness. There were none. The parapets were thick with helmets and spears; the engines of war thrust their arms above the battlements almost as close together as they could possibly be set. There was even a sally-port in the salient, as he had feared, guarded by a double bastion.

Returning, he set his men to work, just out of catapult range, collecting the fragments of stone from the ancient ruined temples. With these they hastily threw up one line of wall connecting two temples, which were to guard their rear; and another at the extreme limit of range from the wall, to serve as front-line entrenchment. As these were rising, a trumpet pealed; the distant clank of mailed feet rang out; and down from the heights of Epipolae tramped three companies of Immortals.

As they drew nearer, Georgios himself spurred out, surveyed Harald's preparations, and approved sullenly.

"Well planned," he grunted. "How many engines can you spare me?"

"A score," Harald answered tersely. "My position here is so perilous that I need thirty for myself."

"There were more on the ships," Georgios scowled.

"Aye, a hundred and fifty more; every one needed to protect the fleet against the engines on the wall. If more could be spared, I would have had them."

Georgios showed symptoms of breaking into a rage; but of a sudden his eyes slewed round to the salient in the Achradina wall, and he smiled.

"I will take the twenty," he decided. "I see your men have armed themselves with my reserve of spears from the ships. I am glad that in some things Varangians will take a lesson from Greeks."

WHILE the catapults were being transferred, Harald let the Immortals do all the work, keeping his own men relentlessly busy running a line of wall between the temples in his rear and the salient, which threatened his left. He succeeded in raising the rampart to a height of four feet all the way, joining it to the wall in his front, before the Immortals marched off with their twenty engines. Georgios lingered as his ranks formed about the catapults.

"Why the rampart in front?" he asked. "You cannot advance easily over that."

"I shall not advance—yet," Harald answered. "I shall need all the protection I have to save myself from attack. Look yonder, how the heathen gather on the wall!"

"By St. Nicodemus! They do indeed!" Georgios exclaimed. Setting spurs to his horse, he rode back, his escort advancing at the double. The rumble of the wheeled platforms bearing their catapults sounded like the march of a mighty army; the limestone dust rose about them in clouds.

Straightaway Harald saw to the emplacement of his own thirty catapults behind his new-made ramparts; ten against the salient, ten facing the line of wall connecting salient with mole, ten more concentrated on the angle formed by the lap of mole wall with land wall. The short space south of that would be dominated by his ships.

Harald scaled to the portico of the nearer temple, and looked out over the harbor for his fleet. Soon around the point of Ortygia shot the first pamphylian, bending northward for the final dash to the mole. Behind her came another and another. He sighed his satisfaction with Eilif—the ships were on time.

But others saw the same sight. From the Moslem embattlements came a great shout, the clatter of kettle-drums and the shrill of flutes. A trumpet pealed, and the clash of arms arose.

Making his way with all speed to his counter-walls, which even now were pitifully low, Harald marshaled his men to meet the expected attack. Well he knew it would be folly to obey Georgios and undertake the attack himself. Better save his men than waste them in a vain dash against the towering Moslem ramparts, defended by thousands on thousands of men and scores of siege engines.

His own house-carles, whom he trusted even more than the best of the other Varangians, he stationed in the center of his north wall, facing the salient; their bowmen he concentrated in groups between the engines. From the other companies he set a second line behind these, both to feed the engines and to support the archers. A third line formed a reserve.

On the other sides, where he had less reason for fear, he stationed double lines. In the midst of the square thus inclosed he held a thousand men in reserve, ready to reinforce any point of danger. Only the side nearest the swamp was unwalled and unmanned; for on this side none could approach him. It was also the side most easily supported by the fleet.

As he finished this task, two things happened with almost perfect unison. The fleet, its oarsmen slacking pace to avoid crowding and fouling, drew up off the mole and the shore beyond; and the gate in the salient opened.

The entrenched Varangians had no time to observe the movement of their ships. They knew nothing of the mutual storm of missiles from deck and wall, of the shouts of the fighters and groans of the wounded. They no longer heeded the vanishing dust-cloud behind the departing Georgios. All their energies were centered on adjusting the screws of the catapults, loading the pans with stones, fitting arrow to string, lapping shield with shield. Then, with the instant fury of the thunderbolt, the salient disgorged a mass of Arab infantry.

THEY advanced, not with the wild, reckless charge of the desert tribes; but in serried ranks, disciplined and firm. One glance at them, and Harald guessed them for what they were—the Berber guardsmen of the Tunisian Emir.

"They know the Varangians!" Thiodolf bellowed in Harald's ear. "They save the weaker island Arabs for the Immortals!"

As the Moslems rolled forward, catapults from the wall showered down rocks into the market place; but after a few volleys they desisted. Every stone fell between the advancing infantry and the low Varangian ramparts, doing no harm. Then the Berbers, increasing their pace to the charge, closed in.

"Loose!" ordered Harald. His voice was drowned by the twang of mule-gut; then blocks of limestone tore through the dense Moslem front, plowing red gaps. Grimly the ranks closed, and advanced again.

"Arrows!" And, while the catapults were being rebent by the wind-

lasses Harald's house-carles fell to work with their long elm bows. At such range, against such a target, not a shaft could miss; but the Berbers never paused.

So many they were, so fired with fanatic fury, that a hundred wounds at once could no more stop them than so many pin-pricks. So swift was their onrush that the engines could discharge but one more volley before the heathen reached the wall. This time the jaggard stones, tearing into their front at close range, broke three whole ranks, but they merely flowed around on either side, and came on.

"They fight silent," Thiodolf muttered. "Never before have I known the heathen to do so."

He had no sooner spoken than the whole Moslem column broke into a united yell: "Allah Akhbar!" And with the words on their lips they flung themselves against the wall.

The first brunt struck the house-carles, who were accordingly hardest pressed; but behind the head of the column the other Moslem ranks deployed, spreading all along the north wall and lapping round the angle of the eastern rampart. This was not merely the effect of their greater numbers making room for action: it was a deliberate plan.

Behind them, protected by them, there opened a port in the mole wall, and from it sallied a second Arab horde. At close grips with the Berbers, the Varangians could not man the first three of their catapults on that side, so that only seven could be brought into action against the newcomers.

But these newcomers were Sicilian Moors, neither so strong nor so fierce as the Africans; they advanced with caution after the first volley had smitten them. Their slowness gave time for a second volley, and a third, ere they mustered courage to close.

This gave the Varangian reserve time to pour in to the rescue. With long spears the house-carles thrust and thrust from the wall till their points were clogged or broken, and the Berber swords flashed in their faces; then they dropped pikes, and seized swords and axes.

The other Varangians leaped to the rampart, making fierce play with their two-faced axes, thrusting the Moslems down with heavy blade and heavy arm. There was no breathing space, no end to the wave on wave of flesh and steel that washed up against them, until the Saracens were scaling the low walls upon the horrible incline of their own heaped-up slain.

The Northmen fought on, drenched with blood and panting for air; their blades rose and fell as fast as they could strike; yet still the torrent broke against the wall; and they were slowly pressed back by sheer weight of numbers. The reserve was now dwindling, only three hundred holding back, because they had orders not to strike save to cover a retreat; and the attack on the mole side, though not so sharp, still held every Northman there engaged.

THEN came a little relief. One after another, a series of mighty crashes drowned out the din of steel on steel and the shouts and grunts of the combatants. The assault from the mole weakened, broke, scattered. From the Varangians who had faced it rose a cheer, as they rushed to reënforce their battered comrades fighting the Berbers.

Eilif, from the harbor, had seen the plight of his fellows ashore; and after losing six ships, had given up his hopeless fight against walls that overtopped him twenty feet, to urge his ships west along the swamp-fringed shore.

Now out of range from the walls, he poured in volley after volley from his deck-catapults into the massed Sicilians attacking from the mole. He brought twenty engines to bear; and the Sicilians, unable to withstand or

meet the storm, rushed back through the gate into the city.

But the Berbers held on. At them Eilif dared loose no stones, for his own comrades stood between. They were over the wall now, and still coming on. Drawing closer together as man after man was dragged down, the Varangians gave back foot by foot, their heavy axes and savage strength contesting every inch. Only in the center, where the Norse house-carles flanked Harald and the ax Hell, did the defense still hold the wall; and even here they must soon give way to keep contact with their comrades.

Now Harald played the stroke he held in reserve. A word to Halldor, who was viciously thrusting over his Prefect's shoulder; and the big Icelander squirmed like an eel out of the press. Leaping back from the rear rank, he shouted an order to the meager reserve, and ran at top speed for the temples.

He was fleet as a deer, and well for him, for a dozen Moslem shafts sped after him. Bounding up the broken temple stair, he ran to the rear portico, down the steps there, and so to the broken ground behind, where a horse was tethered. Springing to the saddle, he galloped away from the fighting, straight north to the camp of Georgios.

Having thus dispatched an appeal for help, Harald threw all his strength into a determined attempt to make room for his retreat. Back and back the Varangians pressed, giving way stubbornly, ever holding formation, with lapped shields, opposing the Moslem scimitars. As they gave way they were forced to extend their line, lest the Berbers outflank and surround them in their own walls. The last reserve now came into play, flinging itself against the assault, striving to make their fresh strength tell against numbers till the main force could win clear and make good its retreat.

They succeeded. Backed by those who had held the moleward wall, they drove into the Berber line, ragged and broken as it poured over the wall, and bit deep into it ere the Africans could form again. The distraction was brief, yet it saved the main force. With utmost difficulty, fighting for every inch, the reserve joined ranks with their outworn comrades, and together they withdrew.

The Berbers followed them up with savage joy. Still bearing the brunt, Harald's rearguard fought as even Varangians had never fought before. While they held off pursuit, the others formed the wall of shields, rims lapping on all four sides, points out.

The shield wall opened in the rear for the briefest instant, allowing the rearguard to pour through, then closed again. Slowly, a man here and a man there, they who had thus entered the shield wall edged themselves into its face and took up the fight again, till every man was in formation.

The retreat had now brought them to the very temple steps; and up these the shield wall rushed, with every last ounce of its strength. All but a few made the top step safely, and backed into the portico. Instantly Harald rushed half his men to the rear portico, by which the Moslems might try to force an entrance if they thought of it; the rest formed where they stood.

Commanding both stairways, the Varangians could hold out almost indefinitely. Man for man they were stronger than their foes, and in their present position they could not be outflanked. In readiness for just this emergency, Harald had piled the stores he had brought with him, including casks of wine and water, within the temple sanctuary.

THE Berbers pressed the attack with the fury of madmen; and now Harald could laugh at their blind ruthlessness. For, while he held the temple against them, Georgios could come to the rescue—and the gate or the salient was open. If Geor-

gios had half the skill men imputed to him, he could have the city for the taking.

In their very blood-lust, the Berbers did not at once think of the temples having two entrances. Before they remembered, Halldor had galloped back from his errand, and was safe within the rear portico. But the beat of his horse's hoofs had sent some of them scurrying around.

Halldor came panting up to Harald.

"Georgios refuses!" he cried. "His word is: 'Tell him that, in disobeying my order to attack, he wrecked my plan for taking the city. Let him take the consequences. I must save my men for an assault on the main gate. Should I lose Syracuse to save an insubordinate officer?'"

Snatching out his sword, the angry Icelander rushed into the fight.

For a space Harald stood motionless. Georgios refused! Refused to aid his own colleague in the midst of a desperate action, in spite of an urgent appeal! When, too, he might have forced the salient gate and captured the city.

But Harald had no time to be overwhelmed for long by the Greek's stupendous animosity, for the fight was too furious. Between blows, however, it haunted him, lent strength to every thrust he made. It was as well, for his weapon was blunt with overmuch striking. As he fought on, clearing the stair again and again, fuller realization of the meaning of Georgios's message came to him. This was his answer for the two blows in the face.

The Greek's intent was clear. Harald and his Varangians should die. If any survived to report in Constantinople that Georgios had deserted them in battle, Georgios could answer that he had to choose between rescuing men who had disobeyed orders and keeping his Immortals intact for another action.

He would lay all the responsibility for failure to take the city on Harald; and dead men, or discredited men, could not effectively defend themselves. His rival out of the way, he could easily send to the city for more Immortals to prosecute the war; and ultimate victory would cleanse him of any suspicion of guilt. To Georgios, Harald's death meant vastly more than an easy victory before Syracuse.

He would probably have his wish. Chanting their confession of faith the Berbers came on and on; nor, though the Varangians held out for days, could they hope to escape. For, if Georgios would not give aid, ten thousand fresh heathen might sally on the little garrison, and keep up the assault till every Northman fell.

Of a sudden the enemy's onslaught received an unexpected impetus. Where before they had clambered breathlessly up the stair, they now were flung sprawling up it in one violent surge. The Northmen, astonished, met them with cut and thrust and forced them back again. Once more they dashed up, like the outflung crest of a wave, but this time their dead were borne with them.

Then the Northmen saw the reason, and raised a mighty cheer. They had been so hard pressed, so blind with the madness of fighting, that they could have eyes only for the oncoming front of the foe; but now they looked beyond. Long axes playing, lips chanting the song of Thiodolf, a thousand fresh Varangians had struck the Moslem rear and flung the whole column headlong up the stair. A second detachment was even now working its way round to the farther entrance.

It was Eilif from the ships, come to the rescue barely in time.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNTERSTROKE.

INSTANTLY Harald dispatched orders to Thiodolf, commanding at the rear portico; and at the blast of his trumpet the Varangians who had themselves been beleaguered, now

counter-attacked down the stone stairs. The descent broke their shield wall, but it gave their impact greater weight; and the Berbers were caught simultaneously in front and rear.

The Northmen's onrush carried them deep into the swirling mass; and Harald's sudden thrust held them, prevented them from forming to meet Eilif. The Moslems crowded back. For a little longer they bore the attack; then, wherever they could, they broke free and fled.

Nor were they saved even then. Pursuing as fast as their laboring lungs permitted, the Varangians drove them past the inclosed market place, and under the very walls of the city. But it was the Moslem garrison that struck the final blow.

Panic-stricken at the defeat of the terrible Berbers, afraid lest the fearful Varangian axes should follow up their victims into the city, the Syracusans closed the gate in the very faces of their beaten comrades. Having thus assured their own safety, they did what they dared to check the pursuit, lobbing great rocks from their catapults into the Varangian ranks.

Instantly Harald ordered a company of his engineers back to man his own engines. From their lesser height, the Varangian catapults made poor play against the towering ramparts, most of the stones falling short. Harald was forced to recall the pursuit, lest it cost more than it was worth. But his engines played on, their stones smiting down the rearmost Berbers, who huddled as close as they could to their own walls, beating at the gate for admittance.

They were doomed. The Varangian engines were advanced just far enough to bear on the gate itself and shattered the Berbers as they clamored to their fellows to let them in. The defenders dared not open the gate, so terrible was the hail of rock that hurtled against it, and so great their fear of the Northern axes.

Just out of range Harald held his infantry, waiting for the Saracens to open. But the Arabs, at sight of them, were all the more determined to keep it closed, preferring to sacrifice the three thousand battered, beaten men without rather than risk the city.

From the north came the crash of drums, and the pelting of running feet. A river of men flowed down from the broken wall of Epipolae!

The Greeks had come at last. Harald laughed stridently as he recognized them, and sounded the call for his own men to retire. Now that the Northmen were safe in spite of him, Georgios had been forced to give over his pretended demonstration against the main gate, both to save his face and to reap the fruits of Varangian valor.

Swerving to the edge of Harald's wall, Georgios brought his column past it and to the verge of the stone-range from the battlements. Halting them there, he realigned them, gave them a moment's rest, then drove them full at what was left of the wretched Berbers, who huddled like sheep at the foot of the city wall. If the garrison had not dared open the gate before, they had even less courage now.

Caught between the wall and the advancing Greeks, the remaining Berbers were blotted out in one ghastly moment.

Withdrawing as promptly as they had struck, the Immortals marched straight back to their safe position on the hills. From the stricken city rose a bitter wailing, and the thin sound of flutes, mourning the slain. Well they might mourn, for of ten thousand Berber infantry, the pride of Africa, not one that had sallied forth so confidently returned within the walls.

"THE Syracusans will be too weak to risk another stroke," Harald decided. "Send orders to the ships, Eilif, bidding them withdraw half a mile, and lie off the swamp. I can use your lads here."

