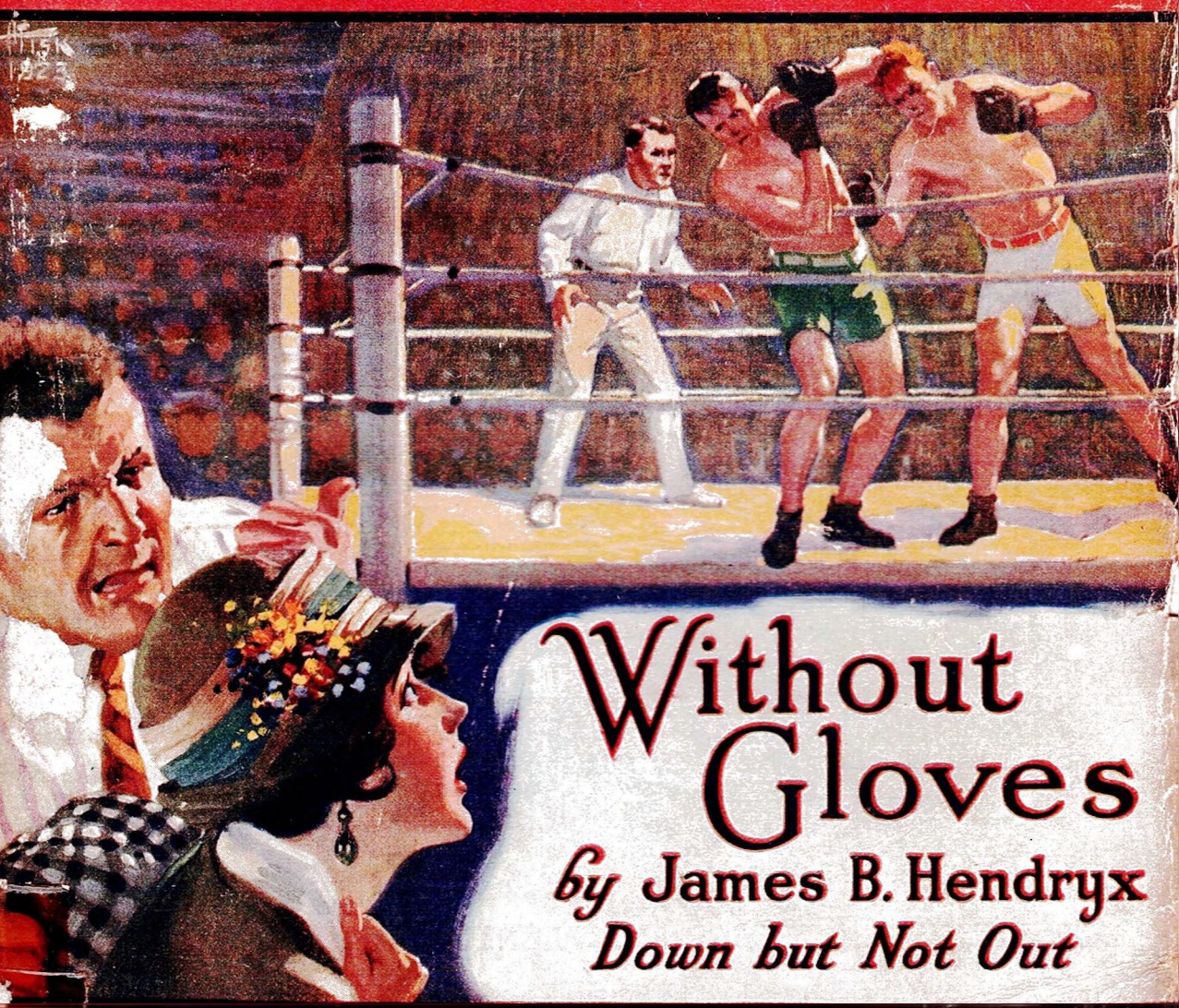
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Without Gloves

by James B. Hendryx

Down but Not Out

10¢ PER COPY — JULY 14 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

"PEACE AND PLENTY"

What one ingredient has done for better shaving

You see the benefit of Williams' in the finer, smoother faces of its users. With every shave, their skin is left soothed, soft, delightfully refreshed.

The help one ingredient gives

A certain ingredient in Williams' is responsible for this delightful skin-help that you get in every Williams' shave. With the help of this ingredient, Williams' lather softens your beard quickly, thoroughly, so that your razor cuts with ease. Then, because of it, your skin remains after the shave soft and cool, in ideal condition—truly benefited by the gentle effect of Williams'.

It is this marvelous skin care that makes Williams' different from any shaving soap you ever used.

Send for free trial tube

We invite you to shave for a week, or as much longer as the tube lasts, with a "Get Acquainted" tube of Williams' which we will send you free. Use the coupon below or send a post card.

For men who prefer the stick, Williams' Doublecap Stick (absolutely new) and Williams' Holder Top Stick (the original holder top stick) give the genuine Williams' in the most convenient stick forms.

THE J. B. WILLIAMS COMPANY

Glastonbury, Conn. Montreal, Canada

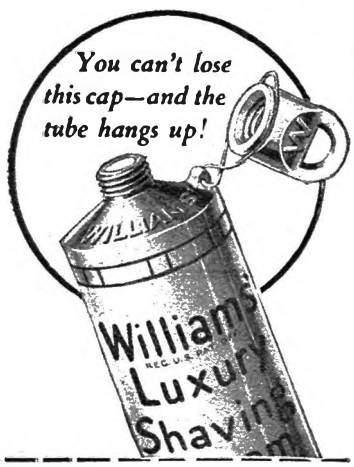
Williams' Shaving Cream

With the Hinged Cap you can't lose

Shave Free

For a week. See coupon below.

Here is an easy test to show you how good for your skin Williams' is. Send the coupon for a free tube of Williams'. Shave with it as long as the free tube lasts. Then observe your skin.



For Free "Get Acquainted" Tube

The J. B. Williams Company
Dept. 7, Glastonbury, Conn.

Send me the free "Get Acquainted" tube of Williams' Shaving Cream.

Name_____

Address_____

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLII | CONTENTS FOR JULY 14, 1923 | NUMBER 6

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

THE MYSTERY OF VOODOO MANOR

Another fascinating story

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

Author of "Ninety-Eight Degree Murder," "Exploits of Beau Quicksilver," etc.

A rich old lady, scornful of ill-omens, numbers her treasure room with the unlucky "13" and installs therein the coffin that some day is to claim her. For this mockery the dark forces of Superstition wreak a fearful vengeance.

THIS FOUR-PART SERIAL BEGINS NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

How YOU Can Make Money Writing Stories and Photoplays

By ELINOR GLYN

Author of "Three Weeks," "The Philosophy of Love," Etc., Etc.

FOR years the mistaken idea prevailed that writing was a "gift" miraculously placed in the hands of the chosen few. People said you had to be an Emotional Genius with long hair and strange ways. Many vowed it was no use to try unless you'd been touched by the Magic Wand of the Muse. They discouraged and often scoffed at attempts of ambitious people to express themselves.

These mistaken ideas have recently been proved to be "bunk" People know better now The entire world is now learning the TRUTH about writing. People everywhere are finding out that writers are no different from the rest of the world. They have nothing "up their sleeve;" no mysterious magic to make them successful. They are plain, ordinary people. They have simply learned the principles of writing and have intelligently applied them.

Elinor Glyn

Of course, we still believe in genius, and not everyone can be a Shakespeare or a Milton. But the people who are turning out the thousands and thousands of stories and photoplays of to-day for which millions of dollars are being paid ARE NOT GENIUSES.

You can accept my advice because millions of copies of my stories have been sold in Europe and America. My book, "Three Weeks," has been read throughout the civilized world, translated into every foreign language, except Spanish, and thousands of copies are still sold every year. My stories, novels, and articles have appeared in the foremost European and American magazines. For Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, greatest motion picture producers in the world, I have written and personally supervised photoplays featuring such famous stars as Gloria Swanson and Rodolph Valentino. I have received thousands and thousands of dollars in royalties. I do not say this to boast, but merely to prove that you can be successful without being a genius.

Many people think they can't write because they lack "imagination" or the ability to construct out-of-the-ordinary plots. Nothing could be further from the truth. The really successful authors—those who make fortunes with their pens—are those who write in a simple manner about plain, ordinary events of every-day life—things with which everyone is familiar This is the real secret of success—a secret within the reach of all, for *everyone* is familiar with *some* kind of life.

Every heart has its story. Every life has experiences worth passing on There are just as many stories of human interest right in your own vicinity, stories for which some editor will pay good money, as there are in Greenwich Village or the South Sea Islands. And editors will welcome a good story or photoplay from you just as quickly as from any well-known writer. They will pay you well for your ideas, too. Big money is paid for stories and scenarios to-day—far more than is paid in salaries.

I have shown hundreds of people how to turn their ideas into cash—men and women in all walks of life—the modest worker, the clerk, the stenographer, bookkeepers, salesmen, reporters, doctors, lawyers, salesgirls, nurses, housewives—people of all trades and temperaments.

One busy housewife, who didn't dream she could write, sold her first photoplay for $500.00. Janett Burrows, a Cleveland, Ohio, stenographer, followed my suggestions and earned over $4,500.00 in six months. Peggy Reidell, a clerk in Chicago, sold her first story for $250.00. One young man quickly sold three stories to Canadian magazines. The wife of an Ohio farmer sold an article to Woman's Home Companion and a story to The Farmer's Wife. **A Massachusetts housewife sold forty manuscripts in two years.** Just imagine how much she earned!

I believe there are thousands of other people like yourself, who can write much better stories and plays than many we now read in magazines and see on the screen. I believe thousands of people can make money in this absorbing profession and at the same time greatly improve present-day fiction with their fresh, true to life ideas. I believe this so firmly that I have decided to give some simple instructions which may be the means of bringing success to many who have not as yet put pen to paper. I am going to show YOU how easy it is when you know how!

Just fill out the coupon below. Mail it to my publishers, The Authors' Press, Auburn, N. Y. They will send you, ABSOLUTELY FREE, a handsome little book called **"The Short-Cut to Successful Writing."** This book was written to help all aspiring people who want to become writers, who want to improve their condition, who want to make money in their spare time. Within its pages are many surprises for doubting beginners; it is crowded with things that gratify your expectations—good news that is dear to the heart of all those aspiring to write, illustrations that enthuse, stories of success; new hope, encouragement, helps, hints—things you've long wanted to know.

"The Short-Cut to Successful Writing" tells how many suddenly realize they can write after years of doubt and indecision. How story and play writers began. How many rose to fame and fortune. How simple plots and ordinary incidents become successful stories and plays when correctly handled. How new writers get their names into print. How one's imagination properly directed may bring glory and greatness. How to WIN.

This book and all its secrets are YOURS. You may have a copy ABSOLUTELY FREE. You need not send a penny. You need not feel obligated. You need not hesitate for ANY reason. The book will be mailed to you without any charge whatever.

Get your pencil—fill out the coupon below. Mail it to The Authors' Press before you sleep to-night. This little act may be the turning point of your whole career. Who knows?

THE AUTHORS' PRESS, Dept. 21,
Auburn, N. Y.

Send me ABSOLUTELY FREE **"The Short-Cut to Successful Writing."** This does not obligate me in any way. (Print your name and address plainly in pencil.)

Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates In The Munsey Magazines:

	LINE RATE	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination line rate $4.00 less 2 per cent cash discount.
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

August 18th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close July 21st

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN TO SELL OUR all wool suits and extra pants at $28.50, $5.00 profit on each order. Fit and workmanship absolutely guaranteed. This is an opportunity for live wire salesmen and merchants to earn the largest profits. Write today for our large and attractive Fall & Winter swatch line. 250 all-wool samples. JAY ROSE & CO., Dept. A, 411 S. Wells St., Chicago.

Wonderful Seller. Big Profits. Harper's Ten Use Cleaning Set washes and dries windows, scrubs, mops, cleans walls, sweeps, etc. Complete set costs less than brooms. Can start without investing a cent. Write Harper Brush Works, 107 A St., Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS—CLEAN UP $100 WEEKLY WITH "NIFTY NINE", weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 30—40 sales daily frequently made; demonstrating outfit cinches order. 30 other coin-coaxers, all daily necessities. Postal brings our unique plans. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 58, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. CARNATION CO., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

TAILORING SALESMEN—Fastest selling line, suits, made to measure—$29.50—one price, all wool. Profits in advance. Biggest old reliable house. W. D. SMITH CO., established 1895, Dept. 21, Chicago.

AGENTS: $12 DAILY, easy introducing Ladies Summer Sweaters in silk and artificial silk; 12 colors. Latest novelties. Going like wildfire. You simply show samples we furnish; take orders; we deliver and collect. Your pay daily. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Form 1147, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—You can earn $30 cash extra every week during your spare time and get your own clothes FREE BESIDES, taking tailoring orders. We are the only house that pays you DOUBLE. No experience necessary. Real cloth samples will be sent FREE. Write today before you forget. SPENCER MEAD COMPANY, Dept. U-204, Chicago, Ill.

SELL MADISON "BETTER MADE" SHIRTS direct from our factory to wearer. No capital or experience required. Easily sold. Big profits. Write For Free Samples. MADISON MILLS, 503 Broadway, New York City.

Start And Operate Your Own Business and acquire financial independence. Openings everywhere. Either men or women. We furnish everything and show you how. Big explanatory book "The Open Door to Fortune" FREE. Ask for it now. National Scientific Laboratories, 12A, Richmond, Va.

AGENTS—$15 A DAY—EASY, QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-BB, Chicago.