Then Harald, summoning his captains, had them dispatch a fourth of the host to gather up the slain and dump them into the bay, since there was no time to bury them. The rest were divided into two divisions, the first of which was ordered to collect all the scattered stones still left in the marketplace and extend the wall, while the second stood guard in case of another attack from the town.

Eilif surveyed Harald's bloody ramparts with a grim smile.

"A small thing to set up against yonder battlements," he said, "but well did you defend it."

"Not well enough, had it not been for you," Harald replied. "I shall have it built higher, and extended parallel with the town wall, to the very shore. Thus it will both shelter us while we invest the city, and protect the fleet from a sally. But I think the heathen have had enough, and are willing now to hide themselves behind their walls till we run out of food or patience."

"That need not be soon," Eilif answered. "The marsh is full of fowl and fish, and though the river is a mile away, water can be brought from it without danger from the heathen. But what ailed Georgios that he did not come to your aid till the fight was done?"

"I sent for help, and he refused," Harald explained. "When you had saved us, he was forced to strike for very shame, to snatch some credit from a plight that else would have brought him only dishonor."

Eilif scowled. "Now he will say, when he returns to Mikligard, that he saved us all," he growled.

Ulf Uspaksson came up to them, wiping the red face of his ax.

"You talk of Georgios?" his eyes flashed. "He meant us to die, Harald."

"That I know as well as you."

"Aye, but I know more. He stationed us here and ordered us to attack for no other purpose than that the heathen might sally and wipe us out. He has not forgot the shame you put upon him at Messina."

"All that I know too," Harald answered.

"There is more," said Ulf darkly.

"What more?"

"Why this: when you were quarreling with him at Messina, I was talking with Rotlieb the Frank. I drew next him, quietly, and thrusting my knife against his ribs under his cloak, so that none might see, I whispered to him. This was our talk:

"'You are no coward,' I said to him. 'Why, then, did you let the Moslem ship escape last night?' He would not speak at first, but my knife nestled so close to his flesh that he saw I meant to know or have his life. So he confessed that Georgios had bribed him, ere we ever landed on the island, to let the Moslem ships slip past, that Georgios might have a pretext to lay the blame on you.

"Georgios planned to let the matter drop till he could lay complaint against you in Constantinople; but his losses at Messina, and your victory, so enraged him that he lost his head and struck you. Your two blows made him resolve you should die, since he could not master you."

Harald glanced at Eilif. "A pretty plot, and a pretty comrade-in-arms," he said bitterly. "He shall pay me for this, and for my good lads who fell today.

"I can plot myself; I should have learned how in Constantinople, if not before. And I shall so plot!" he said with emphasis, "that not Georgios, but I shall take this town as well as Messina."

Ulf laughed loud. "Well crowed, master! But this is ten times the town Messina was."

"It will not be," Harald rejoined, "if you will help your men in extending that wall."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Jitney was gone!

The Jitney

When crusty old Angus McCall fired a man, he stayed fired—until young Johnny Saunders found a hole in the railroad man's armor big enough to drive a locomotive through

By DON WATERS

ANGUS McCALL, the master mechanic on the mountain division, was as dour and stubborn a Scotsman as ever looked into the milky eye of a bowl of porridge. A good man for the job, he knew his business well. He had lived his life among machinery. He left his home, worked his way across as oiler down in the engine room of a tramp steamer.

He'd jumped the ship in New York, got a job as a fireman on a railroad in America, climbed the ladder rung by rung: engineer, machinist, drop pit foreman, then chief machinist, till now, growing gray in the service of the road, he was M. M.

The machinists, the boilermakers, the drop pit men on the mountain division, respected his ability and feared his wrath. Old Crusty McCall, they'd named him. They couldn't put anything over on him. From an operating standpoint, the mountain division was the toughest on the road. Yet, month after month it led the whole system in fewer hours' terminal overtime, fewer hours' delays and the smallest number of engine failures.

Angus, unabashed, freely admitted that this fine record was due solely and alone to his good judgment and his iron hand of discipline. He demanded full service, he never temporized with inefficiency, and once he'd given his word he bragged that hell and high water could not make him back down. He had a rule that he never broke. Any man responsible for a delay to a train got at least a thirty day layoff. And no exceptions.

And yet there came a time when Angus McCall was bluffed to a standstill, when he backed water, when all

his experience and skill availed him nothing. A combination of circumstances against which the master mechanic was powerless arose, suddenly and without warning. Much to the amusement and satisfaction of the division, Crusty McCall was outguessed and outmaneuvered. His unbreakable word, of which he was so proud, was not only broken, but shattered. His thirty day sentence that had stood like a rock proved but a mud doll in a rainstorm.

In this odd series of events, the master mechanic's daughter, Laura McCall, shared the leading rôle with young Johnny Saunders, who, in turn, divided honors with the Jitney.

In fact, Laura was the woman in the case, the contributing motive, the reason and the cause of the whole affair. Johnny Saunders well knew this as he sat, red-faced and ill at ease, in the superintendent's office, gazing into Angus McCall's pale blue eyes.

"Ye've no' the slightest excuse, young man," the master mechanic was speaking. "By yere own confession, ye were sitting on yere seatbox, looking ahead. The switch was on yere own side. No. 93 went up into the siding through the open switch in broad daylight."

Angus pulled out his pocket knife, turned it end over end in his hands. Johnny knew what to expect. Whenever the M. M. played with that knife, the gossip of the sand house and switch shanties had it that some head was coming off. Out of the corner of his eye, Johnny saw the division superintendent and the train master nodding their heads as though in full accord with what Angus was saying.

Johnny knew they were neutral. They would go the way Angus wanted them to. It was no great crime, this. Johnny hoped to get away with the regulation thirty days' layoff. But this time was different. Was almost sure Angus would put the screws to him.

There was a personal reason behind old Angus McCall's words, a reason that he did not state, though Johnny knew it well, and suspected that the superintendent and trainmaster had an inkling of it. Since that day six months ago when he had met Laura McCall, Johnny knew he trod on dangerous ground. As old Jack Tait, engineer on the Tidewater Special, remarked: "Crusty would run off the Prince of Wales if he came a-courtin', run him off at night, and come down to the shops next morning with the same kind of spats on that Waley wore the evening before."

A HARD blow this, to the young fireman, if the M. M. went the limit. Johnny was due for promotion, stood third up on the list for examination. A month, two at the most, and he'd be an engineer. Then the dream of his waking hours, a cottage out in the country a few miles from the terminal, with Laura to meet him when he got in from the run, the two would drive out—

His thoughts were interrupted as McCall's voice shattered his reverie.

"In broad daylight," Angus spoke with a burr to his words that a coarse-cut rod brass file would hardly smooth down. "Daydreaming."

A faint tinge of red crept up beyond Johnny's ears.

"If I had my way, ye'd never waste any more of the company's coal. If it were for me to say, I'd discharge ye without recourse and without hopes o' reinstatement. Ye've proven unfit for the work, without the intelligence needed to make a fireman, much less an engineer. Ye're past record is bad. Ye've in the last twa months been late on three different occasions, delaying the train ye were called for."

With a start, Johnny half rose from his chair. Old Crusty was not overlooking any bets. He was right though. Two or three times, Johnny remembered, he'd lingered over his time when he'd been calling on Laura.

There had been no record made of those delays when he held up his engine for a few minutes, no official record, yet old Crusty had checked up on him. Johnny opened his mouth to defend himself.

The master mechanic silenced him with an annoyed movement of his hands and continued: "And now, through negligence and inattention to duty, yesterday ye sat looking right at an open switch, let yere train run up into it, derail and tie up the main line for three hours. Ye've other things that seem more important to ye occupying yere mind when ye should be all attention to yere duties."

The pocket knife was being whirled rapidly now. Johnny knew the verdict was near. A minute later and the jury trying him had come to a decision. A nod from the superintendent to the trainmaster, a wagging of the M. M.'s head, and the investigation was over. The blame for No. 93's derailment was placed on him. The engineer, the conductor, the brakeman and flagman, waiting in the hallway, gazed at him as he came out the door.

"No need for you fellows to look so anxious," he greeted them. "Angus saddled and bridled it all on to me. He gave me a royal ride down the right of way clear off the company's property, and fellows, believe me, if he has his own way, I'll bet a thousand class locomotive couldn't shove me past him onto a job again—on this division!"

Without waiting to hear their words of condolence, he walked down the stairs and out on the street. He'd got what was coming to him. He'd been a fool to take a chance. The first time he had called on Laura McCall, Angus had given him broad hints that his daughter was far beyond the reach of an ordinary fireman. A fool to take a chance.

Passing the depot restaurant, he half stopped in his stride, muttered, "A fool not to," much to the bewilderment of a negro porter who was passing.

To Johnny's ever-present memory of Laura, the picture recurred of a young woman, light haired, blue eyed, with a bloom of roses in her cheeks, the heritage of generations of women who had felt the salt, fog-laden air of the north of Scotland. And to this picture of her physical attributes, he also recalled other characteristics she had inherited. Behind her soft and alluring femininity were the courage and steadfastness, the determination of her race. She'd given him her word, given it with that little faint burr and burring of her r's he loved so well to hear: "Johnny, you're the man I love, there's no other one."

She meant what she said. He half stopped in his stride again as he went around the corner of the depot toward the path that led across the tracks. "No other before you." How then would she act when her own father was to be considered?

In a studious frame of mind, he crossed the tracks toward the roundhouse. Might as well get it over with. He'd gather up his belongings, pack his working clothes in the back of his puddle-jumper and "step on it." There were other roads where a man could start again, other divisions, but to him there was but one Laura. A heavy, poignant pain crept over him at that memory.

The job and the loss of it did not bother him so much as did the thoughts of what it meant to him. A long wait lay before them till he again worked up his "age," till he held a good paying run. For, in all honor, he could not carry out his intimacy and his promise with her, jobless and without prospects for the future.

HEAVY-HEARTED, his head bowed over, his expression glum, he came to the turn of the roundhouse and looked up at the Jitney, Angus McCall's idea, his pet, the results of months of work and planning. It would soon be complete, ready for a test. Angus had conceived the plan of

combining two engines in one. He had taken the cylinder block and running gear of a hundred class engine, mounted them under the tank of an eight hundred class locomotive. A gang of machinists had been working for months on it now. They had hooked up the drivers, the side and connecting rods, run a flexible joint steam line to an extra throttle in the eight hundred's cab, rigged up a reverse gear to the link motion.

The idea behind the contrivance was simple. An engine hauling the tonnage easily on the level would often stall and have to double over the hills; that is, the train would have to be uncoupled, and first one half, and then the other hauled up the grade.

Angus had the idea that if the extra power needed on the hills were then available, the tonnage and a bit extra would climb right on up the grades. It would save time and money, expedite the movement of traffic, add a feather to his cap, and, in the words of one of the "nut splitters" working on it, would be a nickel-plated, double-jointed, brass-lined, howling success."

In truth, the shop gang and the engine men gazed with rather dubious cold eyes on the Jitney. The shop force were ever known to look with disfavor on anything that might mean more work for them. The firemen were not avid at the prospects of shoveling the extra coal that the added pair of cylinders would eat up. And what engineer has any love for a device that "mops up the gravy," takes away the overtime, that extra money which often makes his bi-monthly, two-figured check run into three figures?

Rather scornfully, the name Jitney had been applied to Angus's creation. Fierce arguments regarding the Jitney's probable efficiency or lack of the same had taken place for months. It was the talk of the switch shanties and the yard offices, the ash pits and the coal chutes over the hundred and fifty miles of the mountain division.

Johnny Saunders stopped and idly watched the machinists putting on the finishing touches. The arguments would soon be settled. In a day or two, the Jitney would hook on to a train and start out on her trial trip. He shook his head ruefully. He'd not be there to see it.

He glanced at his watch, almost noon, recalled again his engagement to take Laura out for a ride that afternoon. He rather dreaded meeting her, dreaded the thought of having to tell her that their contemplated marriage would now be a thing of the indefinite future.

That afternoon, when he drove up to her home, she was waiting for him. Hardly had he come to a stop before the house, when she came out to meet him. One glance at her expression and he knew that Angus had broken the news to her. She got in beside him.

"He told you?" Johnny asked.

She nodded. A spot of red appeared on each cheek. She snapped back her head.

"Yes, he told me. I think it's a shame. He's determined you shall not go back to work." Then a glimmer of a smile swept across her face. She rested a slim white hand on Johnny's arm.

"But—but—" she hesitated, colored deeper. "We shall see. I'm Scotch, too, and as determined—" The rest of her sentence was lost as the car started with a clashing grind of low gear.

Down the hill, out along the road that skirted the railroad, they drove. Then up the long slope toward Mine Hole Gap, Johnny headed. At the top of the grade, he swung to one side on an infrequented pathway just wide enough between the laurels that fringed it to allow his car to pass. Then on a little flat clearing, he stopped, jumped out, helped the girl to alight.

During the past months, they had often spent long hours together here. A wonderful view from the hilltop,

down the long slope of the mountain, a panorama of woods and clearings stretched for miles. Winding round and round the side of the mountain, the right of way of the railroad twisted and turned, climbing the grade toward the gap below them.

At the foot, far below, a freight train crawled slowly around the curves, the white plume of steam from her pops floating upward like a tuft of cotton. Trailing out behind the engine, the roiling, billowing steam of her exhaust floated back and upward in the bright sunshine like a black velvet ribbon, a ribbon that thinned to a gray gossamer web and dissipated into nothingness. The hoarse bellow of the exhaust was thinned and softened in the rare mountain air and reached the two as a faint faraway regular *beat-beat!* breaking but slightly on the afternoon's silence.

LAURA, chin cupped in her hand, seated on a log, spoke. Stretching out her left hand, on one finger of which a ring glittered, she pointed to where the train like a child's string of toy cars, was passing over a fill.

"Johnny?" she asked in a thoughtful, abstracted tone of voice. "That sort of pathway just faintly seen running off at right angles from the main line, is that a road?"

He followed the directing finger, made out the faint and almost imperceptible shadow of a depression in the timber.

"Oh, yes, I see what you mean," he answered. "That's the old siding up Mine Hole Run. There used to be a mine there years ago. They ran a track into it. It hasn't been used for ages now, although the switch still leads up there off the main line."

She sat silent, her expression one of deep thought at his explanation. Five minutes passed. Then she spoke again: "You haven't turned in your switch key yet?"

He shook his head, wonder in his eyes at the strangeness of her question. "No, I intended to, but when I had packed my things, it was noon and the trainmaster had gone out to lunch. I'll turn my book of rules and annual pass and switch key in this evening."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," she retorted firmly.

"Why?" he asked. "It's all over with me. Your father—"

She held up her hand, silenced him. "You know how to drive a locomotive," she stated.

"I've had five years firing one," he replied sadly. "And a fellow would be stupid indeed if he didn't learn the knack of snatching a throttle and horsing a Johnston bar in that time. But little good that knowledge will do me—" He hesitated, drew a deep breath, caught hold of her hand.

"Oh, Laura—" he began, a tremulous catch in his voice.

"Now wait, Johnny," she commanded. "This is a time for serious thought. Suppose, just suppose that something should occur which would cause my father to reconsider your case."

He shook his head. "Not a chance. He warned me to stay away from you. He saw his opportunity to drive me off. He'll not sanction my return to the job. I have no way of making him."

"Perhaps you have," she said and pointed down to the freight, its engine just abreast of the old disused siding at Mine Hole Run.

A roguish expression lit up her face. "The Jitney," scarce audible, she whispered the name.

"The Jitney?" he repeated.

Then a faint smile formed, wrinkling the corners of his eyes, spread across his face. He shook her hand vigorously.

"You've got it!" he almost shouted. "You've got it. By George, Laura, you're all there!"

Heads close together, they talked in low tones till the lengthening shadows foretold the coming of sunset. To the

westward, the clouds were banking up. The sinking sun painted them all the golden bronzes, the scarlets and purples of nature, a spectacle fit to cause the dullest eye to brighten; but Johnny, looking at the purpling cloud masses, merely remarked complacently, "It will sure rain to-night. All the better."

And rain that night it did.

ANGUS McCALL was down early at the shops next morning before the twelve-to-eight "graveyard shift" had knocked off. The heavy downpour had cleared the air till each breath was like a drink of new wine. The sun shone brilliantly. The world in general and his own little section of it seemed all fair and ordered this bright spring morning. Had he not yesterday effectually and finally succeeded in eliminating a "young scallop" who had the temerity to come courting his daughter? Was not the eight hundred almost complete? A day more and he would triumphantly silence the scoffers.

He went into the office, dictated a telegram to the superintendent of motive power, then a couple of others, one each to the master mechanics on the divisions flanking him on either side. He invited them down the next day to witness the test.

Then grandly he said, "Better send a message to the superintendents, too. They'll be wanting to see the test and I'd no' for the world be disappointing them."

He finished, leaned back in his chair, smiled complacently to himself. A picture formed in his mind—the eight hundred stretching out the drawbars on a long train, starting up a grade, the exhaust beginning to labor, the drivers slowing down. And then he'd reach up, open the second throttle.

Above the *chow-chow!* heavy and labored of the eight hundred, another exhaust, that from the auxiliary cylinders under the tender, would rattle out, *cut-a-chee! cut-a-chee!* sharp and steady. Like magic, the train would pick up speed, swing around the curves, across the fills, up through the gap with a rattle of car wheels and the sweet *clickety-click-click!* of passing rail joints.

A canny Scot was he, taking no chances. He would have an unofficial trial to-day, make all the minor adjustments himself so that when the official trial came, everything would go along smoothly.

He arose from his chair. "Get those messages off at once," he ordered the clerk.

He went across to his locker in the washroom, changed his clothes, dressed in a new suit of overalls. Returning, he opened the office door, reached over to the wall, pulled a lever. Outside, an air whistle squealed shrilly four times. A few minutes later, in answer to the summons, the night roundhouse foreman appeared. Carefully Angus gave him his instructions.

"Ye will see that the eight hundred is fully supplied. Put on an extra gallon o' valve oil. And perhaps it might be as well to double the regular black oil allowance. A full set o' tools, aye," Angus ruminated. "An' a good wad o' waste. I've seen to it mysel' that last nicht she had her bunkers full o' coal and the fire started."

As he went out the door, the master mechanic muttered to himself, glancing up at the rising sun, "Ah, a bonny day this, for a trip, a bonny day indeed."

He passed around the corner of the coal chute, turned and came up the track on which the Jitney had been resting for the past two months. His eyes opened wide, his jaw sagged down. A low mournful wail like the cry of a lost soul, burst involuntarily from him. The Jitney was gone. A quick glance around showed him the empty stalls of the roundhouse save for a couple of yard engines on the drop pits.

Wildly he gazed down toward the coal chute and up the tracks that led to

the big hump. They were bare. The morning trains had all gone out. Some one had moved his pet during the night. He had given strict orders that the eight hundred was not to be moved. Who then had the temerity to drive her off the pit track?

With quick strides, he fairly leaped into the roundhouse, grasped the night foreman by the arm, turned him around, pointed to the empty pit track.

"Did ye run her?" he shouted.

Consternation spread swiftly across the foreman's face.

"No, no," he stuttered. "She was there. I saw her myself last night about two o'clock, just before it started to rain. It rained steadily till just an hour or two ago. I didn't go outside again after it started."

"Call the gang," Angus commanded. "Call the gang into the office. I'll get to the bottom o' this."

FIVE minutes later, Angus McCall stood in his crowded office. He was angry, yet through his anger could be perceived the touch of panic. For the full realization had come over him that the eight hundred had not only been moved, but was gone from the vicinity of the shops.

The hostlers one and all denied they had touched Johnston bar or throttle on the eight hundred during the night. One by one, the firelighters and machinists, the boilermakers, and the ash pit men gave the same answer to the question: "Have ye touched her?" Not one had been in the eight hundred's cab that night, save the firelighter who had about two o'clock filled her boiler "three gauges" with water, and banked the fire.

The M. M.'s pocket knife twirled through nervous fingers. Finally he put it back in his pocket, dismissed his audience with a wave of his hand.

"Away wi' ye. No need to ask. Ye were all asleep. If any one had wanted it, they could have moved the coal tipple and ye'd never know it till morning. I've a mind to discharge the whole crew o' ye."

Minor articles, a ball pein hammer, a monkey wrench, a box of tools, have a mysterious habit of disappearing around a railroad shop. Once the bell off a passenger locomotive vanished between two suns, but it was later located by the special agents when the Balm of Gilead colored church rang its flock to Sunday morning service.

But a hundred-and-twenty-ton locomotive with ten thousand gallons of water in her tank and ten tons of coal in her bunker! It was inconceivable that an enormous machine like that should suddenly whisk away from sight like a wind-blown feather without leaving a trace.

Other things had also gone that night. Outside the shop office, an electrician raised his voice.

"The humpbacked, crosseyed, kneesprung delegate that stole my jar of acid after all the trouble I had putting through a requisition for it! May he go to ——!"

The engine painter broke into the tirade. Carefully, methodically, he discussed the family tree, root and branch of the "low-down, thimble-headed, bleary-eyed piece of carrion" that had "lifted my brand new four-inch camel's-hair varnish brush.

"I bought it myself with my own money. No company stuff, that," he howled.

No one paid much attention to these minor wails, however, for all discussion centered on the mysterious and unseen manner in which the Jitney had left. After the first shock of discovery had passed, Angus began to calm down. The eight hundred could not be far off. Ten miles to the eastward, an interlocking switch tower effectually blocked any unauthorized train. Nothing could get by it without being noticed.

He called the tower on the telephone, was somewhat relieved by the answers to his questions. No, nothing had

passed the crossover since two o'clock, except a time freight and the up passenger train. Quickly Angus ran over in his mind the sidings between the terminal and the tower, called a negro and gave him orders to take a hand car, go up into each switch track and notify the shop office what he discovered.

To the westward, the right of way climbed Mine Hole Mountain. At the summit, all trains came to a stop for brake inspection. Down the farther slope, three safety tracks each with a switchman on constant duty effectually blocked any chance for an engine to slip past unseen. The shop tracks, the yards, the sidings close by the roundhouse, Angus searched them himself. The certainty was now on him. The eight hundred was somewhere along the main line, east or west of the roundhouse, within ten miles. A determined glitter shone in his eyes. He'd soon locate her, aye, and then some one would pay the piper.

The master mechanic was a busy man that morning. He went out with the local and questioned the night operator at the foot of Mine Hole Mountain. Small satisfaction he got. No, there had been no extra train passed last night. No light engine had gone by to his certain knowledge. Asleep? Indignantly he denied the accusation. He never slept on duty.

Angus next engaged the track walker in a close whispered conversation.

"Ten dollars, mind ye, I'll give ye ten dollars," the operator heard him say.

A few minutes later, the track walker went rapidly up the right of way, his spike maul over his shoulder, his eyes eagerly roving from one side of the roadway to the other. It was noon when Angus returned to the shops from his fruitless quest. His expression, all anger when he had left, was now one of consternation and anxiety. He went home to lunch that day and ate with scarce a word to his daughter.

To her question, "Are you well, father?" he merely grunted, "As well as micht be expected under the circumstances."

HE did not notice the little smile that swept across her face at his reply. It is not at all likely that he would have understood it if he had seen her expression. Laura ever had been an affectionate and a dutiful daughter. But when a woman falls in love, oftentimes her whole character undergoes a change.

Angus arose, left the house, hurried down to the railroad. The track walker was waiting outside the shop office. He made his report. He'd examined the main line clear to the top of Mine Hole Mountain. He'd carefully scrutinized the old track into Mine Hole, walked up it a hundred yards.

"Red with rust, thick red. Nothing has been in that siding for years. The yards, the passing tracks, and other sidings along the main line, nothing like an eight hundred in them," he concluded.

At this news, Angus's frown deepened. He went into his office, slumped down in his chair, a worried man. Puzzle his brain as he would, no solution of the problem came to him. The clerk entered, handed him a sheaf of a dozen telegrams, answers from the officials accepting his invitations to a trial trip. He was surely up against it now.

His first dread of the morning that some one had driven the Jitney off out of spite and wrecked her, now was almost displaced by the wish that she were wrecked. He at least would have a logical excuse to offer in the morning. To-morrow these officials would be here to see the trial. And how could he explain to them that the eight hundred had been filched away from under his very nose and was not to be found?

He'd be a laughing stock of the road. He'd never hear the end of it. It was unthinkable that the locomotive could long remain hidden. He'd not

even allow himself to think that. Somehow, he'd locate her, although at present he had not the slightest idea of her whereabouts. But time pressed. To-morrow morning if she were not ready to go they'd make a fool of him.

The afternoon passed with Angus nervously walking around the yards. Once he stood beside an engine and overheard two negro grease wipers talking on the other side.

One, a little pock-marked negro, chuckled, said: "Yas, sah, Majah McCall, he jus' like I was once."

The other set his bundle of greasy waste down on the running board, surveyed the speaker.

"Like you, Pesthouse? I fails to notice the resemblance."

"Yas, sah, like me. Once I invites some of my friends to a chicken dinner and I spends three nights huntin' all over and can't locate no loose chicken."

They laughed heartily at this, were still chuckling when the master mechanic, with a roar like a wounded lion, bounded around in front of the engine and promptly fired them both. This relieved his feelings somewhat, yet did little to help him out of his difficulty. Officially, the eight hundred was on the drop pit, being groomed for her trial trip. In reality, the whole division now knew she was gone without a trace.

And then they began. The telephone rang. A voice, muffled and guarded, inquired if a good engineer was needed for the Jitney next day. Angus promptly consigned the speaker to a place where sulphur furnishes the fuel instead of coal.

A few minutes later, another telephone call interrupted his tirade. This time, a friendly tip was given that often an ad in the Lost and Found columns of the paper brought wonderful results.

Angus was too angry to frame a reply before the speaker, laughing derisively, hung up on him.

He hardly had got settled when he again went off like a firecracker at the words of a song floating out from the washroom across from the office. In a falsetto tenor, some one warbled: "Oh, I am waiting for thee, darling!"

Another voice broke in with: "Oh, where is my wandering Jit to-night? The jack of my tenderest care?"

They were riding him, and he had no comeback. The superintendent, the road foreman of engines, the trainmaster, were officially ignorant of the Jitney's absence as they sat in the dispatcher's office and chuckled over the affair. Till the master mechanic officially notified them, they, of course, must act as though all were well. They knew in all reason that the engine would be found soon, yet somehow doubted that it would be located before morning.

THE trainmaster reached over to his desk, grasped the telephone, winked to the others as he called.

"Mr. McCall, I thought I'd run the eight hundred on seventy-one at nine thirty in the morning. How about it?" he asked.

A hollow groan was audible to the others in the room. Then Angus in guarded words explained that minor difficulties had arisen, unforeseen and unthought of that night.

"I'm no' saying for sure, but they might, mind ye, sort o' set the trial trip back a bit. I'd no' put the time at nine thirty just yet," he cautioned.

To escape, Angus left the office immediately after this, and disappeared, much to the regret of a crowd of engineers who had worked up a to them, enjoyable affair. They had it all fixed to couple a hundred class engine to the rear of an eight hundred class engine and, hidden behind a string of box cars in the yard, come down with wide open exhausts and a great blowing of whistles, unload, get in the clear and see what effect this familiar sound would have on the M. M. But their scheme

went flat, for Angus did not return and appeared at his home early that evening.

His worried state of mind was plainly evident in his manner and bearing. When his daughter first noticed him as he entered, a swift shadow of concern, almost of pity, crossed her face. It vanished as quickly and a look of determination took its place. As she herself had said, Laura McCall was Scotch, too, and knew when she wanted something that was being denied her.

Angus sat down, began to eat his supper.

"Most peculiar," he muttered, as though he talked to himself. "I'm certain it's no' far off, and yet it's no' to be found."

"What, father? Has the Jit—" She hastily corrected herself: "Has not the engine you worked on so long been returned yet to the shops?"

He shook his head without speaking.

She hesitated, colored.

"Why don't you try Johnny? Perhaps he might help you," she said.

"Harump!" Angus grunted, glancing up quickly at his daughter. "Harump," he repeated, yet the second ejaculation seemed, somehow, to lack the violence of the first.

His eyes half closed, he cupped his chin in his hands and thoughtfully watched his daughter. She seemed all unaware of this studious scrutiny as she poured the tea. Her voice was under control now.

"Oh, yes," she began. "This afternood when he telephoned that he'd be around to-night, he mentioned something about the engine."

She waited a few seconds for this information to sink in.

"I was thinking that Johnny could surely find it for you," she went on casually. "He knows the road well, and probably could recall many places where an engine might be concealed."

Angus had one eye closed now, and was shrewdly gazing at his daughter with the other. A silence fell. She sat down, began to eat. Her father, unmoving, sat opposite. A minute passed, the quietness broken only by the steady and monotonous click-clack of the clock in the other room.

Angus arose, pushed back his chair. Just one word he uttered.

"Aye," he said in a tone as though a knotty problem had just been thoroughly and explicitly explained to him.

AN hour later, when the young man arrived, Angus had partly recovered his composure.

"Aye, and it's you," he greeted Johnny at the door. "Come in. I've a bit o' conversation to carry on wi' ye."

Over her father's shoulder, Johnny caught a glimpse of Laura in the next room. It seemed to him her nod signified that all was well. He sat down, Angus opposite him, cleared his throat.

"A very deplorable incident has occured this day," he began. "Very deplorable indeed. There's no need for ye to feign surprise, young man. Well ye ken what I'm referring to."

And Angus drew himself up, his voice was stern. "Grand larceny it is. I've looked up the penalty for the same. Ten years at hard labor."

Angus cocked his head to one side, closed one eye, reached his hand into his pocket for his knife as he surveyed the youth much as a judge might before sentencing a criminal.

Laura entered the room.

"But, father," she remonstrated, "how can it be called grand larceny? You yourself say the engine is still on the road and not far off. A thing can't be stolen unless it's removed from the premises of the owner."

"Woman," he said, "ye'll no' interfere. I'm master in this house."

Having by her ready silence assured himself on that point, Angus continued: "Of course, I'd be inclined to be lenient if the object in question was returned immediately in good condition. In all probability, I'd no' take

any legal steps in that event." He waited on the effects of these words.

Johnny shook his head. "It's too bad, Mr. McCall," he said. "Too bad indeed that just when you most needed the eight hundred, she should not be available. Of course, if I were still working for the company, I'd be in a better position to help you out. But unfortunately, as it is now, I'd merely be a trespasser if I went on the company's property—for any purpose. You see how it is, Mr. McCall."

Angus pulled out his handkerchief, blew his nose loudly, looked over to where Laura sat, then across at Johnny.

"Aye, I see. I see it all," he muttered.

Johnny unmindful of the baleful glare Angus fastened on him, went on: "Of course, I'd be willing to assist you to the limit of my ability, except that as it is, I cannot—"

Angus leaped clear of the floor.

"Aye, ye cannot, but ye can, and ye will!" he shouted.

Johnny arose.

"Mr. McCall, if you are going to get violent with me, I'll have to say good night. Remember, I'm no longer working for you."

He moved toward the door. This was a critical time. Laura studied her father, her expression grave. Not till Johnny reached the door, opened it and was halfway out, did Angus budge. Then he gulped, sputtered, and with an effort, said the words that were so hard for him to say.

"You're reinstated!" he almost shouted in a shaking voice. "Mark up for work immediately."

He grabbed his hat, brushed past the youth in the doorway, and bounded out of the house. For once at least in his life, Angus McCall had taken slack and it hurt.

When he returned, it was well after midnight. The four to twelve shift missed their regular "hay" that night. There was little chance to sleep on the job when he was around. His house was silent. He looked in at his daughter, sleeping quietly. For a long minute, he stood. His expression softened.

"Like yere mother before ye, a cannie lass. Quietly ye go yere way and get what ye want. Neither bluster nor ranting has the slightest effect. I've met my match. I ought to have known before."

Next morning when Angus came down to the shops, the first thing that met his eyes as he rounded the turn of the roundhouse was the Jitney. She'd come in during the night. No one saw her arrive. None knew from which direction she had come or when. The operator at the foot of Mine Hole Mountain, about three o'clock that morning, had been awakened from a sound sleep by the trembling of the telegraph shanty as though a train passed. Through drowsy eyes, he had tried to penetrate the darkness outside, but saw nothing.

"The wind," he muttered, and pillowed his head in his arms again.