HELP WANTED

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money. Great demand everywhere. Travel. Fascinating work. Make secret investigations. Experience unnecessary. Write, GEORGE WAGNER, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, payment after securing position. CSS, 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. WILSON METHODS, LTD., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

HELP WANTED—MALE

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. POSITIONS GUARANTEED AFTER 3 MONTHS' SPARE TIME STUDY OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30, STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

Firemen, Brakemen, Baggagemen, Sleeping car, train porters (colored). $140—$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 RAILWAY BUREAU, E. St. Louis, Ill.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

EARN MONEY AT HOME during spare time painting lamp shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING REPRESENTATIVES MAKE $65.00 and up weekly selling our line of made to measure suits and overcoats—$18.50 to $37.50 NO EXTRA CHARGE FOR LARGE SIZES, ETC. Send at once for our FREE sample outfit and make extra dollars that your efforts entitle you to. "OUR CLOTHES MAKE GOOD OR WE WILL." ATLAS TAILORING COMPANY, 215 So. Market Street, Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

GREATEST SENSATION! ELEVEN PIECE toilet article set selling like blazes at $1.75 with $1.00 dressmakers shears free to each customer. Spring rush on. FOSTER REID CO., 90 Winslow Bldg., Station C, Chicago.

AGENTS STOP WISHING—Work you can make $10 Daily selling Articles Everybody Needs. Particulars Free. Write B. & G. RUBBER CO., Dept. 320, Pittsburgh, Pa.

WONDERFUL INVENTION—Eliminates all needles for phonographs. Saves time and annoyance. Preserves records. Lasts for years. 12,000,000 prospects. $15.00 daily. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 712, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

ORANGEADE in Powder—just add cold water—most delicious drink you ever tasted. Fine for home, parties, Picnics, dances, etc. Send dime for ten glass pkg., or 50c for 7 kinds (70 big glassfuls) Cherry, Grape, Strawberry, etc., postpaid with particulars how to make **Big Money.** CHAS. MORRISSEY CO., 4417-29 Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

SELL SOMETHING NINE OUT OF TEN WOMEN WILL BUY because it saves double its cost the day it is bought. 50c each. $2.00 profit on $3.00 sales. PREMIER MFG. CO., Dept. 811, Detroit, Mich.

FORD GOES 66 MILES ON 1 GALLON GAS. Other makes do equally well. Wonderful new Vapor Humidifier. One sent FREE to Car Owner to quickly introduce. Give make car. WALTER CRITCHLOW, Suite 326, 716 Madison, Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

SEND ME YOUR SHORT STORIES AND PHOTOPLAY PLOTS. I'll Revise, Typewrite in proper technical form and place on the Market. Send manuscript or write H. L. HURSH, Dept. 4, 210 Muench St., Harrisburg, Pa.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write LITERARY BUREAU, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

CAMERAS AND SUPPLIES

SAVE ON CAMERAS & SUPPLIES. Liberal discounts. Why pay more than we ask? Send 5c for 192-page catalog. WEST VIRGINIA CAMERA CO., Kimball, W. Va., Dept. C.

AUTOMOBILES AND ACCESSORIES

USE INSYDE TYRES in your old casings and get from 3 to 5 thousand miles more service. Positively prevent punctures and blowouts. Used over and over again. Low priced. Big Money Saver. Agents wanted. Write for terms. AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO., B-701, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND OPPORTUNITY! 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only $10 to $50 down; bal. long time. Near hustling city in lower Mich. Investigate. Write today for free illustrated booklet giving full information. SWIGART LAND COMPANY, Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

These Are The Hours That Count

MOST of your time is mortgaged to work, meals and sleep. But the hours after supper are *yours,* and your whole future depends on how you spend them. You can fritter them away on profitless pleasure, or you can make those hours bring you position, money, power, *real success* in life.

Thousands of splendid, good-paying positions are waiting in every field of work for men *trained to fill them.* There's a big job waiting for *you*—in your present work or any line you choose. Get ready for it! You can do it without losing a minute from work, or a wink of sleep, without hurrying a single meal, and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it in one hour a day, right at home, through the International Correspondence Schools.

Yes—You Can Win Success in an Hour a Day

Hundreds of thousands have proved it. The designer of the Packard "Twin-Six," and hundreds of other Engineers, climbed to success through I. C. S. help. The builder of the great Equitable Building and hundreds of Architects and Contractors won their way to the top through I. C. S. spare-time study. Many of this country's foremost Advertising and Sales Managers prepared for their present positions in spare hours under I. C. S. instruction.

For 31 years, in offices, stores, shops, factories, mines, railroads—in every line of technical and commercial work—men have been winning promotion and increased salaries through the I. C. S.

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you.* No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

Make Your Start Now!

When everything has been made easy for you—when one hour a day spent with the I. C. S., in the quiet of your own home, will bring you a bigger income, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means—can you afford to let another single priceless hour of spare time go to waste?

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2199-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Foreign Trade
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Business Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Architect
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Blue Print Reading
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Plumbing and Heating
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Metallurgy ☐ Mining	☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Radio ☐ Airplane Engines	☐ Mathematics

Name.....
Street
Address..... 3-27-23
City..... State.....
Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Oh, You Skinny!

Why stay thin as a rail? You don't have to! And you don't have to go through life with a chest that the tailor gives you; with legs your body can hardly stand on. And what about your stomach that flinches every time you try a square meal? Are you a pill feeder?

Do you expect Health and Strength in tablet form—through pills, potions and other exploited piffle? You can't do it—it can't be done.

The only way to be well is to build up your body—all of it, through Nature's methods—not by pampering the stomach. It is not fate that is making you a failure. It's that poor emaciated body of yours; your half-sickness shows plain in your face, and the world loves healthy people. So be HEALTHY—STRONG—VITAL. That's living. Mention the ailments upon which you wish Special Information, using coupon below, and send with a 10c. piece (one dime) to help pay postage on my Special Talk on Thinness and my book, "Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy." Don't put it off—send for my free book Right Now—TODAY.

STRONGFORT
The Perfect Man

LIONEL STRONGFORT

Physical and Health Specialist

Dept. 479 **Newark, New Jersey**

— — — — CUT OUT AND MAIL THIS COUPON — — — —

FREE CONSULTATION COUPON

Mr. Lionel Strongfort, Dept. 479, Newark, N. J.—Please send me your book, "PROMOTION AND CONSERVATION OF HEALTH, STRENGTH AND MENTAL ENERGY," for postage on which I enclose a 10c piece (one dime). I have marked (X) before the subject in which I am interested.

.... Colds	.... Successful Marriage	.... Rheumatism
.... Catarrh	.... Impotency	
.... Asthma	.... Increased Height	.... Prostatitis
.... Hay Fever	.... Pimples	.... Falling Hair
.... Obesity	.... Blackheads	.... Weak Eyes
.... Fear	.... Insomnia	.... Gastritis
.... Headache	.... Short Wind	.... Heart Weakness
.... THINNESS	.... Diabetes	.... Poor Circulation
.... Rupture	.... Stomach Disorders	.... Skin Disorders
.... Lumbago	.... Constipation	.... Despondency
.... Neuritis	.... Biliousness	.... Round Shoulders
.... Neuralgia	.... Torpid Liver	.... Lung Troubles
.... Flat Chest	.... Indigestion	.... Neurasthenia
.... Deformity (Describe)	.... Nervousness	.... Muscular Development
.... Flat Feet	.... Poor Memory	.... Great Strength

Name .....

Age ..... Occupation .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE, LIMITED
Authorized Capital $1,250,000.00
72 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

Learn Music at Home!

SPECIAL SUMMER OFFER—Easy Lessons Free—Piano, Organ, Violin, Banjo, Mandolin, Guitar, Cornet, Harp, Cello, Singing, etc. You pay only for music and postage—which is small. No extras. Beginners or advanced pupils. Plain, simple, systematic. Twenty-five years' success. Start at once. Send for special summer offer, free booklet and sample lesson by return mail. Address U. S. School of Music, 727 Brunswick Building, New York City.

No Deposit

Just send your name, address and finger size, and we will send you this beautiful **genuine diamond, 14K solid gold ring** on approval. Send no money; pay no C. O. D. Merely accept the ring and wear it a week. Then decide—either return the ring and call the deal closed, or keep it and send only $3.75 a month until our cut price of $38.75 is paid. (Regular $50.00 value.)

Genuine Diamonds

Each ring is solid 14K green gold, with 18K white gold top, exquisitely hand engraved and set with a fine, large, extra brilliant, perfectly cut, blue-white **genuine diamond.** Order now—at once! Send name, address and finger size. Also kindly give your age and occupation and say whether you want ladies' or men's ring. Write today!

200 So. Peoria Street
HAROLD LACHMAN CO., Dept. B-227 Chicago, Illinois

20 SHOT 9.75 AUTOMATIC

32 Cal SPECIALLY PRICED

Send today sure while they last for this brand new improved 20 shot, 32 cal. automatic of the finest blue steel. 10 shots with extra magazine, making **20 quick, sure, shots** in all. Double safety. **Special at $9.75.**

Also brand new **25 cal. 7 shot** blue steel automatic at the unbelievably low price of **$6.95.**

Both guns shoot any standard automatic cartridge.

PAY POSTMAN ON DELIVERY PLUS POSTAGE

Money back promptly if Not Satisfied.

CONSUMERS CO., Dept. IAM, 1265 Broadway, N.Y.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

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PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. RICHARD B. OWEN, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278-J Woolworth Bldg., New York.

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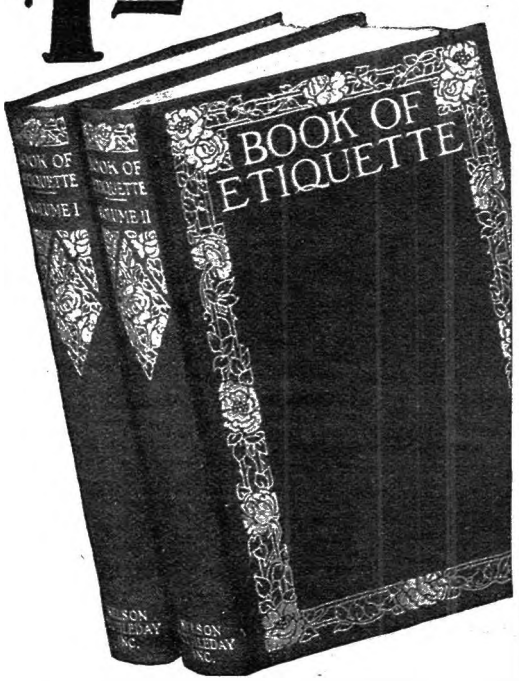
EARN $10 TO $15 PER DAY. Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Showcard Writing, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

MISCELLANEOUS

YOU read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read **your** message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe **your own services?** Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write **to-day** to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

Now Only $1.98



The Famous Book of Etiquette

An Amazing Bargain—Nearly Half-Million Sold at $3.50—Special Limited Offer at Only $1.98. Send Your Order Now.

THE Book of Etiquette needs no introduction. It is the recognized authority on the subject among people of culture, refinement and good breeding everywhere. It covers every phase of proper conduct and manners—at the wedding, dance, dinner, on the street, in the theatre—at all places and at all times. Nothing is omitted. It saves you from distressing embarrassments which arise at the most unexpected moments—gives you delightful ease, poise, confidence in yourself.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
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Without Gloves

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Snowdrift," "Prairie Flowers," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THUNDERBOLT LEONARD.

SHIRLY LEONARD, alias Thunderbolt Leonard, holding his cheap bathrobe loosely about him, walked rapidly down the short aisle and climbed through the ropes that bounded the raised platform, closely followed by Red Casey, burdened with certain impediments of the prize ring.

It was Thunderbolt's first appearance as a professional fighter, and he fervidly wished himself elsewhere. He was badly "rattled"—and the worst of it was he knew it.

"Sit down!" hissed a voice, and he glared into the face of Red Casey, as he settled himself upon the canvas stool that adorned his corner. He suddenly realized that he hated Red Casey. Red had got him into this. It was only for amusement that he had put on the gloves one night in the little Eureka Social Club across the river, and since that night, a little more than a year ago, Red Casey, professional trainer at the club, had seen to it that he appeared in the arena for a workout at least twice each week. One after another the amateurs of the club had gone down before him. Then the champions of other clubs had gone down.

In a flash, as he sat blinking in the gar-

ish light, it occurred to him that he had liked the game. With a sickening chill at the pit of his stomach, he wondered at the thrills his successive victories had given him—especially his knockout of Pat Kavanaugh, the lengthy champion of the Eagles. He recollected his first battle with Kavanaugh and the depths of despair into which the profane and abusive "bawling out" he had received from Red Casey had plunged him when the Eagle champ had earned the decision at the end of the sixth round, with him, Leonard, clinging desperately to the ropes. But this humiliation had been more than counterbalanced by the flush and thrill of the return match when, in the first minute of the first round, he had landed a swing that put the mighty Kavanaugh so soundly asleep that, had he been so minded, the referee could have counted ten thousand instead of the required ten.

It was after that bout that the fertile brain of Red Casey had substituted the name Thunderbolt as a suitable appellation for "a guy dat kin knock 'em cold in de foist." It was after that bout, also, that Casey had begun to press a point that he had previously only hinted at, namely, that young Leonard should quit driving truck for the Metropolitan Construction Company, and enter the list of professional fighters. He had listened to the glowing word pictures of Casey anent the rewards in fame and fortune that were waiting to shower themselves upon him. Under the spell of Casey's oratory the check for thirty dollars that was handed to him each Saturday by the cashier of the construction company dwindled to such piffling proportions that he became almost ashamed to present it for payment.

"T'irty bucks fer a week's woik!" scoffed Casey contemptuously, "w'en any amount of clubs is willin' to kick in wid a century fer an hour's woik in de ring! An' w'en dey find out w'at youse kin do dey'll be clawin' all over one anuder to slip youse a grand, an' 'tain't long before youse kin laugh at a grand."

Leonard listened, but held on to his job. Daily, as he hauled sand, gravel, lumber, and cement over the streets of the great city, his brain reverted to the glowing word pictures of Red Casey.

Came then a day of excessive heat, during the long hours of which he had handled many sacks of cement. Sweat poured from every pore to mingle with the cement that found its way through the bags and coated his clothing and skin with a gray mud that caked and chafed and irritated. It was Saturday, and that evening the fingers that folded the pay check were stiff and sore.

"Thirty case notes," he muttered, as he climbed stiffly from his truck in the garage. "An' Casey claims some one's waitin' to slip me a hundred fer punchin' some guy in the jaw!"

That night when he appeared at the Eureka Club, Casey swooped down upon him and hustled him into an alley behind a row of lockers. The trainer's eyes were shining, and as he talked, he prodded Leonard's ribs with a stiff forefinger: "I seen Dreyfus, to-day, an' we made a deal. He was over to the Eagle Club de night you paralyzed dat long stiff, Kavanaugh. An' he was at de ringside de night you put away de China Kid."

"Who's Dreyfus?" asked Leonard, indifferently, as he slowly opened and closed his fingers, stiff and sore from the gripping of cement sacks.

"Don't youse know who Bill Dreyfus is?" cried the horrified Casey. "De manager of de Bon Ton Athletic Club on East Houston Street! Well, w'en a guy gits a decision at de Bon Ton he's dere! An' if he kin git a knock-out—take it from me, kid, he ain't got to drive no more trucks! It's silk shirts, an' perfectos, an' manicure goils trimmin' yer fingers, instid of sweaters, an' de makin's, an' hang nails, reënforced wid concrete."

"What d'you mean?" asked Leonard.

"I mean youse is down to head de Bon Ton card two weeks from to-night! De Bon Ton don't put on nuttin' but pros. Dreyfus, he's one-two-t'ree wid Lefty Klingermann, an' dat means one-two-t'ree wid de bulls. It was lucky Dreyfus know'd me—an' luckier yet, he was lookin' fer a heavy to head his card!"

"I ain't in no shape to fight a pro," protested Leonard.

"Youse will be w'en I git t'rough wid youse. Monday youse start in trainin'. It ain't like youse was soft. A good woik-out every day fer de nex' two weeks, an' youse don't need to be afraid of no Bull Larrigan!"

"Bull Larrigan!" cried Leonard. "Me fight Bull Larrigan! Not what you'd notice, I don't! Me fer the truck!"

"Listen here." Casey thrust his face close to Leonard's. "Youse kin knock him stiff, kid. He's a has-be'n. Take it from me, Larrigan's gone — dere ain't nuthin' left but bull!"

"He's the fastest big man in the game." Casey interrupted. "I'm tellin' youse he ain't got nuttin' left behind his speed. Jab, hook—jab, hook—jab, hook—an' nuttin' behind 'em. Dis ain't no sparrin' fer points. De Bon Ton crowd wants knock-outs. All youse got to do is reach him wunst—jest wunst, an' it 'll be de shade of de old apple tree fer him. I know him. I'll show youse his game, an' how to block it. He can't hoit youse no matter where he lands. It's a pipe. All youse got to do is stall along an' wait fer de chanst to land on him. Den—bam! An' he's pickled."

"What's in it?" asked Leonard, with his eyes on the tips of his sore fingers.

"Two hundred fer de winner, an' a hundred fer de loser," explained Casey. "Two hundred bucks, dat 'ud be almost seven weeks of truck drivin', an' all youse got to do is train fer a couple of weeks, an' den climb t'rough de ropes an' git it."

"How much of the two hundred do you git?" asked Leonard. "An' besides, s'pose it's me that gits knocked fer the count, how much do you git out of the hundred?"

Casey laughed. "Jest whatever youse t'ink I'm wort'. It's dis way, kid. I be'n trainer fer some of de big uns in my time. I made good money, but I went too heavy on de booze, an' I blow'd it. I lose out half a dozen times 'fore I gits wise dat de booze is nix—an' den it's too late to hook on agin. Dey're afraid to give me a try, 'cause dey figger I can't stay off de booze. But, I be'n off it fer two years. I takes dis job 'cause it's de best I kin git—see? De foist time I seen youse stripped, I says to meself, 'Dere's a guy dat's built fer a champ, if he's got guts an' de head to match his build.' So I starts to woik on youse, an' it ain't long till youse begun puttin' 'em away. 'Course dey's all amachoors an' ain't no real fighters. But youse has got de head all right, an' de speed an' de punch. But—I'm tellin' it to youse fer yer own good, kid—dere's a streak of yeller in youse dat's got to come out 'fore you git anywheres. I've know'd it ever sence dat foist battle wid Kavanaugh, an' it's showin' now. Youse is afraid to fight Bull Larrigan—"

A flush of anger reddened the younger man's cheeks, and he was about to retort angrily, when Casey hastened on: "It ain't no use to git sore about it. Gittin' sore proves it's true. Guys don't git sore w'en you tell 'em t'ings about dereself dat's lies. It's w'en dey know it's de troot dey git sore. De yeller's dere, an' it's got to come out—like a rotten toot'. I git youse all right, an' I'm wise to de game.

"Ask any one about old Red Casey an' dey'll tell youse dere ain't no better trainer, an' dey'll tell youse Red took de count in de fight wid John Barleycorn—but he ain't. Kid, I'm as good now as I ever was—an' better. Give me de chanst to train youse—git holt of a good manager, an' youse 'll go clean to de top, er I don't know de game, w'ich I do. We'll t'row in togedder. Youse slip me w'at youse t'ink I'm wort'. W'en youse git a little money, youse kin slip me a little, an' w'en youse git more, I git more. If I ain't satisfied, I'll tell youse, an' if we can't fix it up, I'll quit an' git out. W'at do youse say?"

Young Leonard's big hand grasped the wiry hand of the trainer. "You're on, Red," he said with a rather sheepish grin. "An' you're right about me bein' scairt to fight Bull Larrigan. I am scairt—scairt stiff. An' I was scairt stiff in the ring with Kavanaugh. That's why I hit him so hard—I was scairt of him."

Red Casey grinned. "Don't I know it? An' youse is goin' to hit Bull Larrigan jest as hard—only youse has got to stall fer a few rounds foist. De sports wants to see a little fun fer dere money."

The following Monday morning Thunderbolt Leonard quit his job, and now, as

he sat under the arc light whose huge reflector shot its full glare down into the ring, he gazed helplessly over the blur of upturned faces and heartily wished himself elsewhere.

Red Casey moved about, close beside him, scrutinizing the lacings of a pair of gloves. Leonard glanced diagonally across the canvas covered floor to the empty stool in Larrigan's corner. The crowd was becoming impatient. Loud bawled calls for Larrigan, scattered at first, became more frequent and more vociferous. Leonard heard his own name mentioned, and realized that the crowd was "kidding" him. He swallowed, nervously, and shifted about on his stool.

The whispered words of Casey, speaking out of the side of his mouth, reached his ear: "Dat's w'at always happens to new guys, kid. Dey're tryin' to git yer goat. It's old stuff Bull Larrigan's pullin'—keepin' a new guy waitin' till de crowd gits his nanny. It shows Larrigan's scairt of youse. Watch him—he'll use all de tricks he knows. But youse has got w'at he ain't got, an' dat's de punch. Keep away from his rushes, an' wait him out. W'en de chance comes, knock him fer a gool, kid; knock him fer a—"

Red Casey's voice was drowned in a roar from the crowd, and glancing across the ring, Leonard saw a robed figure step through the ropes. The next moment the bathrobe was tossed to the floor, and Bull Larrigan stood in his green fighting trunks grinning at the crowd, which cheered, and jeered, and "kidded." Leonard's swiftly appraising eye took in the details of his opponent's figure at a glance; the short thick neck that supported a close-cropped, bullet-shaped head, with a heavy, undershot jaw, thick shoulders, and arms that showed muscles bunched into great knobs and knots; curly hair heavily matted upon a broad chest, and thick waist with a very perceptible roll of fat where the trunk string encircled the paunch. Instantly he recollected the words of Red Casey:

"He ain't built fer de speed he shows. De speed's in his head—it's forced speed—wait him out—an' w'en youse swing, swing hard."

Thunderbolt Leonard knew, in a dazed sort of way, that he was upon his feet, that the bathrobe had been stripped from his shoulders, and that a man was perfunctorily examining the tape bandages upon his hands. He heard his own name mentioned by a loud mouthed man who stood in the ring, and managed to duck his head in acknowledgment of the hand clapping and cheers of the crowd. He knew that Red Casey was tying on the gloves, and that he was again seated upon his stool.

Then a gong sounded, and he was upon his feet facing Bull Larrigan, who, instead of leaping halfway across the ring and boring in with a smothering rush, as Casey had predicted, was approaching cautiously, eyes narrowed, guard raised, and a sneering grin upon his lips. With Leonard still in a daze, the two half circled each other, when, without warning, Larrigan sprang straight in. In vain the younger man tried to guard the shower of blows that rained in on him. Before he knew it he was on the ropes, and instinctively he clinched.

As the blows showered upon him, Leonard's head cleared. This was what he had expected—what Casey had predicted. The clinch was broken, Larrigan rushed again, and again Leonard brought up with the ropes biting into his back. Again he clinched, hugging close till the referee once more broke them apart. There was a stinging at the corner of his eye, and Leonard realized that the warm trickle that tickled his cheek was blood. The crowd was roaring encouragement to Larrigan, whose third rush was stopped by the sound of the gong.

The first round was decidedly Larrigan's round.

The cold water felt good, and he returned Red Casey's look of solicitation with a grin. "I'll get him," he whispered, as Casey whipped the towel up and down before his face.

"Sure youse will," hissed Casey. "But, sting him a little dis round. Don't take all de punishment. Reach him now an' den, but guard an' stall till de fift' or sixt'. He'll slow up den, an' dat's de time—"

Gong!

Leonard was hardly upon his feet when

Larrigan was upon him in a savage rush that had carried him clear across the ring. The crowd was all Larrigan's now, and Leonard, cool as a cucumber, heard the words of approbation and encouragement that greeted the rush of the Bull.

"Eat him up!"

"Kill the dub!"

"Knock him through the ropes!"

To Larrigan's surprise, instead of meeting the rush with a futile guard, Leonard swiftly side-stepped and stung him with a well placed right to the jaw which, before the surprised Bull could put up his defense, was followed by a long left, and a short right jab that brought blood from his lips. The crowd, that a moment before had been howling for his life blood, now cheered Leonard, who continued to force the fighting, without, however, landing a blow. But the forcing was short lived, for, recovering himself, Larrigan rushed again, and this time succeeded in once more crowding the youngster into the ropes. The round ended with Leonard stalling, and the crowd again with Larrigan.

The third and fourth rounds were simply a series of rushes, with Leonard always on the defensive, and only now and then reaching his opponent with a well directed blow. But Larrigan knew what the crowd did not know: that each blow of Leonard's that landed, landed hard. He redoubled his efforts to smother the youngster and to get his nerve with the very speed of his hooks and jabs, with the result that each round ended with Leonard on the ropes struggling vainly to ward off the furious onslaughts.

The crowd was loud in its demands that Larrigan finish the bout with a knock-out. Thunderbolt Leonard was so palpably a dub that the fans felt aggrieved. Only at the ringside, a few of the wise ones, noting that between the rounds Larrigan's overheavy paunch worked spasmodically as he sucked the air into his lungs, and that at the end of each round he sprawled more heavily upon the ropes, withheld decision and hoped for that thrill that is dearest to the heart of the prize ring fan—the sudden and decisive rally of an apparently beaten man.

In his corner Larrigan heard the cries for a knockout, and he realized that he could deliver no knock-out. His hope of winning the decision rested upon two things—either the continuation of the bout to the end of the final round—the tenth—or his ability to make the youngster "lay down" by the ferocity of his rushes. Larrigan knew that this was Thunderbolt's first fight in the professional ring, and somewhere he had heard that at times the youngster had showed a streak of yellow. And it was to make him "lay down" that he had exerted himself to the utmost in the rushes. But the kid showed no signs of "laying down," and a dull rage burned in Larrigan's heart as he realized that the rushes were costing him dear.

At the beginning of the fifth, Larrigan forbore to rush. Toe to toe they indulged in a bit of sparring in which each landed harmless blows. Leonard, on his guard for the rush that did not come, suddenly realized that Larrigan was stalling for wind. Redoubling his effort, he forced Bull to the ropes, seeking in vain for an opening that would enable him to deliver a smashing blow to the jaw or the heart.

He tried for a long left to the jaw, his foot slipped, and the next instant his head rocked and he felt himself falling from a great height. A moment later he realized that he was lying upon his back, and that his gloved hands were clutching at the mat in a vain effort to keep from being whirled into space. Above him the hand of the referee was rising, falling. His ears caught the words—"three—four—five—"

He recovered his senses with a rush. He, Thunderbolt Leonard, was on the mat, and the referee was counting him out! He turned on his side and rose to his hands and knees—"seven—eight—"

He was upon his feet, his guard up, and Larrigan, with redoubled ferocity, was rushing him to the ropes. The gong sounded before he could clinch and as he sank onto his stool, he could hear the wild shouting of the crowd. The clammy cold of the wet ropes felt good as he stretched his arms along them and lay back while Casey fanned him with a towel.

"Look out fer him on de start, dis round,

kid—he t'inks he's got youse — git him, now—any time. He's about all in. Watch yer chanst, an' git him!"

Casey grinned and winked as the gong sounded, and with the roar of the crowd, Leonard met Bull Larrigan's rush. Good old Casey! The only man in the house who believed in him. He'd show 'em!

Feinting a side step, Thunderbolt drove a terrific left to the undershot jaw. The blow went high, landing squarely on the nose with a force that rocked the mighty Bull to his shoe soles. The rush stopped in a rapid exchange of close in-fighting, Larrigan blowing the blood that ran into his mouth from his flattened nose, so that it spattered and spotted the arms and chest of Thunderbolt with crimson.

The crowd went wild. The air was filled with a mighty roar of voices in which the name of Thunderbolt divided honors with the name of Larrigan. For the youngster was fighting now—fighting as he had never fought in his life. He could see what the crowd could not see, the peculiar glassy look in the eyes of Bull that is the look of a beaten man. He knew, also that Larrigan was slowing up.

A swing of his own missed its mark, and Larrigan's right crashed against his jaw. He knew that Larrigan had put everything he had into that blow, and the blow had failed even to jar. A moment later Larrigan's glove, catching fairly the blow it was to block, was driven back into his own face —he couldn't even guard! A punch just over the belt staggered Bull. His arms momentarily dropped, and in that moment a long left to the jaw followed a right to the heart, and Larrigan, his arms fanning the air like flails, his mouth open, and the lower half of his face showing in the glare of the light like a grotesque crimson mask, staggered backward against the ropes.