About noon that day, the track walker had gone up Mine Run siding for another look. Around the second bend where the main line was cut off from view by the rank bushes, he came across a hard rubber battery box that smelled sharply of sulphuric acid. In the box was a brush, its bristles eaten off close to the handle. Had the track walker been a shrewd man, he might have solved a mystery then. But he was a man of small reasoning and little imagination. It was beyond the scope of his knowledge that sulphuric acid mixed with rain water brushed on a steel rail will put on a heavy coat of rust in a few hours.

So the mystery of the Jitney's hiding place remains unsolved to this day, although Johnny Saunders, now a happily married engineer on a regular passenger run, grins broadly every time he passes Mine Hole Run.

THE END

"Say, buddy, ain't you a stranger in town?"

Not So Naïve

Milt Henneber was from the land of grassy dairies and fertile farms—but even in the big city he knew a bad egg when he saw one

By JACK WOODFORD

CHICAGO, according to the newspapers, is a pretty tough place. The newspapers, however, fail to tell the truth. It isn't as tough as they say it is; it's a great deal worse.

But Milt Henneber, from Lemars, a little town just outside Sioux City, Iowa, didn't find Chicago so tough.

Milt came to Chicago with a load of cows. They were prize cattle which Milt had raised, almost by hand, back in the land of the farm revolt, if any. Milt rode right in the car with his beloved cows on the way to the stockyards.

When he had sold them, he seemed to think it might be a good idea to carry the money in currency through Chicago, during his one day's stay in town, so he could brag, around the grocery store in Lemars, that he had carried money through Chicago streets and come away with both his money and his life.

Nobody paid any attention to him as he walked north on State Street, up from the stockyards; and on State and Van Buren Streets, growing bolder, he took out his roll and thumbed through it.

Shortly after that a young man approached him and said:

"Say, buddy, ain't you a stranger in town? Howja like to have a nice room cheap?"

"Yes, I'm a stranger," admitted Milt, "came up here with some cows and sold them."

The young man took him to a very nice room. But Milt was suspicious. When he heard a sudden knock on the door late at night he took certain pre-

cautions before he opened up. When he did open the door he staggered weakly to the bed and sat down upon it.

"What's the matter, buddy?" said his new-found acquaintance, the one who had led him to the room.

"Somebody came in, in the dark," reported Milt sadly, "and hit me over the head and took my roll."

"Whazzat!" roared the young man. He whirled about to look at several other young men behind him in the doorway.

"Which one of you double crossers rolled this bird—when I saw him first?"

"Garn!" one of their number snarled, "whatcha tryin' ta pull? Ya rolled him yerself, ya crook, don't spring none of your back-of-the-yards chatter on us!"

All of the young men immediately exhibited a lamentable predilection for strenuous dispute. Nor did they confine themselves to words, or blows, or even single bullets; they produced enough hardware to have decimated all of Milt's cows, had they been turned loose among them.

Milt had ducked under the bed. When at last he climbed out there were bodies everywhere. He pulled on his pants and ran down into Van Buren Street.

"Sheriff! Sheriff!" he yelled. And then, behind a garbage can, he spied a familiar helmet, such as he had often seen in the newspapers when they printed pictures of the day's kill in Chicago, showing the victim in his uniform.

Cautiously the patrolman came from behind the barrel.

"Is the shootin' over?" the cop wanted to know. Milt assured him that all was safe and led him by the hand up to the room where the bodies were. Ten minutes later a press photographer came along and took flash light pictures of the heroic officer, posing with his foot upon one of the bandits he had vanquished.

When they had carted the bodies off to the morgue, and the press men were gone, Milt reached under his mattress, secured his own fifteen hundred dollars that he had hidden there, and wads of equal size which he had removed from the pockets of five of the fallen bandits before he had gone for the officer, and left the room, for the Northwestern depot, to return to Iowa, to raise more cows for Mr. Armour.

THE END

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Norse Ruins in Labrador

NEAR the coast of Labrador, not far from the Eskimo village of Nain, there is a barren strip of land called Sculpin Island. It is of interest because it is the possible landing place of the Vikings, on the coast of North America.

The remains of some very ancient stone dwellings are located on the east side of the Island near a deep cove, just large enough to shelter a long-boat. The stone houses are both square and oblong, with traces of fireplaces still discernible in the center of them. The Eskimo have always used round stone houses, and burn oil in stone lamps for heat in every part of the Arctic. So the mysterious ruins on Sculpin Island were not built and used by them.

Early sagas of the Norse tell of a rover named Thorfin, who ventured far to the south and west of Greenland in his long-boat. Sculpin Island may have been the place where he wintered. A few days with a pick and shovel in these old houses might solve the ancient mystery as to whether the Norse or Spaniards discovered the new world. *Donald A. Cadzow.*

A long knife sticking in the wall, its haft quivering

The Raider

While Jeff Hale fearlessly battles for his beloved rangeland, deadly peril closes in on Ellen

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Mystery Land," "The Mesa," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ELLEN BALLINGER, young, modern, and selfish, defies her father by riding to a lonely cabin in search of a former suitor, Jim Kellis. Finding he has a Mexican wife, and that her father knew it, Ellen rides on into the night, determined to marry the first passable man she finds, and drag him back to the Ballinger ranch.

Instead, she is kidnaped and taken to another cabin by a man snarling threats at her father, Matthew M. Ballinger. He leaves her, and shortly afterward a group ride up, talking about hanging a horse thief named Kroll. Their leader, Jeff Hale, sees her inside, dismisses his men, and stands guard.

In the morning, Ellen deliberately lies to Jeff, saying she recognizes his voice as her kidnaper's. Jeff, a daring, ruthless leader of the cow country, who has no more use for women than for man-made laws, is nevertheless forced by his code to offer to marry Ellen and save her reputation; and she triumphantly accepts.

At the Hale ranch, the Diamond A, she learns that a land shark named Wade Dallman is stealing Hale land to sell to the incoming horde of dry farmers, and that the heart of their

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 17

ranch is about to be grabbed by her own father, due to a title certificate which had disappeared from the Land Office. Dallman appears, and Jeff horsewhips him off the place. Ellen recognizes Dallman as her abductor, but dares not tell Jeff.

Jeff and several others have been raiding, trying to drive the farmers away. Although Ellen twice saves Jeff from arrest by Sheriff Hazen—a crony of Dallman's—by lying as to where he had been at the time of raids, he believes she only married him to help Matthew Ballinger grab the Hale land; and at last he rides down to Ballinger's Hour Glass ranch, and charges him with framing up the marriage. Ballinger angrily denies it, and tells Jeff that he has withdrawn his claim to the Hale land; and adds that Jim Kellis had been around, trying to sell him the original certificate, which he had hidden somewhere. Hale rides off in a mad rush.

CHAPTER XX.

LULL BEFORE THE STORM.

THE distance from the Hour Glass to Kellis's cabin was about twenty miles, and Jeff had not ridden very far when he drew his horse down. Ballinger's information had aroused in him a fierce determination to confront Kellis as quickly as possible, and for one wild instant his angry impatience had ruled him.

Jeff knew better than to indulge his passions recklessly. He had always fought against his reckless impulses, knowing that once unleashed they would master him, and he was aware now that he had need of all his reason and his self-control.

He was certain that Kellis had stolen the certificate and was trying to sell it. Whoever bought it from him would destroy it, of course, since its non-appearance at the Land Office before the first of the month would insure the title to the land in dispute being awarded to the first claimant.

Ballinger had, he said, refused to buy it, and Jeff knew that it would be offered to Dallman. If Dallman bought it and destroyed it the title to the land was certain to go to him. Dallman would buy it like a flash.

Jeff's horse was comparatively fresh, for his pace on the way to the Hour Glass had been little more than a walk, and while Jeff did not urge him now, he permitted him to hold a brisk lope which covered the ground rapidly.

It was still early, and if Kellis had visited the Hour Glass the night before it was unlikely that he had ridden in to Randall afterward. Kellis was lazy and shiftless, and it was probable that he was still in bed.

Kellis!

Jeff's contempt for the man had been so great that he had never for an instant suspected him of being connected with the land fraud. Dozens of times he had passed the man and had thought him utterly unimportant.

Kellis had no individuality. In a crowd he was simply a negligible unit; alone he was too insignificant to attract attention. And yet this man had become a danger and a menace. Moreover, he had once been regarded with something like affection by Ellen—by Jeff's wife!

Jeff viciously jabbed his spurs into the flanks of the horse and the animal bounded forward into a furious gallop. The pace accorded with Jeff's mood. Jeff writhed as a strange, new rage gripped him; a rage that tortured him because he could find no outlet for it; the rage of jealousy!

Kellis had written letters to Ellen. His wife! Ellen had written to Kellis. For four years they had exchanged romantic letters, and of course in those four years Ellen had entertained romantic visions.

There must have been something between them, something of a serious nature, to hold her interest that long; and

that something would have to be love, for nothing else would last. Ellen had told him that she had once loved Kellis, but that since she had seen him again, in the hotel in Randall, she loathed him.

Well, perhaps that was the truth, but Ellen had lied so much that he didn't know whether to believe that statement or not. It was strange that if she loathed him she would have permitted him to visit her in the hotel.

The rage in him turned upon Ellen. He told himself that he hated her; that she could not be trusted, that she was an insincere, lying, impudent and unscrupulous woman. Yet—

He had a mental picture of her now, standing straight and gazing at him with level eyes. He felt the charm of her, as he had felt it from the beginning. It had gone through him, stirring his blood and filling him with enchanting visions. He had seen the calmness of perfect mental poise in her eyes; he had seen wistfulness; and at times he had observed reproach in their depths. Never, though he had searched for it, had he found deceit. She had lied for him, yet it had seemed to him that a woman of her type couldn't lie.

HE saw her continually. Days when he had stubbornly stayed away from the Diamond A, he would ride along thinking of her; nights in his blanket under the stars he would dream of her. He had kept away from the ranch house to fight against the lure of her, but in spite of everything her charm pervaded him.

His thoughts ran, rioting or grim, as the mood possessed him.

Kellis was aiming at him, of course, was seeking revenge for the knockdown he had administered when Kellis had insulted Sadie Nokes. He couldn't kill Kellis, even though he yearned to kill him. But in some manner he must make him produce the certificate.

The horse ran with a steady, tireless lope. The sun was not very high when from a distance Jeff discerned the roof of the Kellis cabin. A little later he rode out of the timber, dismounted near the cabin and strode to the front door.

It was open; the rear door also. The cabin faced east and the sunlight streamed straight through it, disclosing the pitiful interior.

There was only one room, and only one window, cut in the north wall. It was uncurtained and the glass was cracked and broken. In a corner stood a bed, dilapidated, dirty, and in disorder. Discarded wearing apparel was strewn around it and upon it.

In another corner was a rusted cast-iron stove, some pots and pans, partly filled with cooked food, scattered upon its warped and discolored lids; in the center of the room was a small, rough table with some dishes upon its uncovered top. Four broken-down chairs stood forlornly about.

That was all. The cabin had no human occupant.

Disappointed and impatient because it seemed that Kellis was not at home, Jeff strode to the rear door and looked out. In a small patch of grass under a tree near the rear of the cabin were Kellis's wife and child. The woman was just rising to her feet, hearing Jeff's step in the house.

She stood rigid when she saw Jeff, and twined her fingers together when she observed the cold glint in his eyes.

"Where's Kellis?" he asked.

"Jim away."

"Where?"

"What you want weeth him?"

"I've got some good news for him," he lied grimly.

The woman grimaced and shook her head negatively.

"No, no!" she said. "You got no good news for heem! You, Jeff Hale. You hurt Jim. Pleeze, Mr. Hale!"

"Is Kellis around here?"

"Jim away."

"In Randall?"

"He no say."

"How long has he been gone?"

"An hour, two hour, mebbe. What you want, Mr. Hale?"

"Where was Kellis last night?"

"Oh, he all right last night, Mr. Hale. He do nothing bad. You want heem because he do something bad? He do nothing bad last night. He over to see Mr. Ballinger. He come home early, ten o'clock, mebbe."

Ballinger hadn't lied—Kellis had been there. And Kellis had reached home about ten o'clock, so he hadn't seen Dallman last night. He must be on his way to see Dallman now!

Jeff turned from the woman and ran around the house to his horse. He was in the saddle and riding away in an instant, while the woman followed him, running, and calling unintelligently to him.

RANDALL was only ten miles distant and if Kellis had left home two hours ago he was now in town, providing he had been headed in that direction. There was a chance that he hadn't gone directly to town, and in that case Jeff might reach Randall ahead of him.

The horse was not spared now. Through the green aisles of the forest he flashed, a black thunderbolt moving with sweeping undulations. Jeff knew the country thoroughly and saved much time by heading the horse over dim cross trails and into little known levels where the footing was firm. As Jeff rode he scanned the country about him in search of Kellis.

The high ridges that loomed momentarily in his vision received a glance, the gorges he passed were swiftly scrutinized, as were the little flats that were disclosed to him, the miniature valleys, the arroyos and the natural coverts.

After Jeff reached the great upland which rimmed the mighty basin on the south he slowed the horse down and dismounted. To conserve the animal's strength he went on foot up the long slope, the horse following.

For a brief instant Jeff paused, to search with swift glances the low country which spread around him in all directions. He could see no rider and so he mounted and rode westward, following the trail Ellen and he had ridden when they had gone to Randall to be married.

Later, emerging from the gorge down which he had ridden from the mesa, he saw the Randall trail stretching before him. The trail was empty, so Kellis was probably already in town.

There was still a chance that Kellis had not reached Dallman, and the black horse went down the long slope with sickening velocity. The headlong pace carried him far out over the floor of the valley, and he was within a mile of the town before he would permit Jeff to pull him down. He was loping sedately, however, when he reached the eastern end of Randall's one street.

Jeff rode along, searching for Jim Kellis's horse, which might have been at one of the various hitching racks.

Not finding it he rode to the livery stable, dismounted and talked a brief time with Allen, the proprietor. When he left Allen, he knew that Kellis had not entered town that morning. Allen had been sitting in front of his place since dawn and declared no one had ridden into town since that time.

A humorous remark trembled on Allen's tongue, but he withheld it. Instead of speaking he drew a long breath and held it, for what he saw in Jeff's eyes awed him.

Later, to a friend, Allen said:

"I don't know. But somehow I sure was glad I wasn't Kellis!"

Kellis's wife had lied, of course. Kellis had probably been hiding somewhere in the vicinity of the cabin. And now, knowing that Jeff Hale was looking for him, Kellis would divine the reason.

Jeff was riding past the Elite when he glanced toward the restaurant and observed Sadie Nokes at the window, violently motioning to him. He nodded

slightly to her, rode a little distance down the street, wheeled his horse, rode back, dismounted at the hitching rack in front of the Elite, and entered.

THERE was no one inside except Sadie, and the girl was wildly excited.

"You're in for it now, Jeff!" she said. "Mart Blandin sent a man to the Diamond A last night to warn you! Your wife told the man you were not at home!

"Dallman and Hazen and a bunch of farmers had a meeting last night in Hazen's office. Mart was there. Hazen has sworn in a lot of deputies, besides Mart and the other regular ones. They were all there. Hazen and Dallman are wild because of the way you smashed them off their horses with Dallman's rifle!

"They intended to kill you that night! They had told Mart all about it, for they think Mart hates you—he's made them believe that. Now Hazen says it can't go on any longer. To-night they're going to organize a posse. They're going to capture you. Then they are going to shoot you and pretend they did it in self-defense.

"I s'pose you know why, Jeff? Day after to-morrow is the first and they are afraid you will do something desperate before then! Mart says it looks bad. The farmers are vindictive. Hazen says your wife's lying has saved you twice, but that he'll see that she don't get a chance to lie for you again.

"Mart says if he was you he'd get out of town for awhile, until this blows over. You can't fight them all, Jeff, and you can't do anything about the land. Dallman will get it. He's bragged to Mart that he's got things all fixed up at the Land Office. Get out of town, Jeff, and stay out!"

"Thanks. Rustle some grub, Sadie. I'll be back in five minutes."

He went out, swung into the saddle, rode to the livery stable and told Allen to feed and water his horse. He stood for a few minutes in front of the livery stable, and saw Dallman walking on the other side of the street. He observed that Dallman saw him, but pretended he did not, and he watched the man until he entered the doorway of a building far down the street.

Jeff returned to the Elite and sank into a chair at one of the tables. Sadie placed food before him and hovered near him.