Wildly the man clutched the rope with one arm, as he sought to force a clinch with the other. Leonard easily avoided the clinch, carefully measured his distance, and landed on the point of the jaw. Bull Larrigan, sagging down the ropes, went peacefully to sleep upon the floor, while above him the arm of the referee slowly rose and fell for the tenth time.

As Thunderbolt crossed to the corner he heard his own name roared from a thousand throats, as the crowd milled and swarmed about the ringside and the exits. For crowds are ever fickle. An old hero had fallen, and the East Side had a new darling.

CHAPTER II.

ALL SET.

TOWARD the middle of the afternoon of the day following the fight, Dreyfus entered the door of the Eureka Social Club's gymnasium and was greeted by Red Casey. "Hello, Bill! How's every little t'ing goin' wid youse?"

"All right, I guess." Dreyfus ran an appraising eye about the room. "Nice place you've got here, Red."

"Well, it ain't so bad. 'Course it ain't no Bon Ton, nor nuttin' like dat. But, we manage to pay de rent, an' a few salaries, an' now an' den we got enough left to put in a little new 'quipments."

"What we take in over to the Bon Ton ain't what you'd call all velvet," answered Dreyfus dryly.

Red Casey grinned knowingly. "No, I s'pose Lefty Klingermann tends to dat."

Dreyfus nodded. "Um-hum, an it's Lefty, I come over to see you about."

"Lefty! Wot in de devil have I got to do wid Lefty Klingermann? He ain't got no strings on dis dump. You tell Lefty I says w'en we git ready to move de Eureka Club over to Union Market precinct, I'll come an' see him."

Dreyfus grinned. "I'll say you'd go an' see him, or he'd go an' see you—every once in so often—an' sometimes twice. But it ain't that—it's about Thunderbolt Leonard."

"T'underbolt! W'at about T'underbolt?"

"Lefty's took a notion he wants to manage him."

Red Casey stared incredulously at the speaker. "Manage T'underbolt!" he cried. "Yer crazy wid de heat! Wot in blue hell would dat grafter do wid a pug? Wot's his game? Talk to me, Bill. Put me wise."

"That's all I know. I'd kind of figured I'd like to take holt of him myself, if he showed anything last night. But Lefty come in after the bout was over an' said he was goin' to manage him, himself."

The wrath of Red Casey flared high. "Youse go back an' tell dat big fat slob of a kike dat I says to hell wid him!" Red stepped closer and lowered his voice. "Le'me give youse a tip, Bill. Dis here kid's a comer. But, he's got to be handled right. He's raw as a chunk of liver—but he's got de goods. Wid youse managin' him, an' me trainin' him, we'd put him to de top. I ain't t'rowin' de bull. Dat's straight goods. Youse go back an' tell Lefty to go chase hisself an' if he makes it too hot fer youse over dere, quit yer job an' come over here. You an' me, we kin put the kid clean to de top. An' w'en we do, de jobs we got now'll look like t'irty cents, Mex."

Dreyfus shook his head. "I'd like to do that the best in the world. But you don't know Lefty Klingermann like I know him. We wouldn't stand no show. He'd queer our game one way an' another. An' that ain't all. When he gits it in for a man there ain't no place he can go an' be safe. Remember Coxy Wesson?"

"De guy dat use'd to run de stuss joint on Rivington street?"

"That's him. Well, he tried to double-cross Lefty a while back. The bulls cleaned his dump out, but Coxy made a get-away. Well, last Thursday Coxy got bumped off—in Denver. An' Sunday a couple of gunmen sneaked back into town. That's Lefty."

Red Casey's brow wrinkled. "Does he know youse come over here to-day?"

Dreyfus nodded.

"Well, den day ain't no use talkin' about me an de kid slippin' out to Noo Orleans or Frisco, 'cause dat'd leave youse here, an' he'd know youse double-crossed him, an' it wouldn't do no good fer youse to go along, 'cause if he got Coxy, he'd git youse. Looks like we got to play de game wid his chips. I don't like it."

"Maybe it won't be so bad," said Dreyfus. "Lefty's got plenty of jack. An' he seems hell-bent on bringin' out a champ. There's one thing about Lefty, when he gets a notion in his head he'll ride it, no matter what it costs. I don't think he wants to break into the game for what money's in it. He's got a notion he wants to manage a champ. We might do worse than set in the game with him,"

Casey made a wry grimace. "Might's well claim we kin, seein' dere ain't no udder way. But how do youse figger us bot' in on de jack? Youse is a trainer, an' so am I. Lefty, he ain't goin' to hire two trainers, is he?"

Dreyfus grinned. "No, Red, you can do the training. Don't worry about me. I'll get mine. The Bon Ton is going to be the training quarters for the new champ, an' most of his fights will be fought there. Then Lefty promised to ease up about fifty per cent on—collections."

A form darkened the door, and Casey motioned him to join them. "Here's T'underbolt, now," he whispered, "we'll see what he says."

Thunderbolt nodded to Dreyfus, and greeted Casey with a grin. "Framin' up another match?" he asked, "bring 'em on. I need the jack."

"No, we ain't dopin' out no match," explained Red, "we're dopin' out a manager. We got a proposition. Say, kid, do youse know who wants to manage youse? Well not no one but Lefty Klingermann, hisself!"

"Who's Lefty Klingermann?"

"Dey ain't no one on de East Side couldn't tell youse who Lefty is. He's de devil, an' president, an' congress, an' fire department, an' de police, an' de mayor all rolled in one bundle an' stuffed inside a silk shirt. He's de guy dat lets de wheels go round on de East Side. He's de King of Union Market. He's de guy dat pays de bulls. An' he wants to manage youse. He set at de ringside las' night, an' to-day he sends Dreyfus over to git youse."

An avaricious gleam flashed in the young man's eyes. "What's in it?" he asked.

Dreyfus answered, "He didn't mention no terms. He wants you should come over to the Bon Ton to-night an' talk it over. There'll only be him, an' me, an' you, an' Red. Nine o'clock, in my office."

Thunderbolt turned to Red. "How about it?" he asked.

Casey looked up into the fighter's face. "Dey ain't no use beatin' de devil around de stump," he said. "It's like dis: If youse is out fer de jack, an' lookin' fer de easiest way to git it, I'd say sign up wid Klingermann. Dey ain't no one goin' to buck him. Chances is youse'll win all yer fights, an' pull down a lot of jack. But, if youse wants to hammer yer way to de top, lickin' de men youse kin lick, an' gittin' licked by de ones dat kin lick youse, an' takin' chances on not drawin' down much jack at first, den keep away from Lefty. One way, youse git a long ways up wid t'ings all fixed fer youse—an' maybe he's big enough to put youse clean over. Championships has be'n fixed before now."

Thunderbolt grinned. "I'll say I'm out fer the jack—an' I don't care how I git it. The easier, the better. What kind of a damn fool would I be to throw over a chanst to git to the top easy, an' make plenty of jack doin' it, in order to hammer my way to the top an' gittin' hell hammered out of me, an' gittin' paid less for it than the other way?"

He turned to Dreyfus. "Where's this here Lefty guy? Lead me to him!"

And so it was arranged, after much dickering, that Lefty Klingermann should take over the management of Thunderbolt Leonard, with Casey as trainer. As a sop to Dreyfus, the Bon Ton Club was designated as training quarters, and its ring was to be the stage for the more important of Leonard's fights.

The following morning the coming pugilist and his trainer took lodgement, at Klingermann's suggestion, in the Avenue Hotel, and Leonard became a personage in the immediate neighborhood.

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRL IN THE DOMINO MASK.

FOUR weeks later, in the ring of the Bon Ton Athletic Club, Thunderbolt knocked out one Hammer Hamlin, of Harlem, who took the count in the fourth. The following evening Klingermann in full dress and in genial mood, invited Thunderbolt, Casey, and Dreyfus to dine with him at an expensive up town hotel.

Over the cigars and black coffee the manager waxed prophetic. "We're goin' to put you clean to the top, kid. There ain't nothin' to it. The way you handled your mitts last night didn't look like the same guy that almost let old Bull Larrigan smother him in the same ring four weeks ago. An' you was there with the foot work, too. That Harlem bird never had a show from the tap of the gong. Us four is a combination they can't beat. I guess I didn't make no mistake when I picked out old Red, here, for a trainer. A lot of wise guys would said I was a fool. Little Lefty's be'n played fer a fool before now, but the guys that done the playin' always lit wrong end up at the finish. Ain't that right, Dreyfus?"

"That's right," agreed Dreyfus. "Playin' you for a fool is like playin' a sellin' plater to win a sweepstakes."

"As I says a minute ago, us four is a combination they can't beat. But there's one thing that's got to be changed."

Three pairs of eyes searched the speaker's face as, with a flourish, he drew a pair of tortoise shell rimmed eyeglasses from his pocket and affixed them to the bridge of his nose. Picking up a newspaper which lay folded with the sporting news outermost on the table beside him, he leaned forward, and indicated with a pudgy forefinger, a column headed "In the Squared Circle."

"You all seen the papers, so I don't have to read this piece where it tells about our card down to the Bon Ton, an' how the feature of the evenin' was you knockin' out Hammer Hamlin, an' how it says it's understood you is under the management of Lefty Klingermann, the well known East Side politician. But, that ain't what I'm gittin' at. It goes on down an' gives the fights at other clubs. Here's where Knockout Brady wins over Kid Johnson, an' Sailor Hall gets a decision over Tiger Keller, an' so on down the line.

"They wasn't none of 'em big fights, an' most of the pugs is guys that ain't known

out of their own precinct. An' all of 'em fightin' under some big soundin' moniker. It's Thunderbolt, an' Hammer, an' Sailor, an' Knockout, an' Kid, an' Tiger, an' Bull. That's all right as long as these guys are fightin' around in clubs, but it don't go with the top notchers. Think back over the big boys that's be'n champs. Jake Kilrain, John L. Sullivan, Jim Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, Jim Jeffries, Jack Johnson—every one of 'em fightin' under a regular honest-to-God front name. It's only the little guys that don't never git nowheres that fights under them nicknames. What we're goin' to do is can this ' Thunderbolt ' stuff. What's your regular name?"

" Shirly Leonard."

" Shirly!" cried Klingermann. " That's a hell of a name fer a pug! Ain't you got no other one?"

" No—that's all," grinned the other. " That's why Casey changed it to Thunderbolt."

" Well, Shirly ain't no fightin' name, an' Leonard ain't none too good. While we're changin', we might's well make a job of it. You can't fight under that name no more than what Kid McCoy could of fought under the name of Norman Selby. We've got to dope out a new name."

" My mother's name was Duffy," ventured Leonard, " An' her old man's name was Mike."

" There you are! Mike Duffy! There's a name with a punch! Shirly Leonard couldn't never be no champ, but Mike Duffy's goin' to be. An' now that's settled, how about me tryin' to git a match with Knockout Brady for next month?"

The fight with Brady was arranged. With the introductions came the announcement from the ring that hereafter Thunderbolt Leonard would fight under the name of Mike Duffy. The announcement was met by applause, for the youngster had already become a favorite with the Bon Ton fans. Whereupon, in a spectacular exhibition, during which each contestant fought furiously until the end of the eighth round, when Brady suddenly collapsed on the ropes, the youngster vindicated the interest of his following.

During the next eight months Duffy added seven victories to his record, and thus became the man most to be reckoned with among the local heavies. Sporting writers took him up. His photographs in ring costume, showing his well known " fighting face," appeared in Sunday sport gossip sheets, and letters began to pour in upon Klingermann offering matches with pugs of more than local fame.

By this time Mike Duffy had become the social lion of Union Market precinct. His popularity as a fistic star, together with the fact that he was a protégé of Lefty Klingermann, gave him a standing in the community enjoyed by few others. He purchased raiment commensurate with his position, and tonsorially he blossomed like the rose. At the periodical social club and gang dances Mike Duffy, with his pink-necked hair cut, and his highly polished finger nails, was the envied recipient of the adoring glances and flaunted blandishments of the feminine underworld.

But to the wiles and blandishments of the sirens the erstwhile truck driver gave no heed. So that not by virtue of so much as honeyed word or look could any moll among them claim prestige over any other. Which was a fact that gave Lefty Klingermann such secret satisfaction that he broached it one day to Casey. But the trainer shook his head.

" Dey all falls fer a skirt sooner or later," he said, " an' believe me, when the kid falls, he'll fall hard."

The worldly wisdom of this prophecy was demonstrated toward the tag end of the winter when, at a masked ball in a little street just off the Bowery, Duffy met Lotta Rivoli. From the moment the domino mask dropped and he found himself staring speechless into the face of the sloe eyed Cleopatra from Sullivan Street, Duffy was hooked. The eyes that returned his stare held hint of demure reproach, and the cherry red lips suggested a pout: " What's the matter, you big, strong boy—don't you like me?"

" Like you!" Mike Duffy's voice was husky, and he knew that the words were uttered scarce above a whisper. " Say, kid —them eyes—an' lips—are they real?"

The pout became a smile. White teeth

gleamed between curving red lips, and in the black eyes was a glint, deep down.

" Oh, yes—they are much real—as real as the strong muscles I could feel in your arms as we danced. And I know you, too. In the paper I saw it only last week—the picture of you in the little trunks, and the fighting gloves on your hands. But your face—so cross it looked! You must not ever look at Lotta like that. I shall be afraid—so terrible. Are you not Mike Duffy, the great fighter?"

" You've got me right, kid—Lotta—that's a swell name. But you ain't got nothin' on me. I know you, too. Not your name; but I've saw you somewheres, an' talked to you, in dreams."

A low gurgle of laughter rippled the white throat, and the dark eyes mocked: " It is some one else you know. I am not a girl of dreams. I am too—too—alive! And in the dark I am afraid."

" It's you, all right! There ain't no other one. Say, it's hot in here. We don't want to dance no more. Let's go."

" Go—where?" The dark eyes glowed, and the red lips parted alluringly.

" Anywheres—away from here. I know a place. We'll have a feed—an' talk."