"You'll go away, won't you, Jeff?" she asked.

"No."

"Mart said you wouldn't. But you ought to. They'll kill you!"

Jeff did not answer. He finished eating, got up and smiled gravely at the girl.

"You and Mart have been good friends," he said. "If you hadn't been keeping me informed about what has been going on in the last year or so, I reckon I'd have been dead a long time, now. Have you seen Kellis this morning?"

"Kellis hasn't been in town since—since I saw him in the hotel with your wife." Sadie reddened.

Jeff's gaze was meditative.

"You don't like my wife, do you?"

"I didn't—at first."

"Does that mean you like her now?"

"Yes. She is a good woman."

"In spite of the fact that she was in the hotel room with Jim Kellis?"

"She ain't the kind of woman that does that, Jeff. She couldn't help that. She wouldn't do anything to hurt you."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, you darned fool! She loves you!"

SHE looked keenly at him and laughed in amazement and derision.

"Don't you know that? I don't believe you do! Why, everybody knows that! It's in her eyes when she looks at you—when she talks about you! And you don't know it! My Gawd, ain't men the fools!"

Jeff accepted the epithet in silence. There were several things about his association with Ellen that Sadie did not know. One was that she had married him through mercenary motives. Another was that she did not love him.

He had got no satisfaction from Ballinger. Ballinger was a good actor or a good liar, he didn't know which. But he was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery—the reason she had married him. And while he was waiting for the solution of that he'd settle up matters with Hazen and Dallman.

He left Sadie and walked down the street. He was aware that he was watched and that his presence in town was known to his enemies, for never had he observed so many men lounging about.

Sadie was right, his enemies were ready to act. Their interest in his movements was evident; so glaringly obvious that he wondered if they were not meditating instant action. His contempt for them was deep. They were farmers. Some of them wore guns, and perhaps a few might be able to use them. But he doubted it. The guns were in holsters that were strapped tightly to the waist above the hips. Some of the butts pointed forward, some backward.

They were not his kind of people. They were alien usurpers of the ranges, they did not belong in cattleland. They were plodders of the plow, swarming slowly over the trails that had been blazed by the frontier riders. But as Gillman had said: "You can't stop them fellows from coming. A whole wagon train of them came in to-day—we're through, Jeff."

Yes; they were through. Jeff knew that. He was contemptuous of the farmers and yet he sympathized with them in a way. They would have to endure much.

But their coming marked the beginning of the end of the reign of cattle. Men like his father, himself, like Gillman and all the rest, would have to get out. They'd have to move farther west.

He did not blame the farmers for coming; he blamed Dallman for bringing them. Dallman was a pernicious influence in the country. He was bringing these people before the land was ready for them; he was stealing land and selling it to innocent victims of his greed. Every legal title would be clouded.

Jeff found himself entering the door of a little office. Above the door was a sign reading:

WADE DALLMAN
Land, Titles, Surveys.

Jeff pushed the door open and entered the office. He stood before Dallman—for at his entrance Dallman scrambled up and faced him. The color drained from Dallman's cheeks, but he made a valiant effort to stiffen his muscles so that he might stand before his enemy with some semblance of steadiness.

"Dallman," said Jeff, "it all comes back to this."

He moved his right hand and the heavy Colt was out of its holster and balanced in his palm. "I'm through accepting your kind of law. Withdraw your claim to the Hale land and get out of town by the day after to-morrow!"

He stood, looking at Dallman. Dallman did not move or speak. Jeff backed slowly out of the office. On the sidewalk he holstered his gun, walked down to the livery stable.

His horse was tired, so he borrowed another from Allen. He urged his horse to an easy trot and rode straight down the street, taking the trail he had ridden when entering town.

He was aware of the stares that followed him; he observed various groups of men in doorways, other groups clustered around various wagons. Faces were plastered against window panes.

Sadie Nokes was right. His enemies meditated action.

CHAPTER XXI.

JEFF FLARES UP.

FROM the floor of the valley the long upland trail over which Kellis would have to ride to reach Randall was always in sight, and as Jeff rode out of town he watched for a rider to appear there. It was unlikely, however, that Kellis would visit town that day, for if he had been in concealment during Jeff's visit to his cabin, he would suspect what the visit portended and would remain hidden until he was certain Jeff had left town.

Jeff had only one chance of getting possession of the certificate. That was to surprise Kellis, to come upon him before he had an opportunity to destroy the document, for it was valuable to Kellis only if he could sell it, and if he discovered that Jeff suspected him of having it he would very likely destroy it out of pure malice.

Of course Dallman would buy the certificate to prevent it being restored to the Land Office. Jeff was certain it had not yet been offered to Dallman. Ballinger, the wealthier man, had been given first chance.

Jeff rode back to the Kellis cabin. He left the trail when still some distance away and rode carefully through the timber until he reached a point several hundred feet from the rear of the building. Concealed by a heavy growth of brush he watched the cabin.

Near a small outbuilding was a little corral built of cedar poles. There was no horse in the corral, and the absence of a horse would appear to indicate that Mrs. Kellis had told the truth when she had said that Kellis was away.

But Jeff did not believe it. Kellis had no interests anywhere except in Randall. He had no friends and no neighbors who would receive him. If he had gone anywhere he would be in town, for that was where he would find Dallman.

For perhaps an hour Jeff continued to watch the cabin. Several times he saw the woman come to the door. Once she emerged and walked slowly around the cabin, evidently without purpose, and Jeff watched her narrowly to see if she would make any movement that could be construed as a signal. But she did not even glance into the surrounding timber.

Once she paused and plucked casually and languidly at a wild vine that grew against the cabin wall; and for a time she stood at the southwesterly corner staring downward. There was something in her attitude that suggested weariness and discouragement. Jeff waited until she went into the house. Then he rode away, convinced that Kellis wasn't anywhere about.

He rode back to Randall and went directly to Sheriff Bill Hazen's office, which was a small frame building set in the center of a space between two other buildings. Jeff entered and a tall, slender man of about Jeff's age greeted him with a smile.

The slender man was Mart Blandin, Sadie Nokes's lover and one of Hazen's deputies.

"Saw you in town awhile ago," he said. He got up, walked to the rear door, opened it and spat, glanced out casually, left the door open, sauntered to the front door, spat again, turned, leaned against a jamb and whispered:

"Sadie tell you?"

Jeff nodded.

"THEY mean business, Jeff," warned Blandin. "They're goin' to organize at nine to-night. Hazen will be back, then."

"Where is Hazen now?"

"He rode over to Lazette yesterday—I don't know why." He looked keenly at Jeff, adding slowly: "I hear Gillman an' the boys have quit. That leaves you playin' her a lone hand, eh?" He shook his head. "No use advisin'

you lay low for awhile, I suppose. Well, I reckoned you wouldn't.

"I got an idea it'll blow over, after the first of the month. I got it figgered out that they want to get you out of the way before the first, so's you won't be able to pull off any surprise party on them.

"Hazen an' Dallman hate you like poison since you bashed their heads in that night. There's nothin' you can do about the land, anyhow, Jeff. If you could manage to keep out of their way until after the first, I got an idea they—"

"Thanks, Mart," smiled Jeff. "You say Hazen will be back before nine?"

"About an hour after dusk, he told me."

"The others won't do anything until Hazen comes, eh?"

"No. Hazen's makin' it legal. He's runnin' it. Told the other boys to keep their hands off. So they won't start nothin' until he gets here."

"Has Jim Kellis been in town?"

"Ain't seen him."

"I've been hoping that if he does come to town he won't see Dallman," said Jeff, and smiled.

"I can fix that," promised Blandin. "There's an order to bring him in, anyway. Nothin' serious: Hazen wants to ask him some questions about that Hank Kroll hangin'; thinks he knows somethin'. If Kellis comes in I'll hold him; he won't see Dallman alone."

"Leave word with Sadie if you get hold of Kellis," said Jeff. "I'll see her to-night."

"You hadn't ought to come to town to-night, Jeff," warned Blandin.

Jeff did not answer. He went out, mounted and rode out of town, heading toward the Diamond A along the trail that led straight down the valley. He was well aware that his departure was observed by many watchers.

His mood was now saturnine. He hadn't slept in twenty-four hours, and he was physically and mentally weary. His friends had deserted him. He was convinced that Kellis had the certificate and would destroy it before permitting it to be found. Despite anything he could do, the land would go to Dallman. His wife was a liar and a fraud.

The afternoon was almost gone when he dismounted at the corral gates and turned his horse into the inclosure. He carried saddle and bridle into the stable and placed them upon their pegs, then walked to the door and stood for a time staring grimly out into the valley.

He was considering his wife.

Half an hour later he was standing in the doorway of her room, looking at her with a steady, somber gaze. He had appeared in the doorway while Ellen had been combing her hair in front of the mirror in the dresser, and she had turned when she had heard his step on the threshold.

HE had never seen her looking more beautiful. Her hair was down, and she had caught the glistening mass in one hand and was holding it close to her breast so that one side of her face was screened by its filmy folds while the other was revealed with cameo-like sharpness in the dim light that shone upon her.

He had never seen her eyes so big or so lustrous. They were alight with wonder and embarrassment, but when she saw him standing there so rigidly, his gaze intent and somber, she slowly straightened; defensively, he thought.

He moved slowly toward her, and when he was close enough he reached out and grasped her arms, the tightness of his grip betraying the passion he felt. She did not try to escape him, but stood erect, gazing straight into his eyes.

"What were you doing in the Navaho Basin the night I found you in the cabin?" he asked.

"Why, I had been abducted, of course."

She had paled and her eyes were luminous.

"That's evasion," he said, contempt

in his voice. "It's something I know. I want to know what you went into the basin for, why you were there at all?"

"I rode over to see Jim Kellis!" she returned defiantly, and went on slowly, every word searing her soul. "I told you once before that there was some romantic nonsense between us! I once thought I loved Jim Kellis well enough to marry him. I rode over there to do it—and met his wife!"

The statement accorded with Ballinger's version of the affair. He couldn't be jealous of Kellis. If she had told him about this when he had questioned her before he would have thought nothing of it. But after discovering that Kellis was married she had permitted him to enter her room at the hotel.

"You met his wife," said Jeff. "And you left. Which direction did you take?"

A certain gleam in his eyes warned her that he knew she did not ride toward the Hour Glass. And so she told the truth—with reservations.

"I—I felt so badly that I decided I wouldn't go home," she answered. No, she would never tell him the truth! He must never know of her wanton determination to marry the first good-looking man she met! She would admit anything but that!

"Which way did you go?"

"I rode toward Randall."

A cynical quirk appeared at the corner of his mouth. "What did you expect to find at Randall?" he asked.

"Why, I—" She hesitated, blushed, met his gaze again and continued: "Why, I don't know. I just wanted to go there."

"And then somebody abducted you," he added, mockery in his voice.

"Then *you* abducted me!" she declared.

Jeff shook his head.

"Too thin," he said. "You know better, too. Even if you made a mistake you'd know by now that I didn't do it. One of the Ballingers is lying."

"Oh," she said, "you have been talking with father!"

WELL, her father didn't know what had been in her mind that night, and she wouldn't tell, no matter how Jeff pressed her! She didn't want him to know that she was the kind of woman who would marry the first man that came along. She wanted him to respect her! Her folly of that night caused her no regret now, however. She had treasured them because they had brought Jeff to her.

"Yes. I told Ballinger about the monogrammed silk handkerchief I found in the cabin. I mentioned the rope I found in the slicker behind the saddle you used that night. Some of that rope was used to tie your hands. Your father told me Jim Peters followed you to Kellis's cabin that day. I think your father didn't tell all he knew. Did Peters tie you up?"

"It was not Peters, it was you!"

His grip on her arms tightened and she detected a faint paleness around his lips.

"That's getting monotonous," he said. "You're a liar, but you can't lie as cleverly as you think you can. I don't clearly understand what you and your father had in mind when this thing started; possibly you thought that if you married me your father would somehow be able to get his railroad through the valley. I don't know, I haven't the least idea how liars invent their lies; but here is the way you carried it out:

"You pretended to ride to the Kellis cabin. Perhaps you did. I don't know, and I don't care. Somehow, you and your father knew I would be in the Navaho Basin that night, and Jim Peters leads you to the cabin, binds and gags you, and leaves you there. Then he rides back, looking for me and my men.

"He sees us hanging Hank Kroll and he lets himself be seen so that we'll chase him past the cabin, where he has

left you. He placed your horse where we couldn't fail to see it, to make certain we would stop. He got away. After that it was easy. You overheard the boys talking about hanging Kroll, and you worked on that, thinking I would marry you to keep you from telling."

The queer quirk twisted his lips again. "It wasn't that. I didn't care a damn about that." He laughed mirthlessly. "Sympathy, and perhaps a sense of decency, did it. And hell! I can tell you now that I think I loved you with the first look I got of you when you stood there in the pale moonlight that came into the cabin windows.

"What!" she said tremulously, but taunting him. "Does character have nothing to do with—your love?"

He laughed harshly and stepped back, releasing her arms.

"Character!" he said. "I think not. I always imagined it did, but I'm just like millions of other damned fools. I went crazy over a pretty face. Why, right now I'm glad I married you—in spite of the fact that I know you are a liar and that you lured me into marrying you, I love you! I love you in spite of the fact that Jim Kellis was found drunk in your room!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, putting both hands to her face.

"Clever!" he mocked. He walked to the door and stood there for an instant looking back over his shoulder at her as she stood with her wonderful hair streaming down over her shoulders and her hands still covering her face.

"You'd better go back to the Hour Glass to-night," he said. "You like to do your gadding alone, and to-night will be a good night for it. And get a train out of this country as soon as you can, for things won't be pretty around here from to-night on!"

He stood for another instant looking at her. Then he was gone. Ellen could hear his booted heels striking the flagstones of the patio, could hear the musical jangling of his spurs.

That was all.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DESPERATE PREDICAMENT.

ELLEN had some very definite ideas about her married life. She wasn't going to permit their marriage to be wrecked. The better she knew Jeff the more determined she was to keep him. It made no difference to her what he said or how he treated her. She deserved all the harsh things he had said to her. She knew it, and she wasn't going to hold it against him. She loved him—and he loved her; he had told her so.

His black moods were another matter. He couldn't change his nature any more than she could change hers. And she didn't want him to change, for she loved him as he was, temper and all, just as he loved her in spite of the fact that he knew she was a liar.

But her face was pale and her lips set tightly together when at last she left her room, crossed the patio and entered the living room. She was glad the elder Hales were not at home. They had ridden away early in the morning, telling Ellen they were going to Lazette. Possibly they would not return for several days.

Standing far back in the living room Ellen saw Jeff riding away. He had changed horses; he now rode a powerful, rangy bay, and he was headed toward Randall.

Ellen had seen that Jeff was worried. She had observed the deep lines about his mouth, the new wrinkles that had appeared around his eyes, on his unshaved cheeks. Standing in her room he had seemed to be afflicted with a great weariness of mind and body.

It was weariness such as would oppress a man who no longer cared what happened to him. It seemed to express contempt of everybody and everything,

and yet it somehow conveyed the sinister promise of reckless violence.

She was certain he was riding into danger, but she had no power to prevent him. He did not trust her, would not listen to her.

With her hands clasped over her breast she watched him out of sight. Turning, then, she stood for a long time gazing at his picture which looked down at her from its shelf. She reached up, took the picture from its frame and concealed it in the bosom of her dress.

It was almost dusk when she went out to the stable and placed saddle and bridle on her horse. She carried none of her belongings except Jeff's picture and a small revolver in a holster.

She had no intention of obeying Jeff's orders. Her personal effects would remain at the Diamond A, for she intended to return. Jeff did not want her now, but some day, she hoped, he would be glad she had not obeyed him.

After mounting she rode northeastward up the great, sloping wall of the valley to the high level country. Before darkness finally encompassed her she had found the trail she sought and was determinedly riding it.

She was going to see Jim Kellis. She intended to appeal to the man's better nature. She was confident that Kellis knew where the missing certificate could be found, and she meant, somehow, to make him tell her how she might get possession of it. There must be a man named Lincoln somewhere in the vicinity or Kellis would not have mentioned his name in connection with the document's hiding place.

AT moonrise she was descending the big slope that led down into Navaho Basin, and shortly afterward she passed the cabin where she had first met Jeff. How long ago it seemed! She had a yearning to stop at the cabin, but she did not yield to it, and presently the cabin was behind her and she was deep in the timber that had been the scene of her adventure with Dallman.