" I, too, am tired of the dance and hungry. In five minutes you shall meet me at the door—downstairs."

The next moment she was gone.

In a daze, Mike Duffy recovered his overcoat and hat, and in the cool hallway outside the door he paused under a mantled gas jet and struggled into them. In the dimly lighted lower hall the wait seemed interminable.

Duffy paced up and down, pausing at each turn, and listened for the sound of footsteps upon the bare stairs.

" She ain't comin'," he muttered. " She was jest kiddin' me along. Maybe her pardner got next—damn him! I'll kill him!"

With fists clenched inside his overcoat pockets, he began the ascent of the stairs. A low laugh rippled from the gloom above, and a rich, low pitched voice sounded close in his ear:

" So fierce! I am afraid. And who is it you shall kill?"

The girl of the domino mask was beside him upon the stairs, and grasping her almost roughly by the arm, he hurried her down the few remaining steps and out into the street.

" Do not hold my arm so tight—you are hurting me," she said. " And you have not told me—who is it you would kill, and why?"

Duffy smiled rather sheepishly as he released her arm.

" I—I thought some guy had stopped you from comin' downstairs—the guy you come with, or—" He ceased speaking abruptly, and peered searchingly into her face. " Say, kid, who did you come to the dance with? You ain't—married?"

The low, throaty laughter held a tantalizing note, and the dark eyes mocked: " Why do you care? Sometimes one marries too young. One does not know. And sometimes one puts it off too long. That which has passed is gone. And that which is to come, we do not know. It is only now we live. So, why do you care?"

The bitter March wind, whipping around the corner, struck the two muffled figures and held them in their tracks as they attempted to turn east on Houston Street. Instantly Duffy's arm was about the girl's waist, and he drew her back into the shelter of the building. For an instant he held her close while his breath came fast. With her muffed hand against his breast, she drew away. Even as he released her, he caught a look of wondrous softness in the depths of the dark eyes—and the red lips smiled.

A row of taxis, their hoods swathed in robes, stood along the opposite curb in anticipation of patronage from the dance. The drivers, muffled to the ears in huge coat collars, stood humped in the lee of their cars or stamped up and down the sidewalk.

At a shrill whistle from Duffy, the robes disappeared from a hood, and with the roar of a motor a cab detached itself from the line and swung to the curb before the two waiting figures. Handing the girl inside, Duffy gave the driver a number, and the next moment was seated beside her upon the cushions.

She had settled herself into the corner, with head thrown back and eyes closed, and, despite her rich, dark complexion, her face looked almost marble white in the dim light of the street lamps. A white hand lay ungloved upon the seat beside him, and as he took the hand soft, warm fingers closed about his own.

It seemed to Duffy as though the girl must certainly hear the wild pounding of his heart. He spoke aloud, as though no interval had elapsed since her last words; and in his own ears his voice sounded strangely gruff:

"I don't care! I don't care—a damn!"

His arms were about her, but with a half muffled cry of protest she pushed him away.

The taxi swerved sharply into Avenue A, and a few moments later drew up in front of a garishly lighted café, a few doors below the Avenue Hotel. The door opened, and Duffy assisted the girl to alight. Slipping a dollar bill into the driver's hand, he followed her across the sidewalk. At the door of the café the girl turned abruptly and, hufriedly recrossing the sidewalk, entered the taxi.

Duffy stared after her in surprise. Then his glance swept the brilliantly lighted interior of the building. Midnight diners were grouped here and there at small tables. At a table well forward two men sat, and as Duffy looked one of them was slowly settling himself into his chair from which he had evidently half risen. The other man's hand rested in evident restraint upon his arm. The eyes of both were upon the door through the glass panels of which his own face showed chagrin and bewildered surprise.

As he turned and followed the girl, a puzzled frown wrinkled his forehead. The man who had half risen from his chair was Lefty Klingermann. The other was Red Casey.

By the time he reached the door of the taxi the girl had completely recovered her poise, if indeed she had ever lost it.

"What's the matter, kid?" asked Duffy, thrusting his head into the interior.

The girl laughed. "Oh, it's nothing. Only I don't like that place. A long time ago—more than a year—I one night sat at a table, and there was a fight, and I saw a man stabbed so that he fell dead on the floor. I rushed out from there screaming, with many others, and I have never been in there since. I could not go in there and eat. Always I would see that man lying dead on the floor, and the red blood upon the tiling."

"I heard about it," answered Duffy. "Some dago row, wasn't it?"

"Yes, the man who was killed was a—dago."

"But why didn't you tell me before, an' I'd of took you somewheres else? I eat here regular. It's a swell dump, an' they feed you good."

"I didn't know where we were to go till I got to the door." She paused and the smoldering dark eyes were fixed half timidly upon his face. "I was thinking about—something else."

Duffy was beside her upon the seat.

"Where'll we go?" he asked. "Anywheres you say."

"I know a place—uptown. Let us go there. It is quiet, and I can forget this so horrible place."

She gave him a number which he repeated to the driver. The door closed, and the car drew smoothly away from the curb.

In the little chop house, far from Avenue A, the two sat long over black coffee at the conclusion of their meal. For the most part, the man talked and the girl listened, now and then interrupting with a question or a suggestion that drew out the greater share of his life's history, and more particularly his record in the ring and something of his ambition.

More than once she surprised him with some pertinent remark upon matters pugilistic, which betrayed a thorough and deep rooted knowledge of the inside working of the game.

"I don't get you, kid!" he exclaimed suddenly, in reply to a suggestion that his trainer pay some attention to developing his left along other lines than an uppercut. "How do you know I ain't got nothin' in my left but that uppercut? How do you know I could of floored Brady sooner by keepin' him away an' forcin' him to fight

long range? Where do you get this dope, anyhow? Who are you? You ain't even told me yer name, except Lotta."

Laughter rippled from the girl's curved lips.

"It is because I like to read about the fights and about the fighters. It is not only the men who read about such things. I know about many fighters—why some are strong, and why others are weak. If they would let a woman in, I would go and see them all, for I would rather see them than to picture them from the stories of the reporters.

"But you ain't told me yer name. An' where do you live?"

"My name is Lotta Rivoli. And now we shall finish the coffee, and you shall take me home."

"What's yer graft, kid?" asked Duffy abruptly, a few minutes later, as the taxi he had summoned skirted the park.

"Graft?" The dark eyes looked puzzled for a moment, then lighted in a swift smile. "Oh, yes—I know. You mean, how do I earn my living? I am—an artist."

The car turned into Eighty-Fourth Street, and a few moments later drew up to the curb before a modest apartment house.

"It is here that I live. And now, good night. No, no! You shall not kiss me—please! Some time, may be—when you have the right. Why—you and I—we hardly know each other."

"I've told you all there is to tell about me, kid. An' that's the truth. An' about you—you can tell me or not. It won't never make no difference. I'll marry you to-morrow—to-night, if you say so."

The light from the street lamp caused the man's eyes to gleam with intense brightness in the semidarkness of the car's interior, and with a rippling laugh the girl freed herself from the arm that half encircled her waist.

"I must go now," she said. "We shall meet again—some time."

"Can't I come to see you here?"

"Perhaps. Who can tell? Good night."

And before Duffy realized that she had gone he found himself alone in the taxi, and from beyond the sidewalk came the sound of the closing of a door.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT TO TRENTON.

AT a conference in the brilliantly lighted Avenue A café that had lasted until midnight, Klingermann and Red Casey, with numerous offers, challenges and defis before them, had been endeavoring to map out a campaign that would place Mike Duffy in position to challenge the holder of the heavyweight championship. To Klingermann the road looked easy, but Red Casey was cautious.

"We've got to go slow, Lefty," he warned, in reply to Klingermann's demand that they accept a challenge from Cincinnati, to be followed a month later by a bout with a Chicago aspirant.

"What d'you mean—go slow? This here Cincy guy ain't never showed nothin' better'n a lot of 'em the kid has knocked out, has he? An' this here packin' house pet from Chicago—he might be a little stronger than anything the kid's tackled, but by that time he'd ought to be able to handle him. What we want is about three good fights leadin' up to Kid Morowitz. An' then if we can put Morowitz on ice, we can go after the big fellow."

"Ye're spacin' 'em along too fast, Lefty," cautioned the trainer. "De kid 'll go stale. 'Cordin' to you, we'd ought to take on Morowitz dis comin' fall."

"That's it."

Casey shook his head.

"Kid Morowitz ain't goin' to be no easy bird to handle. Take it from me, Lefty, he could right now knock de champ fer a gool. I look fer him to hook up wid de champ nex' winter, an' if we lay off, an' de champ licks him, dat 'll clear de decks for us wit'out fightin' Morowitz; an' if Morowitz wins de belt, we can go after him about a year from nex' fall."

"To hell with a year from nex' fall!" exclaimed Klingermann impatiently. "It's all right for you to string yer job out as long as you can, but how about me? It's little Lefty that's puttin' up the jack."

"You should worry about de jack! Dere's always plenty more w'ere dat come from. I wisht I got mine as easy as w'at you do. Take it from me, Lefty: you better play safe, like I says."

Lefty Klingermann leaned forward impressively and lowered his voice so that the trainer had to lean close to listen.

"I got a card in the hole that you don't know nothin' about—an' believe me, she's an ace. I was over to Philly for a couple of days. I didn't go there for nothin' else but jest to see Jack Keen, Morowitz's manager. I seen him, an' Morowitz too. If we can win three fights this summer, they'll take us on in October. An' Mike Duffy wins with a knockout!"

"Wat's de price?" asked Casey.

"Morowitz takes on the St. Paul boy in August. If he wins with a knockout, it 'll cost me more than if he don't. We didn't talk figures. There's time for that later. Whichever way it goes, it 'll cost enough. Keen's out for the jack, all right."

"Well," said Casey thoughtfully, "you know yer business better'n w'at I do, but, at dat, I'd sooner see de scrap put off fer a year, an' den pulled on de level. I b'lieve Duffy could win."

"Can that stuff. What I want is a champ. An' I don't give a damn how I get him. The quickest way's the best way. When Duffy wins the belt, your salary doubles, so the quicker the sooner, for you, too."

Klingermann paused abruptly and stared at the door, where the faces of a man and a girl showed through the glass panels.

Casey's eyes followed his glance, and a moment later the girl turned swiftly, and, hurrying across the sidewalk, stepped into a waiting taxi. Klingermann half rose from his chair as the man turned to follow the girl, but the hand of Casey restrained him.

"Did you see who it was?" asked Klingermann, a frown wrinkling deeply his fat forehead.

Casey nodded. "Yes. Dago Lottie an' Duffy."

"How'd you know her? She ain't be'n around here since you have."

"No, I ain't saw her fer couple of years. She use' to be Bull Larrigan's skirt."

"Yes, an' when Bull hit the toboggan she quit him. Do you know where she's be'n lately?"

"No."

"She's be'n in Philly. Hooked up with Kid Morowitz. Believe me, I was glad when she kissed this precinct good-by. She is a gold digger, all right. I'd rather mix it up with the devil himself than her. An' now she's back!"

"You talk like yer was afraid of her," grinned the trainer.

"I'll say I'm afraid of her! The man that ain't's a fool!"

"I mus' be a fool, den. I ain't never be'n afraid of no woman yet. You leave her to me. If she gits to buzzin' around de kid too strong, I'll slap her face an' send her home. What's her game? Put me wise."

The look that Klingermann bent upon the trainer was a blending of pity and scorn.

"When you feel like slappin' some one's face, Red, you'd better jest slip around to some of the hangouts an' pick you out a couple of good live gunmen, an' try it on them. You might get away with that—but not Dago Lottie. You want to know what her game is. I'll give you a line on what she's done, an' I can tell you what she's tryin' to do.

"Her name's Lottie Rivoli, an' her father runs a fruit store somewheres over on Sullivan Street. But there wasn't no 'sella de banan'' for Lottie. She started in young an' got to be one of the smoothest dips in the business. Her specialty was bag openin', an' that took her into the shoppin' districts, where she soon got to be queen of shoplifters.

"She was too smart for the store dicks, an' they knew it. So, one by one, she made deals with 'em—that is, through them, with the management of the store. I'll bet she's right now on the pay roll of twenty big stores in this town, an' prob'ly as many more in Philly, as a member of the detective force, which means that they're payin' her a salary to stay away from their stores.

"A couple of years ago, or more, she married Nick Gorno. They lived around the corner, a couple of squares from here.

Nick was a clever counterfeiter some of the time, an' a gunman all the time. There was a gang war on, an' one night while she was sittin' at a table with him he was bumped off, right here in this room.

"After that Lottie played up to Bull Larrigan. Bull was a headliner then, but when he began to skid she quit him. By that time the fight game had kind of got into her blood. She's hell bent on bein' a Mrs. Champ. When she quit Bull she picked out Kid Morowitz. She's a smooth one, an' she ain't takin' no chances. She'll never marry him till he's won the belt. When Jack Keen got holt of the kid an' took him over to Philly, she went along, an' believe me, there was plenty of us not over a thousan' miles from here that was good an' damn glad to see her go.

"I tried to make her kick in wunst, same as the rest of the dips, but before we was through it cost me money—an' Lottie had the jack. Just when things is goin' good, up *she* pops! She's too hot fer me."

A slow grin overspread the face of the trainer. Klingermann frowned.

"I don't see nothin' funny about it. You'll be laughin' out of the other side of yer mouth time you know her as good as I do."

"She's a swell looker," muttered Casey. "If a guy was to fall fer her, he'd be apt to fight like hell to hold her, wouldn't he?"

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean, dese here gold diggers is like rats on a sinkin' ship. She quit Bull Larrigan w'en he hit de toboggan—an' now, if she's quit Morowitz, w'at's de answer?"

"You don't mean Morowitz is—through?"

"I ain't sayin' he is, or he ain't. He fights a week from to-night over to Trenton. I guess I'll jest slip over dere an' look him over. 'Cause if he's slowin' up, de quicker we git to him de better—'fore some one else beats us to it."