She had never been able to understand why Dallman had abducted her. Of course she remembered his words: "This is one time I even things with Matthew M. Ballinger." But she had thought then, as she thought now, that the threat was vague and indefinite.

At any rate, what Dallman had in mind that night wasn't important because he hadn't succeeded in holding her. She wasn't interested in Dallman, except that she hated him because of the names he had called her. Some day, if she managed to stay married to Jeff, she would make Dallman squirm because of those names! That is, if Jeff didn't kill him before she got a chance!

The forest was beautiful in the silvery-black night, but she was in no mood to appreciate it, though she was grateful for the mellow moonlight that disclosed the narrow trail winding sinuously between the trees. She had been riding not more than half an hour through the timber when she crossed the swale where she had fallen from her horse the night Dallman had abducted her. A few minutes later she was riding across a clearing to the door of the Kellis cabin.

There was a light inside; a kerosene lamp standing on a table near the center of the room. Mrs. Kellis was sitting at the table. She had evidently heard Ellen's horse.

She got up as Ellen dismounted and was standing in the doorway when Ellen tied her horse to one of the slender porch columns and moved toward her. The moonlight was strong and she recognized Ellen, for she became suddenly rigid.

"Miz Ballinger?" she said. "Miz Hale, I mean. What you want?"

"I am on my way to the Hour Glass," lied Ellen. "I started late and I am afraid I can't make it to-night. You see, I don't know the trail very well. I was thinking that perhaps I might stay here until morning."

"Huh." The woman's voice lacked cordiality; it even held a note of suspicion. She did not move.

"Why you start so late? You know heem far distance. Why you' husban' not come weeth you? Where you' husban'?"

"Mr. Hale had to go to Randall."

The woman shook her head with a violent, negative motion.

"You' husban' here to-day—two time. He look for Jeem. What he want weeth Jeem?"

"Mr. Hale was here to-day!" exclaimed Ellen. "Why, what did he want?"

"He look for Jeem. He come in. He look like he keel somebody! He ask for Jeem. I tell heem Jeem no here. He go away. He come back an' stay over in the timber, watchin' the cabin. He go away again. What he want weeth Jeem?"

"I am sure I cannot tell you," said Ellen. "But I am certain he didn't wish to kill your husband. And he isn't with me now—he is in Randall."

"You leave him? He don' treat you right?"

"Oh, no!" smiled Ellen. "That isn't it. You think that because I am going to the Hour Glass—"

"What you ride this time of night for, if you don't leave him?"

ELLEN resented the woman's impudent questioning, but she was determined to enter the cabin. She divined that Kellis wasn't at home. She didn't know whether she was disappointed or relieved. She was a little afraid of Kellis since his real character had been disclosed to her, and she doubted that she would gain anything by questioning him further.

If she could convince Mrs. Kellis that her visit was entirely unpremeditated and incidental she might succeed in discovering something about the mysterious Lincoln. And if the woman permitted her to stay all night she would manage to search the cabin, for there was a slight chance that Kellis had the certificate hidden here.

"Oh, Mrs. Kellis, you musn't say that," she said, smiling, "I wouldn't leave Jeff."

"You love heem?"

"Quite as deeply as you appear to love Mr. Kellis," said Ellen.

The woman's face flushed.

"What Jeff want weeth Jeem?" she asked.

"I can't answer that, of course," returned Ellen. "He certainly doesn't want to kill him, Mrs. Kellis. Jeff has never killed anybody, has he? I think, perhaps, he wanted to ask Mr. Kellis some questions about Mr. Dallman. You know, of course, that Mr. Dallman has been trying to take some of Jeff's land?"

"Yes. I hear that. Jeem talk sometime in hees sleep; sometime when he drunk. Jeem hurt nobody. You sure Jeff don' hurt Jeem? You not let Jeff hurt Jeem?"

"Certainly not! There is no reason why Jeff should hurt him."

And now because of a subtle change in Mrs. Kellis's voice Ellen knew that the woman's suspicions were almost allayed. So Ellen laughed and stepped back, reaching for the bridle rein.

"I think I shall ride on, after all," she said. "There is a good moon, and I think I shall be able to find the trail."

"No!" exclaimed the woman. "You no ride! You come in. You get lost, hurt, mebbe. Excuse me, pleez. I'm foolish, mebbe. I think everybody want to hurt Jeem. Pleez. You come in. You stay. To-morrow you go. Leave you' horse there. After while I put heem in stable. Come!"

She stepped back and smiled at her visitor.

Ellen entered. She had no intention of staying in the cabin all night, and one glance at the interior almost dissuaded her from taking the chair Mrs. Kellis offered her. But she must appear to appreciate the woman's hos-

pitality, and so she sank into the chair and smiled.

Mrs. Kellis was now eager. She darted here and there, making ineffectual attempts to tidy up the room, insisting that her guest remove her hat and be comfortable. She herself could not wear a hat. Too heavy. The mantilla was best. Cool in the sun. A hat was hot. Why did American women wear hats?

She chattered volubly on. Her voice, now that her suspicions were gone, became flatteringly soft and solicitous. Mr. Ballinger was a great man, reech. Never, anywhere, was there a ranch like the Hour Glass! The Hales were wonderful people, too. How long had Ellen known Jeff Hale?

ELLEN answered many questions, and failed to answer many others; apparently Mrs. Kellis did not expect them to be answered, for she went on asking others without waiting.

She made excuses for the appearance of the cabin, for Jim's lack of ambition, for their poverty. Jim was a good man. People didn't understand Jim. Babies! They were a bother, but they came, one couldn't help that. They were wonderful, though; her baby looked just like Jim. Jim loved the baby.

For perhaps an hour Ellen sat, nodding and smiling. But there were times when she hardly heard Mrs. Kellis. Once she interrupted her: "Do you know where Mr. Kellis is?"

The woman gave her a sharp glance and shook her head.

She didn't know, she said; Jim had left the cabin about daybreak without telling her where he was going. He seldom told her anything about his movements.

For a time following the answering of the question, Mrs. Kellis was silent. Then, as Ellen asked no more questions she resumed her chatter, while Ellen was glancing searchingly about the room.

There was a battered dresser in a corner with several drawers in it. If Kellis had the certificate would he conceal it in the dresser? Hardly. Yet she would search there when the opportunity came. There was a shelf on the wall above the dresser, and upon the shelf was a small metal box, together with a pipe, a leather tobacco pouch and a comb. The box would be peered into.

There wasn't much else. The stove, the bed, the table and the chairs. A faded steel engraving on the wall near the bed. The picture was tacked to the wall. It was unframed, discolored with age, its edges were torn and frayed.

But the long, homely face portrayed on the faded paper was distinct enough. It may have been the way the light shone on the portrait, or it may have been that Ellen's dawning comprehension intensified her vision, for the sad and patient eyes that gazed so calmly at her appeared to flicker with a faint, ironic inquiry. It was as if they were saying: "Well, here I am! You didn't expect to find me here, eh?"

How simple it seemed, now that the mystery was solved!

Ellen's heart was suddenly pounding hard. She assured herself that she wasn't excited, that there was nothing to get excited over. If she had not misinterpreted Kellis's drunken declarations; if she had calmly reasoned the thing out, she must have known what Kellis meant when he had told her that Lincoln would not talk.

It had been like solving a puzzle. Mystery, bafflement, and then amazingly rapid understanding. She was now aware that she must have been looking at the picture for many minutes before she had realized that the face in the picture was that of the martyred President, Lincoln.

She wasn't excited. She had been for just an instant. Now she was calm, cold, determined. She deliberately turned her back to the picture so that if Mrs. Kellis was watching she might

not suspect her interest, and quietly asked if she hadn't better go out and water her horse. It had been hot and the animal had been a long time without a drink.

No, the woman said she should not bother with the horse. Besides, she didn't know where the water could be found. Right away she, herself, would go out and water the horse. Then she would put him in the stable and feed him. She went out, smiling.

ONLY an instant Ellen waited. Only until she heard Mrs. Kellis speak to the horse. Then she was out of her chair, snatching at the picture of Lincoln. She had no time to be careful, so she tore the paper from the tacks and slipped a hand into the aperture. Instantly her searching, eager fingers gripped another paper. She drew it out, opened it, quickly examined it and thrust it into the bosom of her dress, where Jeff's picture reposed.

She had it! There was no doubt that the paper was the missing certificate. She had seen Adam Hale's name on it, the Land Office stamp, the engraved border, the flowing signature of the land agent, and the date.

She drew a deep breath of triumph and made an involuntary bow of gratitude toward the picture. As she bent her head she heard the swish of some object hurtling past her, and she straightened, startled, to see a long knife sticking in the wall, its haft quivering.

She knew the knife had been thrown with murderous intent, just as she knew that the voice of the knife-thrower belonged to Kellis. His shrieking curse and the thudding of the knife in the wall above her head appeared to come simultaneously.

She glanced backward as she darted toward the rear door. Kellis was leaping toward her from the front door.

She had never seen such demoniac rage in any man's face, and for an instant as she fled her muscles faltered on the verge of paralysis. Then terror strengthened her, and she was over the doorsill, running toward the timber that fringed the clearing.

As she reached the edge of the timber fright drew her gaze backward, and she saw Kellis falling headlong through the rear doorway. He had evidently stumbled over the sill.

Ellen ran on without any idea of direction, for the timber was strange to her and there was no trail for her to follow.

She had not gone a hundred feet when she heard Kellis crashing after her. He was cursing. He was muttering, too, unintelligibly, whining and mewing like a desperately harried animal. The sounds he made terrified her.

She ran on, seeking the aisles that appeared to offer good footing. She soon discovered that there were traps and pitfalls everywhere. She got into many of them. A dozen times in half a mile she fell. Thorns clutched at her garments and scratched her face and hands.

She could hear Kellis coming after her. He crashed heavily through brush that she dared not try to enter. He leaped over deadfalls which she had to go around, and his superior strength and sure-footedness gave him an advantage that was certain to win him victory in the end.

Twice, however, it seemed she was to escape him, for twice heavy clouds covered the face of the moon, and in the darkness she changed her course and veered sharply from the aisle she had been following.

Once she was sure she had lost him, for she could no longer see him or hear him. But she did not linger, and presently, at a dangerously short distance, she saw him clamber out of a dry arroyo. The moonlight shone clearly upon him and she saw that his face was hideously contorted.

He stopped, drew a gun from a holster and leveled it at her. She stopped and stood, incredulously watching him.

The powder belched at her and she heard the bullet whine as it passed her.

SHE turned and ran, moving in zigzag fashion among the trees. She heard the crashing of the gun again and again, heard the bullets thudding around her.

Strangely, although Kellis was a man and was naturally stronger than she, he did not appear to gain upon her. She was aware that his cursing had grown louder, and that there was a high, screeching note in his voice. Its timbre had changed. There had been a ring of command in it. Rage, too, but a sane rage—the rage of baffled human hate.

But there was nothing human in the cries that now filled the timber. There was a wail in them, a shrill, quavering, senseless and querulous crying which sounded so strangely in Ellen's ears that morbid, fearsome curiosity prompted her to pause and turn.

About a hundred yards from her she saw Kellis. He was limping. He had evidently hurt his right leg badly, for he was holding the knee as he moved toward her, and dropping almost to the ground at each step. But he was coming. And when he saw that she had stopped he yelled hoarsely at her and came toward her faster than ever. She screamed at sight of him, and ran on.

She ran until in sheer weariness she was forced to drop to the bole of a fallen tree to rest. Somewhere back in the seemingly endless stretch of timber through which she had passed was Kellis. She did not see him. But listening, she heard him, heard the crashing of twigs and branches that marked his progress.

She had no idea where she was; she had lost all sense of direction. One section of the forest was exactly like any other section. The moon was now directly overhead. When she finally saw Kellis coming toward her, still limping, she sprang up and went on again.

She would have circled around Kellis in an effort to get back to the cabin and take possession of her horse, if she had known which direction to take. For all she knew she might now be going toward the cabin. She had no hope of finding a trail in the timber. This was the Navaho Basin, and she remembered that Jeff had told her there was no trail through it.

But at this minute she wasn't greatly concerned over the possibility of her escape from the basin. What she must do was to keep away from Kellis.

She was tired, and her progress was slow, and yet she was still strong enough to keep Kellis at a distance. And it seemed that Kellis had used all the cartridges for his gun. He did no more shooting. In fact, she was almost convinced that he no longer had the gun.

She went on, slowly but steadily, watching Kellis, keeping him at a distance. She had been going for more than an hour when she observed that on each side of her the timber was growing thinner.

She paused, quickly apprehensive, and looked back.

She had been traveling over a mesa, a great, timbered table-land. Thinking only of Kellis, and being unable to see far enough ahead to discern the character of the country, she had walked out upon a narrowing wedge of land which ended in a ragged, rocky butte that sloped sharply downward toward the lower country.

She was in a trap!

SHE ran swiftly to her right, hoping to slip by Kellis before he became aware of her predicament.

Kellis also hobbled in that direction, so she turned and ran the other way until she saw that Kellis was still active enough to intercept her. Moreover, it seemed to her that the contemplation of her imminent capture had endowed the man with new-found agility, for he now hopped toward her with amazing

strides, his injured leg dragging limply, like some sort of a superfluous appendage. As he came closer to her she saw his face clearly, and she knew that he had lost his reason.

His face had no expression whatever. His eyes held only a blank stare, and his open mouth was drooling saliva. If he had not been coming directly toward her she must have thought he did not see her.

He said nothing, but there issued from his loose lips a flow of sound, a steady, monotonous whining. It was unlike any sound that she had ever heard. Appalled, but still courageous, she turned her back to him and ran to the edge of the cliff.

Pausing there for an instant, and glancing back, she observed that he was still hopping toward her. Swiftly turning, she faced him and clambered over the edge of the cliff, sliding downward until she was suspended by her hands. She had seen a ledge below her, and had thought she would be able to reach it by dangling her legs. But the ledge was farther down than she had estimated; her toes did not touch it.

She released her grip and dropped. The distance was not great, for the shock was slight, and she had no difficulty in maintaining an upright position, though for an awful heart-stopping instant she swayed outward.

She did not hesitate to see if Kellis had reached the edge of the cliff, but got down on her hands and knees and began to crawl along the ledge, which ran along the face of the wall under a great, jagged, bulging rimrock.

The ledge grew narrower. She reached a spot where it merged into the wall and vanished. The moonlight was still good, and she looked around her. She could hear Kellis again. The strange, mewing sound he made seemed to come from the point on the edge of the cliff that she had vacated.

Kellis was probably looking for her. Perhaps he would think that she had missed the ledge and had gone tumbling down the sharp slope to the valley below. She resolved to stay where she was until she was certain Kellis was coming after her.

Straight down for perhaps a dozen feet was a sloping section of wall out of which projected jagged points of rock. From her position the rocks looked slippery, but from various fissures grew gnarled, root-like branches of nondescript brush which appeared to be strong enough to support her weight.

Beyond this section it seemed the descent would be easier. She would have to go down, anyway, whether Kellis followed her or not, for she realized that she would not be able to retrace her steps.

For some time she rested on the ledge, hoping that Kellis would not attempt the descent. But presently she heard a slithering noise and she knew he was sliding over the edge. She was already moving downward when she heard Kellis drop to the ledge. Almost, she felt, he had gone over. For she heard him scrambling around, and cursing.

She descended backward, her face to the wall, and when she was about halfway down the stretch she saw Kellis crawling along the ledge above her. He made no sound when he observed her, but halted for an instant and seemed to watch her.

SHE went down until she reached a huge slab of rock which seemed to have broken from its position somewhere above and dropped to its present resting place. It had lodged against a huge rock outcropping, and appeared to be balanced there precariously. She carefully slid around it, observing as she moved that Kellis had reached the point of the ledge above where she had been forced off.

She was near enough now to Kellis to get a good view of his face. She thought some of the blankness of his expression had been replaced by sly-

ness. His mouth had closed a little, and there seemed to be a queer, malignant quirk to his lips. But there was no gleam of sanity in his eyes. They were wild and staring.

Some portion of his brain was functioning, however, for he was casting rapid glances here and there as if searching for a place to descend. She thought she saw fright in his eyes when once he stared downward, and she was certain he shrank backward as if the prospect of descending dismayed him.

When she saw him pick up a rock from the ledge beside him she comprehended the meaning of the action. Swiftly she threw herself flat and slid down the slope, recklessly trusting to chance.

She saw the rock leave his hands, watched it strike the wall near her and go bounding down the slope to the bottom of the valley. Long after it struck the bottom she heard other rocks slithering and clattering after it. A light, feathery dust arose and hovered over the slope.

She got behind a rock that was not quite large enough to shield her, and crouched there. Another rock, hurled by Kellis, struck close to her and bounded over her. Then another, and another.

She heard Kellis shrieking, and looked up to see him crazily running back and forth on the ledge, hopping grotesquely, dragging his limp leg.

"Damn you!" he shrieked. "I'll kill you! I'll smash you to smithereens!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

HAZEN LIGHTS OUT.

AFTER leaving Ellen at the Diamond A, Jeff rode toward Randall. He rode slowly, and darkness overtook him while he was still about five miles from town. Then, instead of continuing on the Randall trail, he left it and cut across the valley bottom into the country west of town. There he found a trail and rode it northwestward until he reached a point where the trail ran through a dry arroyo.

Dismounting, he led the horse behind a dense growth of wild brush, trailed the reins over his head, and left him.

Jeff walked to the western end of the arroyo, which cut into a section of upland country which was brilliant in the moonlight, dropped upon a bowlder behind a dense clump of tall mesquite, and sat there, somberly regarding the trail.

Apparently Jeff had judged the time accurately, for he had not been sitting on the bowlder very long when he saw a rider come into view on the west trail.

The rider was in view for all the distance down the slope. He was coming at a moderate speed, his horse in a steady, rocking lope.

Blandin hadn't lied.

When the rider reached the head of the arroyo he slowed down because of the shadows and the uncertainty of the trail, and when he reached the clump of mesquite behind which Jeff was sitting on the rock the horse was moving at a walk.

And then Jeff's voice, cold and sharp, floated through the mesquite: "Reach for the sky, you mangy pup!"

So swiftly that the action seemed to be accomplished with a single movement, the rider brought his horse to a halt and raised his hands high in the air. He had turned his head and the moonlight shining on him revealed him as Bill Hazen.

He had recognized Jeff's voice, but he said nothing as Jeff emerged from beyond the mesquite and confronted him.

Jeff's gun was rigid at his hip, but not more rigid than his muscles as he stood there in the moonlight watching his enemy.

Hazen had never seen Jeff in his

present mood. He was apprehensive at the sight, for he gulped twice and seemed to settle heavily in the saddle.

At Jeff's command he gripped his gun carefully and delicately with forefinger and thumb and dropped it into the sand of the trail. He appeared to realize that he must obey quickly and without objection.

"Light!" ordered Jeff.

Hazen swung out of the saddle and dropped to the ground without lowering his hands. Silently he faced the somber figure of his enemy.

"Turn!" ordered Jeff.

Jeff searched Hazen's clothing. He found no other weapons. With Hazen standing motionless Jeff drew a rifle from a saddle sheath on the sheriff's horse, tossed it into the mesquite clump, and then inspected the slicker that was strapped to the cantle.

He stepped aside.

"Get up and ride straight down the arroyo!" he commanded.

Hazen obeyed, still keeping his hands above his head except for the instant he was required to use them in order to mount. Then, followed by Jeff, he rode down the arroyo to where Jeff had left his horse. There, at Jeff's command, Hazen halted, and waited until Jeff was in the saddle.

BY this time Hazen seemed to have partially regained his courage, possibly realizing that since he had not been shot at once he was to escape that fate altogether.

"Seems you're makin' a lot of fuss about somethin'!" he jeered.

"More than you're worth," answered Jeff. "You know I'm not in the habit of shooting men who can't shoot back. But I've no objection to cracking your head with the butt of my gun. Hazen, I'm yearning to kill you. Whether you live to get where I'm taking you depends on yourself. Get going—north!"

"Hell!" exclaimed Hazen. "That will be Navaho Basin."

"Exactly. Just let your horse lope smooth and easy."

Hazen was reluctant, but he had no choice, and he sent his horse across some level country northward, toward a long slope that could be seen in the distance. Beyond that slope was a wilderness that few men had ever penetrated. It loomed dark and forbidding, a mysterious country.

For an hour Hazen rode steadily, with Jeff not more than twenty or thirty feet behind him. The two riders crossed the level, descended the slope and were riding straight into the solemn darkness of the forest, when Hazen suddenly halted his horse, swung around and faced his captor. Hazen's face was now pallid with fright.

"You can kill me right here, damn you!" he shouted.

"I'm glad to hear you admit that you need killing," said Jeff. "I have known it for more than a year. I'll be glad to accommodate you. If you are not riding in ten seconds you'll be plenty dead right after that."

He sat motionless, his gun drawn, watching Hazen.

Before the ten seconds had passed Hazen was riding again. Some of the resistance had gone out of him; the belligerence of spirit which had provoked him to halt and face his captor had been quelled by the steady and saturnine eye which had met his.

He was in ignorance of Jeff's intentions. Jeff had told him nothing. Jeff had not revealed his knowledge of Hazen's plans to organize the posse of farmers for the purpose of lending a legal atmosphere to his own execution; he had not intimated that he knew anything about Hazen's plans. He would give Hazen no information whatever.

When they entered the timber Hazen again hesitated. But he went on again presently, without speaking.

To Hazen's amazement, they ultimately found a trail. Where they came

upon it Hazen could not have told, or could he ever find it again. It seemed they had been zigzagging and circling in the timber for two or three hours, when the trail appeared, but by that time the sheriff had lost all sense of direction.

If Jeff had left him at that moment, he could not have found his way out of the timber. He was lost, and his manner betrayed his helplessness.

The trail was a faint one, running in irregular fashion from one aisle of the forest to another, circling around low, wooded hills, doubling back and forth to skirt deadfalls and sometimes descending to miniature flats or rising to dizzy heights at the rims of great, ragged buttes.

Hazen found nothing more to say. He seemed resigned, dispirited, and he rode forward, slouching in the saddle in a manner that was singularly in contrast to his usual arrogant attitude.

ABOUT midnight the trail led them down into a little flat close to the bank of a small stream of water. At a little distance from the water's edge was a small cabin built of logs.

The cabin was dark, and Jeff signed to Hazen to halt.

Jeff called, and after an interval a voice answered:

"That you, Hale?"

Jeff replied, and he and Hazen rode forward.

Two men emerged from the cabin doorway. They were men who occasionally visited Randall. Hazen had seen them several times, and knew them as Dell Hart and Jess Givens. He had been told that they were outlaws. Once, when they had lingered in town too long, he had ordered them to leave.

He listened now to the conversation carried on between the three men. They did not lower their voices; it appeared they were very frank in discussing him.

"So you want us to take him with us an' lose him?" said Hart. "Well, he's worthless, anyway. Nobody will miss him."

Hazen watched the two outlaws as they talked. Their faces were villainous, and Hazen knew that if they took him with them, anywhere, he would not return.

He learned from the conversation that Hart and Givens were about to leave the country anyway. "Pickings" were not good. They were going north, straight through Navaho Basin, through one hundred and fifty miles of forest wilderness.

"What's the use of botherin' with him?" said Givens. "Why not—"

Significantly he tapped his gun holster.

"He's not worth even that," said Jeff. "But he's an officer."

"Of what?" asked Hart. "Of the law? Well, I don't know. I've heard of the sort of law he runs, an' it don't amount to anything. It's just his law, fer himself an' Dallman. Shootin' him wouldn't be injurin' the law."

"He's no good," said Jeff, "but I haven't been able to bring myself to do it. I had thought of it—twice—but it would have been like killing a sheep."

"He's yellow, of course," said Givens. "Everybody knows it; but why should that save him? He's just one of them accidents you hear about. Somehow, he got the most votes, and that makes him represent the law—but such law! He's been sheriff for more than a year, an' he's never arrested anybody. Brag an' bluster an' pose."

"Well, we can't let him go," said Hart. "He'd go right back to town an' start to strut. Mebbe he'd have nerve enough to bring a posse here. He would be sure to do that if he could be certain we'd gone."

"IF you boys would let me go, I'd ride straight to Lazette an' resign," interjected Hazen. He was pallid again; he gulped his words out.

Nobody seemed to hear his voice; nobody looked at him. He felt he had

not spoken distinctly enough, and so he repeated his words. As before, they were ignored.

"The best way is to end it right now," said Givens. "What do we gain by taking him with us? I sure hate to lose any sleep, watchin' him nights while we was ridin'."

"We'd be nervous," added Hart. "If we'd be in camp an' he'd take it into his head to turn over in his sleep, I'd throw my gun on him, thinkin' he'd be meanin' to cut our throats."

"We couldn't always be keepin' him ahead of us," said Givens. "If he'd fall back, we'd have to plug him. We ought to do it right now; it would save trouble."

"Well," said Jeff, "you boys do as you think best. I'm turning him over to you. Do what you please with him. I'm ridin' back to town. But maybe you'd like to know what he was intending to do to-night."

Jeff told them what Blandin had said, and when he concluded there was a short silence.

Hart and Givens looked at Hazen.

Jeff had not mentioned Blandin's name, and Hazen seemed amazed to discover that Jeff knew of his plans.

"See!" said Hart. "He didn't mean to give you any chance. Why should you give him any? If you don't want to kill him, why, I—"

Hart's gun seemed to glide into his right hand.

"I'd be willin' to give you boys my resignation right now," said Hazen. "You could send it on to Lazette. I'd light out of the country an' never come back."

He wiped his moist forehead with a handkerchief. His hands trembled; his knees were sagging.

"After we kill him we could toss him into that narrow cañon," said Givens. "Nobody would ever find him. That's a whole lot better way than havin' him resign. He might change his mind."

"Don't kill me, boys!" begged Hazen. "I ain't done nothin' so awful bad. Nobody's been hurt. I'd write a confession sayin' me an' Dallman was workin' together to get the Hale land. Then you'd know I wouldn't dast come back."

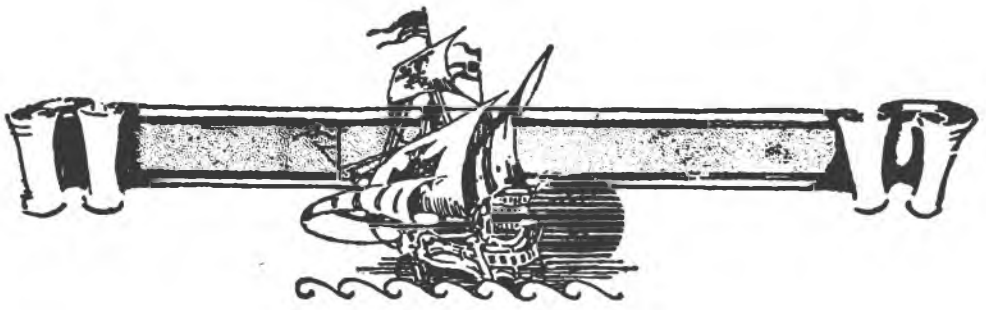
"We could try that," said Jeff. "You boys take him into your shack and set him to writing."

Hart and Givens led Hazen into the cabin. Jeff waited outside. Just before daylight Hazen and the other men emerged.

There was no word spoken. Hart and Givens stood near the door of the cabin. Jeff had vanished, though his horse was grazing near the edge of the clearing.

"I'd ride north," suggested Givens, as Hazen mounted. "That way you'll be certain to miss town. I'd keep on missin' it, if I were you."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



The right hand gripped a gun in his coat pocket

A Bad Guess

"Give me a lift!" the hard-boiled hiker asked—and obligingly Duff, the real estate salesman, took him for a ride

By M. E. CHASE

THE roadside bushes parted and a scraggily hard-boiled visage stared in both directions. Only one car was in sight approaching his ambush. The highwayman turned a pair of small but powerful binoculars upon it. Yes, it was a good make of machine, and the man at the wheel had a prosperous air about him. Also, there was no one else in the car.

He waited for it to draw near. Then, stepping out, he signaled with his left hand. The right gripped a gun in his coat pocket, ready for action in case this guy got funny and tried to speed by.

But the car slowed up.

"Give me a lift into town, brother," he challenged roughly.

"Sure thing, climb in," the driver opened the car door. "Too blamed hot to hoof it far to-day," he went on affably, disregarding the other's hard scrutiny.

"Ya said a mouthful!"

"My name's Duff. What's yours?" inquired the driver cheerily.

Finally deciding to answer the ques-

tion, the other snarled, "Anderson's my handle!"

"Glad to have company. I hate these long drives alone. Ever smoke, Mr. Anderson?"

The stick-up regarded the proffered cigar with considerable dissatisfaction. A five center! It suggested that pickings might not be so good here after all.

Still, one never could tell. However, there were too many cars approaching just then to crack the bird senseless and find out exactly how much of a wad he did have on him.

Then, by way of making conversation, Duff let drop: "Never saw business worse than it is at present. In my line, anyway."

"What's your line, brother?"

"Selling real estate—tough game all right."

The highway suddenly cleared. Anderson scrutinized the gas meter.

"Say, better fill up on gas," he sneered. It was best to have plenty for his get-away after he dumped Duff by the roadside.

"Guess you're right. Well, there's a station just ahead a ways," Duff replied, and went on to say: "Drove clear to Santa Ana to-day to collect some back payments on a lot I sold a fellow, and all I got out of him was a hard luck story, after my burning up a tankful of gas."

At the filling station, Duff called for five gallons, digging into a trousers pocket for change.

"No, by George! make it only four. I see I'm short of cash," he told the attendant. He fumbled in the other pocket, but produced nothing. "Thought I had enough to get my one suit pressed in the morning before I start out on my calls," he grinned despairingly. "Have to put up a front regardless of whether I eat."

Anderson's impulse, when he had taken in the situation, was to bid Duff good day and waylay a more lucrative victim. Yet the dicks were on his trail. It was really strategy to get into hiding in town without delay, and just as well not to leave any fresh evidence of his whereabouts unless he could made a decent haul. Duff was furnishing him comfortable transportation in the right direction, so he decided to keep on with him.

"Here, I got some change," Anderson said, shoving two quarters at Duff, and out of the corner of his mouth to the attendant, "Say, guy, make it five, see!"

Just his luck to make a bad guess when he was down to his last ten-spot. He grinned at the idea of actually shelling out from his own jeans, when he'd been all fixed to lift a wad. Oh, well, this Duff was a likable bird, even if he was still wet behind the ears.

"GLAD to do a good turn to a guy what's on his uppers," Anderson said condescendingly. "Been that way too many times myself." Now his tongue loosened up. "Ever ride the bumpers, pardner? Don't suppose you ever did, eh?"

"Oh, sure!" Duff replied, showing no surprise. "Beat my way West the first time—bumpers, side door Pullman, and hitch hiking along the highway."

"Yeah?" Anderson responded. "Well, it ain't so easy to pick up a ride on the highway any more."

"I suppose a lot of folks are afraid to give a stranger a lift, for fear of being held up. But I treat every man as though he was as straight as I aim to be. Neyer yet came to any grief doing it either." Duff offered his passenger a cigarette. He accepted it, smiling up his sleeve at the narrowness of this poor trusting boob's escape this trip.

"Say we stop up here and eat!" Anderson suggested.

"It'll only take us forty-five minutes to get into town now," Duff demurred, glancing at the dash clock.

"Naw, le's eat! Ya look hungry,

fella. I'll set 'em up, see?" Anderson persisted with rough magnanimity.

"I got to be in town by four, but I guess we can make it all right," Duff said, turning into a roadside hot-dog stand.

When they had surrounded a substantial lunch and were again under way, Anderson got to wondering how this poor fish would act if he knew his passenger was the stick-up so badly wanted right now for that killing he had pulled last week. He was on the verge of springing it, just to see how he'd take it. But habitual discretion checked him. Instead he asked:

"Ever been in New York, pardner?"

Duff had been in New York, as well as Chicago, Miami, New Orleans, El Paso, Seattle and now Los Angeles, playing the real estate game, the stick-up learned during the next half hour. He snorted aloud at the idea of any guy who'd been about that much not being wise to what sort of passenger he had.

But Duff didn't seem to notice. He kept his eyes on the road, and he was certainly stepping on the gas, too.