Klingermann nodded. "That's right. We'll take on these other guys an' put 'em away one after another, an' take Kid Morowitz on in the fall. If Dago Lottie has quit him an' figgers on throwin' in with Duffy, she might slip us some good inside stuff on the Kid. That would make it cheaper when we come to deal. She'd do anything to hook up with a champ. But, believe me, it's dangerous business, tryin' to make use of Dago Lottie."

"Not w'en we bot' got our money on de same card. If she's smooth as you say, she damn well knows she's got to t'row in wit' us."

"Yes, an' double cross us without battin' an' eye, if she seen where she could make by it—same as she's prob'ly double crossin' Kid Morowitz right now. I wisht she'd stayed out of it, but seein' she didn't, we got to make the best of it. Good night. See you to-morrow."

For a week after the night of the masked ball, Mike Duffy haunted the flat on Eighty-Fourth Street, but all to no purpose. He called in the evening, and in the afternoon, and once even in the morning, but the door never opened to his ring, and in desperation he even made inquiry of the janitor's wife, but the only information he could get out of her was that the lady who leased the apartment was a "Cuban" or "Spanish lady," who was hardly ever there.

His work that week was perfunctorily performed, and Casey noted that the youngster was morose and irritable. Whereupon he invited Duffy to accompany him to Trenton to see the mill between Kid Morowitz and the Frisco Wonder.

At the ringside Duffy watched every move as the contestants battled on for the full ten rounds. For he knew that the time was coming when he would have to fight the Philadelphia boy and secretly he feared him. In vain he sought for manifestation of the much talked of ring generalship of the near champ and for the terrific surprise punch that had put many an adversary to sleep before bedtime. What he saw was an exceptionally good exhibition of boxing which lasted the full ten rounds, during every one of which Kid Morowitz had undoubtedly the best of it. Duffy saw the much touted fighter pass up two chances and fail in half a dozen attempts at a knockout, and also, he saw him rocked to his heels by a right to the jaw in the eighth.

"How'd he look to youse, kid?" asked

Casey as the two waited at the ringside for the crowd to thin in the aisles. "If youse had be'n in de ring wid him to-night dey'd of carried him out. If de Frisco Wonder had followed up w'en he had him goin' in de eight', he'd of got him."

"Maybe Morowitz wasn't showin' all he had," replied Duffy, doubtfully. Then, vanity overshadowing for a moment the yellow streak the old trainer knew was there, he added: "But yer right, Red; if I'd of be'n in the ring in the eighth, I'd of et him up."

Casey nodded emphatically. "Sure, youse would. I guess Lefty's right. Kid Morowitz is about done. It's up to youse to git him. An' de quicker we git him, de better. It 'll mean plenty work dis summer. Lefty's got t'ree fights lined up, an' w'en we got dem on ice, Morowitz has got to talk to us."

Duffy grinned knowingly. "Leave it to Lefty," he whispered. "He told me about his trip to Philly."

"Look here, kid," replied the trainer. "By de time fall comes you won't need no frame-up to knock Morowitz fer a gool."

"Where in hell do you get that stuff?" retorted Duffy. "What kind of a fool d'you think I am, to go into the ring against Morowitz an' take a chance, when the fight can be put on ice before she starts? Let Lefty spend some of his money. He gets it easy. Believe me, it's the man with the graft that draws down the jack. Hard work don't get no one nowheres. Look at Lefty, he never done a tap in his life, an' he rolls up more jack every week than I ever seen."

They were on the sidewalk now, before the door of the hall in which the fight had been staged. A big limousine stood at the curb a short distance away, the liveried chauffeur standing beside its closed door. As the two drew opposite the car, a lane opened in the passing crowd, and Kid Morowitz, closely followed by Jack Keen, hurried across the sidewalk. The chauffeur held the door open, and by the light of a street lamp both Duffy and Casey saw distinctly in the gloomy interior of the car the face of a beautiful woman. It was only a momentary glimpse. Then the door closed and the crowd surged about the vehicle, which the next moment glided slowly away.

Casey glanced at his companion, who stood rooted to the sidewalk, his face showing marble white in the glare of the arc lamp. Suddenly, with a half articulate exclamation, Duffy sprang forward, heedless of the imprecations of the men who were jammed together in the crowd.

"Stop that car!" he cried hoarsely.

Some one laughed. Amid jeers and gibes Casey managed to get hold of his arm and bring him to a standstill just as a big policeman shouldered his way to the spot to ascertain the cause of the commotion. Evidently no one in the crowd felt himself sufficiently aggrieved to make a complaint, and with a word of advice as to future conduct the officer passed on, leaving Duffy and Casey to worm their way to the edge of the crowd and cross to the opposite side of the street.

"What was she doin' in that machine? Where is he takin' her?" cried Duffy as he stared down the street into which the car had disappeared.

"Back to Philly, of course," grinned Casey. "Why?"

"Why?" cried the young man excitedly. "Good God, man, that's Lotta! She's mine —my girl! We're goin' to be married! She don't live in Philly! She lives in New York. She's an artist—an' she ain't be'n home for a week! Where's the station? It's me for Philly!"

"An' w'at 'll youse do w'en youse git dere?" grinned Casey.

"I'll hunt up Kid Morowitz, an' I'll— I'll—"

"Yeh, an' dat's as far as youse would git. Make a damn fool of yerself, an' maybe git pinched. Take it from me, kid, youse don't need to chase dat skirt over to Philly. All youse got to do is go back to little old Noo York, an' sit tight, an' Dago Lottie 'll be chasin' youse up inside a week."

"Dago Lottie! What do you mean? Who in hell you talkin' about?"

Casey glanced at his watch, and hailed a passing taxi. "We got five minutes to get de train fer home," he answered. "Wait till we git on de cars, an' I'll tell youse."

As the train pulled out of the station, Duffy said surlily: "Well, spit it out. What was you goin' to spring on me?"

"In de firs' place," began the trainer, as if carefully weighing his words, "dis here moll was married to a dago gunman. He got bumped off one night in de Élite Café, wit' her settin' by an' lookin' on. Some claims she didn't lose no sleep over it, at dat."

"It's a damned lie!" snarled Duffy. "She told me herself about sittin' there one night an' seein' some dago guy croaked. It busted her all up. She ain't never be'n in there since. An' why in hell did you call her Dago Lottie?"

Casey grinned. "All right. I didn't figger youse would believe it. An' Dago Lottie—dat's de moniker she goes by. Take it from me, kid. Dis here Morowitz ain't de first pug she's hooked on to—an' youse won't be de last."

Duffy interrupted with a sneering laugh. "Where'd you get that? Suck it out of a pipe? She never know'd a pug till she know'd me. She lives on Eighty-Fourth Street. I've be'n to her flat—I guess I know. She's an artist."

"I'll say she is!" agreed Casey. "But tell me, kid. You know her so damn well—ain't she pretty well posted on de fight game?"

Duffy hesitated, frowning, as he recollected his own surprise at her intimate knowledge of matters pertaining to his profession. Then he remembered her own explanation. "What if she does?" he growled. "She likes to read the dope in the papers."

"Sure, an' w'at she couldn't find in de papers Kid Morowitz could tell her. She's be'n stringin' him along—promisin' to marry him fer a year. An', now we got started, we might's well go de whole road. She's de smoothest dip an' bag opener an' shoplifter in de game."

Duffy leaned closer, his fingers gripping the arm of the trainer. "Some one's be'n stringin' you with a pack of lies," he said in a low, tense voice. "But even if it was all true, it wouldn't make no difference to me." A note of defiance crept into his voice: "Every one else is crooked, why shouldn't she be?"

"You got de wrong slant, kid," replied the old trainer, soothingly. "It's only de tin horns dat's crooks—"

"Tin horns!" sneered the youngster. "Lefty Klingermann, an' the police, an' them higher up is all grafters. An' look at damn near every one you know! Who's got the jack? It's the con-men, an' the gams, an' them that uses their head. Show me any one that ain't a crook—"

"I ain't," interrupted Casey emphatically.

"Yes, an' what you got to show? Nothin' but a job with a lot of work an' damn little pay! You've told me yerself how much you be'n offered, back when you was workin' with the big ones, to sell out. If you'd of done it, you'd of had enough jack so's you wouldn't be workin' now."

Casey shook his head. "No. Dat kind of jack don't never stick to a man. Look all around you. Dey ain't nowheres, I guess, dat's got more crooks livin' in it den Union Market precinct, an' how many of 'em's got anyt'ing to show fer it?"

"They would have if they didn't shove it all over the stuss tables! You can't tell me nothin'. I got eyes. I can see who's got the jack, an' who ain't." He paused for a minute and broke out, petulantly: "What in hell did I listen to you for, anyhow? I'd ought to be in Philly right now—an' it's your fault I ain't! If you think she's be'n goin' with Kid Morowitz fer a year, what made you say she'd be huntin' me up inside a week? Tell me that!"

"Sure, I'll tell youse. I'm playin' her to run true to form. Her huntin' youse up in de foist place showed she know'd what we didn't know—dat Kid Morowitz was reachin' clost to de end of his string. She was huntin' fer a place to light w'en de Kid dropped, an' she picked youse. After w'at we seen to-night we know she's right. Morowitz should of knocked dat guy cold, but he couldn't. She'll hunt youse up, all right—but she won't break wit' de Kid—not till youse two come togedder. Her game 'll be to string youse bot' along, kind of layin' low to see w'ich way de cat jumps—an', take it from me, kid, she'll jump wit' de cat—an' light right side up!"

Duffy relapsed into a moody silence, his

sullen gaze fixed upon the outer darkness where, now and then a tiny light flashed past. Newark was reached before Casey spoke again. "If you still want her, kid, de best bet fer youse is to woik up to w'ere youse kin knock Kid Morowitz cold w'en youse get in de ring wit' him dis fall."

Duffy's lip curled in a sneer. "Is that so? I'll have her all right. But, you talk like you'd fergot about Lefty's trip to Philly."

Casey grinned. "S'pose Morowitz was to find out she was playin' up to youse? Would he deal wit' Lefty, den? Nix! He'd go into de ring to git youse—an' de best man wins!"

"How in hell's he goin' to find out?" asked Duffy, querulously. "She ain't goin' to tell him—an' I ain't. Seein' I'm in the game, I'll play it a little smooth myself. But, damned if I'm fool enough to try to knock out Kid Morowitz, when I can set back an' have the fight all bought fer me."

Casey answered nothing, but a grim little smile twisted his thin lips as he followed the younger man out of the car.

"An' it's a new job fer me nex' fall," he muttered as he ascended the steps to the station, "'cause w'en Morowitz gits t'rough wit' youse, youse won't never fight no more!"

CHAPTER V.

LOTTA RIVOLI RETURNS.

As Duffy stepped from his hotel early on the second evening after his return from Trenton, an urchin brushed lightly against him upon the sidewalk, slipped a scrap of paper into his hand, and disappeared.

A half hour later, with quickened pulse, he pressed the button beside the door of the little flat on Eighty-Fourth Street. The door opened cautiously the length of a short chain, closed, and swung wide to disclose a vision of feminine loveliness that struck Duffy speechless, his eyes drinking in each detail of the wondrously beautiful figure that stood half revealed in the dim light of the tiny hallway.

He entered. Closing the door, the girl led the way into the little sitting room, where a single rose shaded light burned low, and blue flames shot fitfully from log to log of the tiny gas grate. Again the girl turned and faced him, her two hands resting lightly upon his shoulders as her eyes glowed up into his.

"I have thought of you all the time—big boy. I've been lonesome."

Duffy's face darkened. "Dis is de fifth or sixth time I've be'n here since—that night. Where have you be'n?"

She smiled guilelessly into the lowering eyes. "You missed me, then! I am glad! I have been in Baltimore. My work—it took me there. I had no time to let you know."

"Baltimore!" cried the man sharply. "All the time? You ain't be'n nowheres else?"

"No, no! Foolish one! No place else! But why do you ask?"

For answer the man's hands closed roughly upon the upraised bare arms, and he pushed her from him so violently that she crashed among the pillows of the davenport that was drawn up facing the fire.

"You lie! Damn you!" The man's breath came fast, and his voice sounded thick with passion. "It's either me or Kid Morowitz. An' you've got to choose now—to-night!"

The girl looked little and helpless as she cowered among the cushions, with the man standing over her glaring down into the half frightened eyes. "What—what do—"

"Don't try to pull that stuff, kid! You can't git away with it! Didn't I see you myself—in the big car, in Trenton—an' didn't I see Kid Morowitz get into the car, an' the car pulled out fer Philly? Monday night, it was—the night he fought the Frisco Wonder."

He paused. The girl buried her face in the cushions and her shoulders shook with sobs, but as she lay huddled upon the davenport her brain worked rapidly. If worse came to worst she could swing unequivocally to this man who glowered above her, but—Morowitz might win! For years her dream had been to share the money and the fame of a world's champion. If, when these two came together Morowitz should

win—she must make one desperate effort to save the situation as it was.

He was speaking again. "I've learnt a lot in the last year. I've learnt a man can't make no jack by workin' for it. I fight for mine. If I couldn't git it that way I'd gamble for it—or steal it! But I'll be damned if I'd lie to a pal! I want you, kid! I—yes—damn it! I love you! But there ain't goin' to be no halfways about it! You'll either marry me or Kid Morowitz—you can't marry us both!"

The stage was denied a star when Lotta Rivoli cast her lot with the underworld. Just as her superb ability as an actor had carried her through more than one trying situation in the department stores, so now it leaped forth to triumph over the accusation of her outraged lover. With a cry she leaped to her feet, faced the man, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Oh, you do love me!" she sobbed. "You do! You do! But, you are wrong—all wrong!"

"It ain't no use—"

The girl interrupted, speaking rapidly: "Listen, big boy, I see it all now! I was a fool to lie to you. But I lied because—I loved!"

"Morowitz?" the question rasped nastily from between the man's lips.

"No, no! Only you! For Morowitz I do not care so much as *that!*" She snapped her fingers in the air and hastened on: "I will come clean—will tell you everything. You see, I did not know—the papers said you were a truck driver before you began to fight. I did not think you would understand. I thought that if you knew my—business you would hate me. I told you I was an artist. I am, in a way—but not the way you think. I am an artist in my profession. I am a crook—yes, a shifter—a shoplifter."