Reaching the city limits, Anderson informed him: "You can drop me off any place here and I'll take a street car down town."

"Going down town anyway," Duff told him.

A purposefulness now took the place of the driver's affability. He ceased talking, kept his eye on the clock and several times violated traffic rules to make speed.

"Say, brother," Anderson snarled, his hand on his gun. "Ya tryin' to land us in jail? Drive onto the next street, where they ain't so many traffic cops, if you're in such a damn hurry."

Duff slowed down and resumed conversation. Anderson slowly relaxed his grip on the gun, decided he'd accept Duff at face value, unless he actually made an out-and-out false move.

When the car stopped at a down town curb, Anderson lost no time in getting out. "Thanks for the lift, brother, and good luck to you," he said and hurried off, hand in pocket. And, to make sure that Duff hadn't recognized him and wasn't setting a cop on his trail, he secreted himself in a doorway to watch.

Sure enough! The guy was standing by his car peering in the direction Anderson had taken. The stick-up automatically began pulling his gun out of the pocket with slow and ruthless purpose, for Duff was cutting diagonally across, toward the traffic cop at the corner. But, no! He walked past the cop and on into a bank.

Anderson shifted to get a better view through the bank door. Duff was taking a fat wallet from his inside coat pocket and was now pushing in a thick wad of bills to the teller. With an air of great triumph he was telling something which two other employees stopped work to hear.

Anderson stared. "And me, Chicago Bob, a settin' 'em up for that guy instead of crackin' him over the bean and helpin' myself to that wad!" the stick-up mumbled as he shuffled off in the direction of the nearest speakeasy.

THE END

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

WEST INDIAN ADVENTURE

THIS week's newcomer to our pages is Harold Montanye, author of "Caribbean Magic." Mr. Montayne is an experienced magazine writer and brings to us in this novelette a tale laid in a seldom used setting—but one with which he is thoroughly familiar. Of himself he tells us:

According to the family Bible I was born in April the year before the Spanish War, although I can't remember much about either of them. The place was Canton, Pennsylvania. The reason has not yet come to light.

From then until my first year in college—Bethany, in West Virginia—nothing of any importance. Thought of studying for the ministry at Bethany, but the president didn't agree with me after the first three months. When they chucked me out I tried selling washing machines with another chap who had been fired at the same time.

We sold one in three months, and I decided that I could be more of a success in college. Went to New York University to study journalism and story writing. Attended one class in one year because I found too many other interesting things around New York—important things, too!

Went to France with the first convoy in 1917 in the Army Transport Service. Was on board the Dakotan until February, 1918, except for a brief time, when I tried to desert the United States service and get into the French air service, where they said things were more exciting. Got into the French service, but found that I was apt to be shot for getting out of the United States service. Maybe I'm still apt to be shot by the French.

Anyway, I got a transfer to United States Naval Aviation and ended the war fooling with kites, free balloons and blimps out in Akron.

Went down on Wall Street with a bond house to make my fortune so that I could retire and write. Lost my shirt and started writing to pay my debts.

Been at it ever since.

This particular tale, "Caribbean Magic," I picked up while I was on an expedition with Paul Griswold Howes, curator of the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut.

We spent four months up in the jungle on the island of Dominica. It lies between Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Leeward Group of the British West Indies.

Each year the Administrator allows the natives the freedom of the capital during what the English term "Carnival Week." The natives paint their bodies, fill up on native rum and go whooping it up and whacking one another over the head with clubs—and any one else they can whack. There are about thirty thousand of them to a mere hundred and fifty whites, but they've become quite docile, due to West Indian cruises and other causes.

However, they've made quite a bit of trouble at one time and another, and the English bring a cruiser in every so often for the sake of their morale. They are, of course, frightened to death of the cruiser and do nothing more than mumble and make covert threats.

They are quite superstitious and, although a number of them are regular churchgoers they are all afraid of "jumbies" and a few worship Obeah. They also go in pretty strong for "love potions" and poisoning one another.

We handled and brought back several small boa constrictors known as *tête chien*, and for that reason the natives would avert their faces and refuse to look us in the eye, fearing a jumby curse.

I have picked up some interesting tales from some of these officials in the British and French colonies in the tropics. Talking with them it is easy to realize how they have extended their power to the four corners of the earth.

HAROLD MONTANYE.

THOUGH Mr. Nigri lives in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, he works in New York and had no difficulty in visualizing the weird New York scenes depicted in "A Brand New World," by Ray Cummings:

Ridgefield Park, N. J.

I certainly enjoy reading the Argonotes and find that every time I read all those complimentary letters it makes me feel proud that I am an ARGOSYITE.

I have just started Ray Cummings's new story and it certainly promises to be a *wow!* I hope he keeps us in old New York for a time so that we who are closely associated with New York will know just how to act in case of a catastrophe like this one pictured in the first issue of the story. The fact that this fantastic tale takes place right in our own sphere makes it all the more interesting, because it brings the people of another world to us instead of our going to them. I personally like the fantastic tale which deals with the vicinity I live in or thereabouts, and I suppose every one else does; when something is brought nearer home it makes it all the more interesting.

My stack of ARGOSY magazines certainly is increasing, and I always like to look through my "treasure chest" of ARGOSIES to find tales that I have been unable to read in the past and which at the moment appeal to my state of mind.

I certainly must congratulate you on your fine staff of authors, I do not dare mention names for fear that I may overlook some of them. All that I have read sure have come up to the standard and even surpassed it. I wish to close, saying, as many other readers have said, keep up the good work, with variety always. ANTHONY C. NIGRI.

GEORGE F. WORTS made this convert for ARGOSY. Indeed, it would be interesting to know how many readers have been attracted to our pages by his fine yarns.

N. S. Pittsburgh, Pa.

The first issue of the ARGOSY I read was in 1923, starting the serial, "Out Where the Worst Begins." I haven't missed an issue since. It's the best fiction magazine on the market at any price. I read the ARGOSY from start to finish, seldom skipping a story. But the real red-letter issue was August 4. Every story was excellent. Try to publish another.

One feature of the ARGOSY that I like is the sub-title under the name of the story. It gives the reader an idea of the story.

My favorite authors are John Wilstach, Fred MacIsaac, and George F. Worts. I believe his "Crime Circus" will be a knockout. Two of the best short stories I have read are "The Amateur Doctor" and "Applause Mail."

The variety of the magazine suits me fine—the Westerns are not too numerous.

MARY B. NELSON.

EIGHTEEN years of ARGOSY reading in twenty-three countries—quite a record that!

Waco, Texas.

I am inclosing ten of Your Choice Coupons—but, alas, I did not fill them out. How could I possibly choose the best when all of them entertain me and every one gives me pleasure? Every issue is read from cover to cover every week and then passed on to my folks and friends, who in turn read them and pass them on *ad infinitum*.

What kind of stories do I like best? That is hard to say. Almost all, with the exception of the much cussed Westerns. I can hardly blame some of my fellow readers in doing so—cussing them, I mean. I do like the "impossible" stories, pseudo-scientific stories and then—well, I just like about all of them. Ray Cummings, Burroughs, Worts, MacIsaac, Milne, Garret Smith are my favorites.

I have been reading your ARGOSY—let's see, about eighteen years, I believe, ever since I was a kid in grade school. Then during the war, it followed me all over Europe. I have purchased my ARGOSY in about twenty-three countries. Sorry I can't subscribe, but as I'm on the move all the time, I guess it is better to get it as I can, as I sure would give your mailing department a merry chase.

Good luck to you. May you continue to lead the field of fiction. S. S. KAHN.

TRULY, every cloud has a silver lining. Even behind the thick clouds of a devastating forest fire there was a spark of cheer for this ARGOSY enthusiast:

Cloquet, Minn.

In 1918 I was a forest fire refugee in a strange town and a very lonely little girl of ten.

I became acquainted with an old druggist and his wife, who used to give me old magazines to read, as I've always been crazy about reading.

One day he gave me a copy of the *All-Story* and one of the ARGOSY, and I never read a better magazine before. Of course the stories were old for a ten-year-old girl, but I loved them just the same.

Have taken the ARGOSY ever since, not missed a copy, and am just crazy about stories like "The People of the Ring," "The Moon Maid," "The Radio Man," "Seven Footprints to Satan"; also the new story, "A Brand New World." It's the best story I've ever read, and I've sure read a lot of them. Here's hoping for some more like it.

MRS. ART MATTSON.

RIVALRY for ARGOSY in this household! For Mrs. Phillips's information: *Mme. Storey* will be back in Hulbert Footner's latest story, "The Black Ace," in the issue of January 12.

Hamilton, Kan.

I am sure glad you brought back the Readers' Viewpoint. It is almost as interesting as the stories. Sure hope you don't stop the Western stories as some of the readers want done. The ones in ARGOSY are so much better than you can find in any magazine that is all Western.

I first started getting the *All-Story Weekly*, as it was then, about twelve years ago. Was hunting in a bookstore in my home town for something different to read and could get four issues of the *All-Story Weekly*, so bought them and read them and subscribed for it right away. Have been getting it ever since.

I have four girls, the youngest one ten years old, and they are all ARGOSY fans. We draw straws and take turns to see which one gets it first. The girls like Western and Northern stories best, and I like them all with the exception of some of Edgar Franklin's stories, but others like them, so I'm satisfied.

Was awfully glad to see in the issue of September 22 that we are to have some more *Semi Dual* and *Mme. Storey* stories. I sure like them. We also like those articles, such as "The Valley of Ivory," "The Foe of the Ants," *et cetera*. Also want to mention the

cover for the September 22 issue; it was beautiful! Keep old ARGOSY as it is or make it better—which I don't think can be done, as it is now the best yet.

MRS. BURT PHILLIPS.

WE are putting our very best efforts into securing for ARGOSY the most attractive covers on the market. Many of our readers have expressed appreciation of them. Here is an artist to confirm their judgment:

Mankato, Minn.

Coupons inclosed. Drawing expected. You've got a good plan there in more ways than one. Being a commercial designer and an original illustrator I am always interested in getting an original from some other artist. I haven't really carved a name for myself yet outside of my home town.

Your covers are lesson charts to me, as I always study the coloring, blending, *et cetera*. One of your most beautiful covers was the one illustrating the serial, "'Geechee Shad." That was a splendid soft-toned night scene.

I disagree with L. Leonard in the September 29 issue. Why do we get news reels with our feature pictures? If they're interesting—and so far they have been—the short articles sure go fine with all that fiction. Your articles are O. K., say I, so keep 'em coming. Then about the synopses. If you've started the story from the beginning you pass 'em up, of course, but s'pose you hadn't started that particular story; you see by the synopsis it's pretty darn good, anyway, so you hunt up your other ARGOSIES and start it from the beginning. I've done it lots of times. It's the editor's way of making you come back after something good that you were passing by. HERBERT WERNIMONT.

AND, of course, Fred MacIsaac always gives the bell a good resounding swat!

Boise, Idaho.

I am a reader of your magazine for good. I want to congratulate you for publishing "The Golden Burden." It is the type of story that hits the spot! I like that type of story extremely well. It is like the stories that made me an ARGOSY fan a few years ago. Let's have more stories like this one and like "The Vanishing Professor," "Mark of Satan," and, last but not least, the story about the most perfect butler in the United States. I haven't the copies of this magazine, so I don't know the author.

I think ARGOSY is the best magazine on the news-stand for real live action stories.

MARVIN KNOX.

AND now a word from Canada. Incidentally, we are now doing as Mr. Buscombe requests: wherever possible dividing the serials by complete stories so that they may be bound together by those who wish to preserve them in this way.

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

There is no use beating around the bush; I think ARGOSY is the best magazine at any price in the whole United States or Canada.

My favorite author is Fred MacIsaac. And the best stories I have read lately are "Sea Marauders," "The Masked Barmaid," "A Brand New World," and "The Albino Ogre," which I have just finished.

I suppose you will think this an unusual request, but every good serial that I have read, I save and bind all the installments together. But once in awhile I come across two serials running into each other. I mean that one serial ends on the back of a page that another one begins. So would you please try to remedy that by dividing each serial with a short story or a novelette.

CHARLES G. BUSCOMBE.

A WORD of praise for Floria Howe Bruess.

Chicago, Ill.

I want to say a word for the author of "Code of the Mounted," by Floria Howe Bruess.

It's a good type story and makes fine reading. I noticed a number of her stories in your magazine and hope to see some more. "Rain Magic," by Erle Stanley Gardner, was also good. ALICE WILLIAMSON.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

I did not like_____

because_____

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

12-15

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by F. V. W. Mason

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ISSUE OF DECEMBER 22nd

The Press Agent

by Fred MacIsaac (*A Complete Novelette*)

is 1928 up to date. A tale of one of those opportunity-grabbing gentlemen who spend their lives wooing the Goddess Publicity with a courtship in which no holds are barred. As usual with a MacIsaac story, it will give you many a hearty chuckle, but will grip you from start to finish.

Notches—by Eugene Cunningham

A feature short story this—another of this author's Central American tales in which he has caught the romance of the Southern republics, the insidious languor they hold out for the unsuspecting Northerner—and the cold steel beneath the inviting soft surface.

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HULBERT FOOTNER presents Madame Storey in

THE BLACK ACE in the Issue of January 12th

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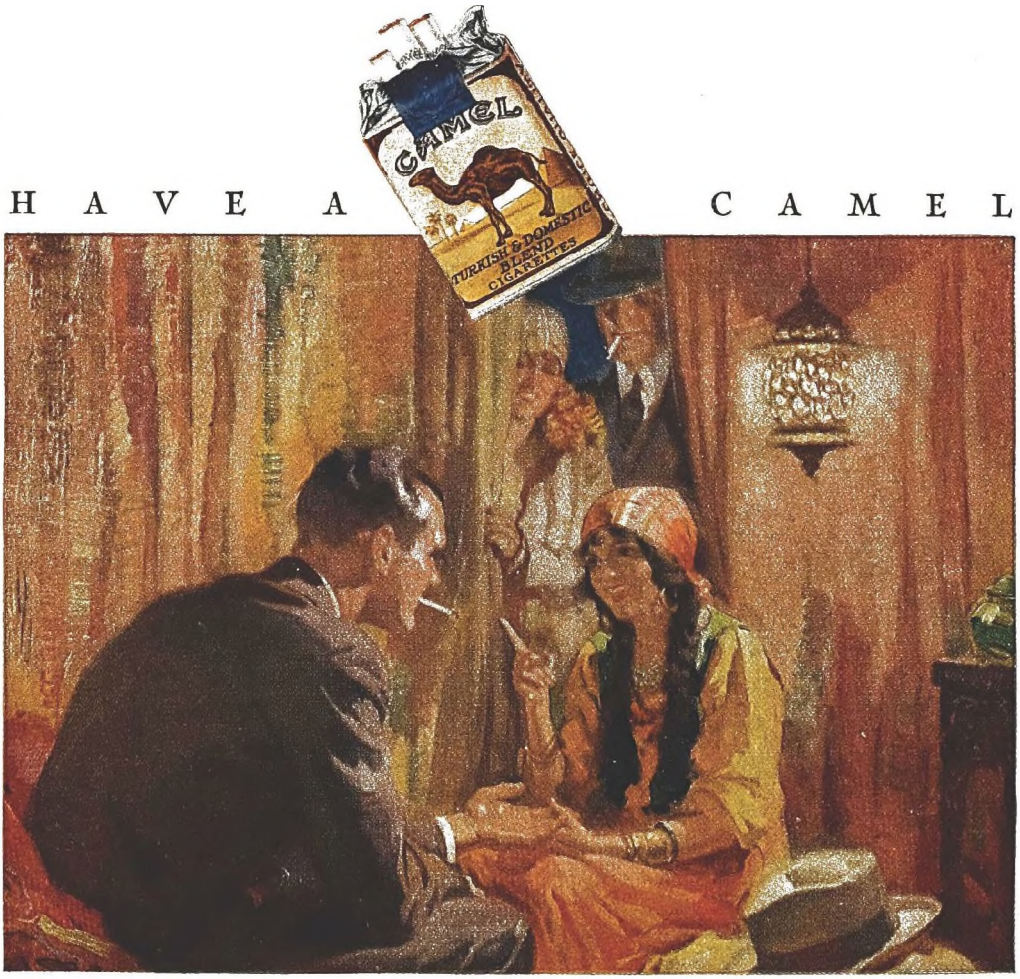

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