She paused and smiled, slightly, as her glance drifted about the room. "And it has paid me well. I became so much of an artist in my line that rather than try to catch me, the managers of many great stores are glad to pay me never to enter their doors. Each month I get my pay—the pay of a private dick. And to earn it I do nothing but stay away from their stores. It is an easy graft and it pays well. I was afraid to tell you this before. I know you better now—for you said if you couldn't get your money by fighting for it you would gamble, or steal it. But I am no worse than the others—they all steal—the big from the little, the strong from the weak—always. But I steal only from the rich—from those who can afford to lose. It is not wrong—one must live."

"Sure it ain't," cried the man impatiently. "I don't care nothin' about that. But Morowitz—how about Morowitz?"

"I am coming to that." The red lips smiled, and the dark eyes glowed softly. "So jealous, and—I am glad. For I know by that, you love me. For a year, now, I have lived in Philadelphia. I keep this apartment also, because each month I must come to New York to collect my—salary. And, then sometimes, I run down and stay a few days when it seems necessary, for reasons of my profession. But I live in Philadelphia because there I can work at my profession. There the stores do not pay me to stay away, and it is easier because the store dicks are not as wise as here.

"But the police are alike, one place and another. They've got my number, and I must kick in. It is the same in a certain part of Philadelphia as in New York. The police have their go-betweens, and their collectors. Over there, Jack Keen is the same as Lefty Klingermann and a few others are here. I kick in to Jack Keen, and he squares me with the bulls.

"The other day I met a police lieutenant on the street and he told me I wasn't playing square, that I was holding out, and he threatened to get me. Then I hunted up Jack Keen, because he knows I play square. It was the night of the fight at Trenton, and he had no time to talk to me, but I was afraid the bulls would frame me that night, because the lieutenant was sore. Keen and Morowitz were going to drive to Trenton in a big car, and Keen told me to go along and we could talk. So I went, and we doped out a plant for that bull, and I waited in the car till after the fight, and then we drove back."

The man's hands closed upon her wrists in a viselike grip.

"Then, you ain't engaged to Morowitz. An' you'll marry me?"

The dark eyes that met his own so steadily registered supreme disgust, and the red lips curled slightly. "Morowitz!" she hissed, "I hate him! And—yes, I will marry you! But, you are hurting me!"

She winced with pain at the grip of his hands, and with a laugh he released her wrists, and seating himself upon the davenport, he drew her to his side where for a long time he held her close.

"Tell me, kid," he asked, at length. "Why do you hate Morowitz?"

The dark eyes flashed. "Oh, you should hate him, too—if you love me. A long time ago, it was—before he learned I could take care of myself—"

"Wait till I get in the ring with him! Damn him! I'll fix him!"

The girl looked quickly into his face. "Ah, yes! In the ring! When do you fight him? If it could only be soon!"

Duffy smiled. "What's de hurry?" he asked. "The way things is doped, him an' I hook up some time in the fall."

With a little sigh of regret, she laid her head against his shoulder. "Too bad," she breathed, "If only you could fight him this summer. He may be able to—come back by fall."

"What do you mean—come back?" asked the man, curiously. "He win his Trenton fight, didn't he? An' he's goin' to fight the St. Paul guy in August."

The girl sat suddenly erect. "You have not seen the papers?" she asked.

"What papers? I ain't looked at none to-day."

For answer she crossed to a small table, picked up a newspaper, carried it to the light, and turned to a news story upon the sporting page.

"Listen to this," she said reading the headlines. "'Patsey Gibson, St. Paul heavyweight, meets with a serious accident.'" And rapidly she read the news story as the man listened.

"So you see," she concluded, "Morowitz don't have to fight in August, an' with all summer to rest up, he might be able to come back strong in the fall."

Duffy was all interest now. "You talk about him comin' back. What's the dope? Ain't he right?"

He paused abruptly and a gleam of suspicion flashed into his eyes which were fixed on the face of the girl. "An' if he ain't, how do you know so much about him?"

Lotta Rivoli laughed. "I know I'm a spy, and I hate spies. But I am telling you because I love you. I heard it in the car, on the road back from Trenton. They thought I slept. They talked, and I learned that Morowitz's heart is bad. Now's your chance—they're broke, they've got to fight?"

Duffy leaped to his feet. "It's me to find Lefty!" he cried. What's the use of stringin' along with these other guys? If they want to fight me after I knock Morowitz out there'll be plenty of time. Believe me, with that inside dope, I'll knock him cold?"

The red lips pouted. "You're going to run away and leave me?"

He drew her to him and held her close. "Sure, kid, I want to git Lefty on the job before some other guy steps in an' gits a date."

But it's so early!"

"Lefty's a hard guy to find nights. I might have to shag him all over town. An' I might not find him till mornin'."

"Maybe there is some other girl—prettier than I am."

"Duffy laughed. "Nix on that stuff, kid. You're the only girl for me! Honest, kid—I never had no other girl."

Her smile was smothered by his kisses, and releasing her, he turned to the door.

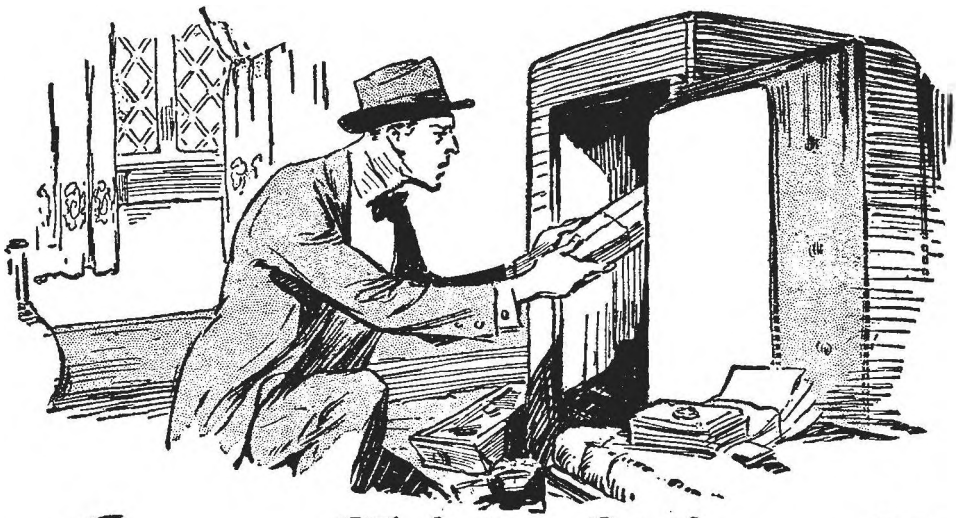
"See you to-morrow night," he called over his shoulder.

"Not to-morrow night, dear," she answered. "I've got to be in Philadelphia to-morrow night. It's the night we frame that fresh cop. I've got to be there. If I didn't show up Keen would be in bad and if Keen would throw me down, the bulls would make quick work of me."

"Day after to-morrow night, then?"

"Day after to-morrow night—right here—at the same time."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Jimmy Helps Himself

By HENRY DODGE

A NOVELETTE IN TWO PARTS—PART II

VII.

IT is to be presumed that Jimmy did not sleep much that night. At any rate Trench heard him splashing about in his bath at an ungodly hour in the morning, and when he awoke again he had already gone.

Jimmy, coming downstairs, found a deserted lounge and an empty dining room. He managed to persuade a shocked waiter, whom he found mopping floors, that it was possible for a Christian to have his chocolate and rolls out of bed and still remain a respectable if eccentric member of society, but an appearance at half past seven almost put him beyond the pale. He was so acutely conscious of the waiter's reproachful face, as he served his makeshift breakfast, that a sudden, un-Gallic desire for soft boiled eggs was smothered almost at birth.

These international amenities concluded, he sauntered outdoors and sat on a bench in the circular Place behind the Casino, basking in the glorious morning sun. Here, too, he was an object of contempt, if not of suspicion, to two gardeners, three *gendarmes*, and two other natives who were manicuring that section of Monte Carlo with huge brooms, and lengths of hose moved about on little wooden wheels like sluggish black snakes to whom artificial aids of locomotion were necessary.

Why does one never see Monte Carlo at that hour? The crowds of trippers have not yet begun to pour in from Nice, by train and railway and bus. The roulette players, the *cocottes* and the exalted personages who winter there, are still abed. The *croupiers* and other officials of the Casino, who cannot live within the boundaries of the principality, are breakfasting with their families over the French line in Beausoleil, a few hundred yards away. Only the Monegasque is about at

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this hour, and every Monegasque seems to be doing something to make the place more beautiful for the outlanders who will swarm in its streets in an hour or two. The gravel paths are raked into snake-like lines, the scraps of torn paper of the day before have disappeared. The very streets are washed and brushed.

The sun is still low, coming up from over the bay toward Italy, that the shadows are longer than they will be later, and the contrasts of green foliage and snowy wall and crimson roof are more marked. The sun of the afternoon, when every one is abroad, does not show us this, as it disappears too early behind the mountain wall to the west.

No, the morning is the time. Everything then is so white and gold, so drippingly and dazzlingly clean, so polished and brushed and expectant. It is as if the little toy town were a lovely woman who smooths down her skirts, pats her coiffure into more entrancing waves and falls into a little conscious pose, saying: "*Bon jour, mesdames et messieurs.* Am I not beautiful this morning?"

Jimmy consulted his watch a dozen times as he sat there. The minutes were merely crawling and he wanted them to gallop. Too early! She would not be in the garden until nine. Once he decided that he would go up at once and wait in the road until he should see her coming from the house. Finally he realized with a start of dismay that it would take him longer to get there than he was allowing himself, and he remembered that he did not know the schedule of the funicular. Where could he find a car at this hour?

"A little later, perhaps, *monsieur.* Surely no one would be about so early."

The gardner kneeling beside the bed of cyclamen straightened up, smiling covertly at this droll American who wished to go somewhere in a hurry before half past eight in the morning.

"A *fiacre,* possibly? Ah, no. For La Turbie that would be too slow. Perhaps if *monsieur* would go to the garage in the rue d'Italie opposite the kiosk, and demand Léon, he could have a car. Léon is very obliging. *Merci, monsieur.*"

Jimmy strode off through the gardens to the rue des Moulins, busy even at this hour, gleaning numerous bits of apparently contradictory information as to the whereabouts of the rue d'Italie and the obliging Léon, from sundry volubly helpful natives. He found the street perhaps a hundred yards from where he had started and it had taken him ten precious minutes.

Yes, Léon had a car, but it was not yet washed. Would *monsieur* object? No? *Monsieur* was very kind. The car had been out the night before with another client.

"And where would *monsieur* desire to be conducted?"

"Do you know the villa of the Comte de Grimaldi near La Turbie?"

Léon gazed queerly at his early morning client.

"But, certainly, *monsieur,*" he replied.

"Name of a pipe, was all the world calling upon M. le Comte," Léon thought, "and at such unheard of hours?" His last client had asked to be driven there at two o'clock in the morning, and had made him wait a little way down the road as the noise of the motor would disturb the comte, who was ill. A physician doubtless—and this was probably another.

"Is M. le Comte, then, dangerously ill, *monsieur?*" inquired Léon solicitously.

"Is he what?" returned Jimmy with some asperity. He was in a hurry. "No. I don't know. I want you to drive up and turn into the little road that runs back of the Grimaldi garden toward the station of La Bordina. And I'm in a hurry. Let's get off as quickly as you can."

"*Bien, monsieur.*" Léon disappeared at a run.

Jimmy was suddenly struck by a new quandary. He could not be in two places at once and some one ought to keep track of Salih's movements to-day. Trench could do it! He must see Trench before leaving.

He heard a motor start with a satisfying roar that promised a quick trip, and the car rolled out into the narrow street. He tumbled into the back seat.

"Go to the Hotel de Paris first," he directed. "And hurry."

The car jumped forward, swung around into the main street and shot through the gardens up to the hotel entrance. Jimmy was out on the curb before the machine had stopped. He tore through the lobby, cursed the French elevator all the way up to his floor, and burst into Trench's room. Charlie was in the bathroom standing knee deep in the tub, dripping and cold.

"Shut that door," he yelled savagely.

Jimmy shut the door.

"Listen, Charlie, I have about one minute to waste on you. I'm late as it is. Now don't muff this. I'll be back as soon as I can. It all depends on whether we find this stuff and how long it takes. Some one must watch Salih to-day until I come back—and my erstwhile wife as well. They may not be so scared as we think and may try to get up there to look over the ground. In any case don't lose sight of Salih one second. I want to know what his movements are all day long. Remember everything he does and every one he meets. Stick to him. If he objects, have him arrested, if necessary. You're consul, you know, and a friend of Boujassy."

"Sh-sh-sure I'm a c-c-consul," quavered Trench shaking with cold. "Th-th-that's the t-t-t-trouble. G-g-gum-shoe your own T-turks. F-for heaven's sake g-g-give me a t-towel!"

"Here you are. Catch! You watch him. Don't let him out of your sight."

Trench worked vigorously with the towel for a moment.

"Oh, all right," he conceded, in a voice of resignation.

As Jimmy slammed the door behind him and on his way out he heard a voice raised from the bathroom.

"Lord, what a darn fool!"

He found the car waiting for him with its motor still running. They whirled round the little Place and headed up through the gardens. It was already quarter to nine.

"How long will it take you to get there?"

"It is a question of thirty minutes, *monsieur*."

"I'll give you five francs extra for every minute under that."

"*Bien, monsieur*, it will take but twenty minutes," said Léon stepping on the throttle.

Jimmy saw little more of the scenery than he had on his first trip to La Turbie. For a few minutes they tore dizzily through the town following the sea road that runs to Mentone, narrowly missing a curb here and skidding on the tramway tracks there. They missed the early morning train for Mentone by the breadth of a hand, and zigzagged through a covey of donkey carts bringing garden truck into town.

"*Monsieur* will pardon me for not employing a greater speed," Léon shouted over his shoulder. "It is because of the danger to the market wagons. I shall do better when we leave the main road."

They swerved from the coast, whipped round a sharp, steep turn and swung into the white curving way that leads upward to join the Corniche at La Turbie. The car could climb, Jimmy admitted, and Léon could drive! They tore around high banked turns where a slip of a foot would plunge them over the edge onto the slopes of broken rock, raced through groves of olive, or between sentinel lines of plane trees on the level stretches, round sheer cliffs where the road clung like a shelf to the side of the mountain, and the deep blue of the Mediterranean seemed directly below them.

The road curved always, mounting higher and higher, seldom giving them a glimpse of more than a hundred yards ahead. Then gradually the grade lessened and the vista opened out. The cliffs seemed to shrink down to meet them, and the coast line to move away toward the horizon. They came out upon the plateau and began to pass villas and gardens and more groves of olive.

Suddenly Jimmy caught sight of the red station through the trees. He tapped Léon on the shoulder.

"Slow down here. The little road turns off just beyond the wall."

Léon jammed on the brakes and pointed exultantly to the clock on his dashboard.

"*Voila, monsieur.* Nineteen minutes to here!"

They turned into the narrow well re-

membered road and drove on a little way under the wall of the garden. Jimmy stopped the car then and tumbled out.

"Wait for me here. Léon. I may be a long time," he called back as he hurried off up the road. He rounded a turn by the wall and disappeared.

Léon settled himself back in his seat, swung his feet up over the door, and fished a grimy packet of cigarettes from his pocket. Léon was not Monegasque. He had drifted here from the Dauphine, up north beyond the Alps, but he had been long enough in this bizarre but lucrative new home of his to learn never to expect anything quite normal. In Monte Carlo one takes things as they come and asks no questions. So he pulled his cap further down over his eyes, wriggled his left hip into the comfortable, saggy depression in the worn leather seat and prepared to wait.

"So M. Le Comete is not ill," he chuckled to himself. "He must indeed be nervous if he cannot suffer the noise of a motor nearer than this! Just where the other descended last night," he reflected, sleepily. He rested his head against the cushion and forgot everything but the warm sun on the back of his neck and the lengthening ash of his cigarette.

Jimmy made his way swiftly along the wall toward the little gate. He paused for a breathless moment just before he reached it, then took a step forward and looked into the garden.

She was there. Of course, he had never had any doubt that she would be. She was sitting just as he had first seen her, on the rim of the old well, but this time she was leaning forward and looking out through the gate—looking for him. As she caught sight of him she sprang up and ran to the gate to meet him, flinging back over her shoulder, toward the house, the same, frightened, timid glance. They faced each other through the grillework of the gate and Jimmy suddenly saw much more of that garden into which he had gazed yesterday.

In her clear, frank, little-girl eyes and in the flush that crept over her dark cheeks he could read something that she had kept hidden during all the years of her lonesome girlhood. To no one else, he knew, had she given that expectant, trusting, timid smile. For no one else had her child's eyes opened wide to show that limpid wealth of passion and unfolding knowledge which she showed to him now. She was telling him as plainly as she could that the eyes of her heart had never left off gazing at that gate in the wall, since the moment when he had passed through it yesterday and left her.

Jimmy did not know that his look was telling her the same thing, but it was. She knew it as surely as that he was standing there at the gate before her.

She reached out and dragged at the bolt with her slim hands. He pushed the gate open and came into the garden to her side. Until he had seen her, the story he had come to tell had been bubbling over within him. Léon could not have driven too fast! She had to know at once! But now Salih Nasar who had advertised in the *Eclaireur de Nice,* was, for a glorious instant, pushed into second place in his thoughts. He did not particularly want to talk about what had happened since he saw her last. He only wanted to stoop and put his arms around this girl whom he had found in the garden behind the gray wall, and tell her to forget the jewels and Pucelli and the well and everything else—except him.

That was what he wanted to do. And —you may as well know at once—that was what she wanted him to do. But he had only known her a few hours, and he was frightened within an inch of his life that his aching arms might get the better of his judgment; and *she* did not know anything about him—except that she loved him, and she was a well-brought up girl, and—Baptiste might come into the garden even at nine in the morning!

So she caught her breath, put her hand upon her heart to try to keep it where it belonged, and moved away from him a good six inches.

And Jimmy smiled, foolishly, and swallowed several times, and pulled at his tie. His lips moved, but he failed to achieve words. The burden fell upon her.

"Did you walk up, *monsieur?*." she inquired solicitously. "You look so warm."

Perhaps is was just as well that she was frightened, and hard pressed for words or this story might have ended here. For I am sure that if she had not moved away, and if what she said had not made a flood of self-consciousness rise up in Jimmy, we would never again have heard of Salih Nasar and the jewels, and Trench might have wandered about until nightfall, on the trail of a plump Moor in spectacles, wondering why his friend's matutinal excitement had not been more productive of results.

Jimmy pulled himself together.

"No, *mademoiselle,* but I came as fast as I could. I've found out a lot to tell you."

"Could you find out who 'S. N.' is?" she asked eagerly.

"He's a Moor, named Salih Nasar, from Tangier.

"Oh," she whispered. "Then I was right!"

"Yes, you were right. But there's a lot more. He had a visit yesterday afternoon from a woman—a Madame Dulac—and she has promised to bring him up here and show him where the well is, at noon to-day."

"Madame Dulac?" the girl repeated with a puzzled frown. "Who is she? How did she know about our well?"

"I don't know. I'll tell you more about her some time. She evidently knows where the well is. Then we—Trench, the man who is staying with me, and I—met the chief of the *Sûreté* who took him into the room where this Madame Dulac and Salih Nasar were talking; and we introduced them all.

"Monsieur Boujassy, do you mean?" said the girl wonderingly.

"Yes."

"I don't understand. How did you know him and how could you introduce him to people you did not know?" Again the puzzled frown creased her brow.

"Oh, it's a long story," said Jimmy hastily. "I'll tell you some time. The important thing is that I hoped to frighten Salih into keeping away from La Trubie to-day, and I imagine I succeeded. He thinks, of course, that Boujassy is suspicious of him."

He watched her face eagerly as he paused a moment before telling her the great news.

"The next thing is that I think I've found out myself where the jewels are."

She clutched his sleeve with both her hands.

"Oh," she cried. "Where? Tell me quickly."

"Salih Nasar called them 'The Tears of the Peri,'" he said softly.

"The Tears of the Peri?" She repeated the words after him mechanically as if there significance had not yet dawned upon her. "But that is written on the well." Her eyes grew wider and her hand fluttered to her throat in the gesture he knew so well. "Why, then—"

"Exactly," said Jimmy, nodding. "That's just where we'll look."

She snatched her hand from his arm and ran to the well.

"Oh, come quickly," she cried. "It must be true. You see the inscription only covers a few tiles on one side. You can take them out easily, I suppose?" She broke off breathlessly and looked about for some tool.

Jimmy picked up a trowel from a barrow leaning against the well, fell on his knees, and commenced to tap gently on each tile in order.

"Perhaps there is a space behind one of them—" he began excitedly, when suddenly she saw him drop the trowel and stare at the ground beside him.

He stooped and picked up some bits of crumbling mortar. His heart skipped a beat. He raised his eyes to the side of the well just above the fragments of mortar and put the palm of his hand against one of the tiles. The enamel along one edge was freshly chipped—new, clean fractures, showing the coarse earthenware beneath—and the tile rocked a little under his hand. At the sight of his strained face the girl dropped on her knees beside him.

"Oh, what is it?" she implored.

He picked up the trowel again, drove its point under the edge of the tile that had moved, and wrenched at it. With hardly an effort the square of porcelain came away and fell on the ground between them, revealing a deep hole in the coping.

With his heart pounding with the certainty of defeat, he plunged his hand into the blackness of the hole and drew out a square brass box inlaid with copper—a little chest of Moorish workmanship. He held it for a moment in his hands. He sensed defeat as surely as if the cache had been quite empty. The loose tile and the fresh breaks had told him enough. But the girl was kneeling beside him, trembling, expectant, and unwarned of the blow that was to fall upon her.

He could hardly bring himself to open the box and strick the blow.

" Oh, quickly!" she whispered.

He fumbled with the catch and flung back the lid. The box was empty.

He dropped it, and turned his head. She knelt there beside him, quite still, her face deathly white, her eyes closed. She swayed forward a little, and rested her forehead against the side of the well. He sprang up and leaned over her, laying his hands lightly and compassionately upon her shoulders.

" It doesn't make any difference," he said huskily. " I'll find them for you. only don't cry."

She got up slowly and sat down on the edge of the well. Though the tears glistened on her cheeks, she looked up at him and smiled.

" Forgive me," she murmured. " It was just that—it is hard to have my happiness taken away so suddenly—like that."

" Listen to me," said Jimmy rapidly. " It hasn't been taken away yet. We can get them again somehow. Salih came after all "—he showed her the chipped tile—" so he's more of a man than I thought. At least we're almost sure that they exist, and that he has them. Don't you see that we "—it was " we " now—" are better off than we were? Please don't be unhappy. I'll get them for you."

He did not know in the least how he was to accomplish this, but he did know that he would stop at nothing to be able to come up the hill again some day with the Tears of the Peri in his hands and lay them in her lap!

" Why," she said suddenly, her face lighting up with hope, " M. Boujassy can arrest him. They belong to us, and this man has stolen them."

" Well," Jimmy said judicially, " I can't very well go to Boujassy about this except as a last resort. I would have to explain about yesterday's affair, and I can't do that." He realized that he must slur over his acquaintance with Mme. Dulac with Giselle as well as with the *Sûreté*. " I can't tell you why, yet," he added lamely. He stood up and held out his hand. " You mustn't worry. Do you hear? I'll come back every morning, if I can, and always when I have any news."

She took his hand.

" Oh, my friend, my friend," she said tenderly. " You are the best man that I have ever known in my life. I wonder if you realize what you are trying to do for me?" Her hand tightened in his suddenly and she leaned a little closer. " But you must not do—oh, it may be dangerous. Do you know, I should die—if—you never came back."

" I'll come back." He was fighting hard to keep a curb upon himself. " And just remember—you're not going to marry Pucelli. You must stop thinking about it."

" But if we fail, *monsieur?*"

" Wait until we fail. There's another way of settling that question—that—that I'll tell you about—some day." He stood looking down at her for a moment without speaking. " Are you forced to see much of him? Does he come here often?" he added irrelevantly.

" Almost every day. He dined with us last night. But to-day he goes to Paris—he will be gone several days. He has gone, he says, to buy my—present." She smiled a wan and pitiful little smile. " His going will make it a little easier for—us," she added shyly.

It was a moment before he could steady his voice to say: " Yes, that will make it a little easier for us."

He did not suspect how much easier it was to make everything!

" I must go now. There is so much to do," he forced himself to say, as she made no reply. Again he raised her hand to his lips. *"Au revoir,* Giselle. Until to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow," she breathed. "Oh, come back surely, to-morrow. I shall be waiting all morning in the garden. *Au revoir*—M. James."

He hurried through the gate without daring to look back, and strode off down the road toward the waiting automobile.

VIII.

THE first thing that Salih Nasar did when he opened his eyes that morning was to slide an exploring hand under his pillow and feel what lay there. He had them! With fingers that were trembling anew with the joy of his unexpected success, he drew out the little silver casket which he had taken from the discarded brass box. He fumbled at the double catch, threw back the lid, and reverently lifted out the treasure which he had come so far to seek.

The thing which he held in his hands was a chain of soft gold dulled by time to an almost rosy duskiness, and from it were suspended, by curiously wrought links, the emeralds, each framed in its own band of gold. Twenty of them, irregular in shape but almost matched in size; not faceted but polished *en cabuchon;* flattish globes of brilliant green without a flaw.

When he had walked through the deserted gardens of the Casino, a few hours before, after leaving the automobile, he had hesitated a long time before he had finally brought his loot to the hotel. The hotel safe? He could not trust that. If they were really suspicious of him, that would be childish. He racked his brains to think of a hiding place. He could conceal the casket anywhere—somewhere in the gardens where it would never be found. The Place was deserted. No one would see him, and he could retrieve it later, when he was ready to leave Monte Carlo. The last thing he should do would be to keep it on his person or in his room.

Yet as he pressed his hand to his side and felt its bulk in his breast pocket, he realized that human nature was too strong for him. He could not let them out of his hands even for a few hours. Not yet, at least. He must look at them again. He must let his eyes drink in once more the beauty of these gorgeous things that had lain so long in an unbeliever's garden. The glimpse he had had of them under his pocket torch, when he had lifted the cover of the inner box and felt his heart almost burst with joy, had not been enough. He would keep them through the night. Even if they suspected something of his mission, they would not come until to-morrow. And to-morrow, early, he would hide them.

As he sat on the side of his bed, with the casket lying open in his hands, and the sun pouring in through the seaward looking windows of his room, he tried to puzzle out the meaning of that extraordinary scene in the blue salon. Who were those people? Was Boujassy really of the *Sûreté?* And the others, the Americans? They had convinced him, at first, that the game was up; and then something—some subconscious streak of Oriental acuteness in him—had suggested that the game had not been all in their hands, after all, and that they were unable to move until he had shown them the way. So he had gone to La Turbie, after all. The pull of his desire had been too strong.

They had apparently let him go unhindered. That was the greatest puzzle of all. Perhaps they had thought that he had been frightened away, he reflected, exultantly. He could not even have guessed all the influences and cross currents of motive that had been at work yesterday between those five people in the little room.

Well, he had them. He had outwitted these fools who had tried to stop him. Curiously, he gave to Mme. Dulac no place in the problem he was studying. What her motives had been in coming to him he did not know, but he was sure that she had not been a party to their plot. She was on his side.

He breakfasted in his room and dressed hurriedly, thinking all the while of posible hiding places. Yes, he should have done it last night in the darkness. Some place where no one ever went—some nook outdoors.

He went to the terrace of the Casino and sat on a bench, looking out over the sea. He must decide quickly. So far, everything had gone well, but they might

come at any minute, and here he sat with the things in his pocket.

He felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and started up, wide eyed, trembling in an agony of terror. Then he heard a voice say:

" *Eh bien, mon ami!* To find you abroad at this hour! *Tiens!* What is the matter? You're shaking like a girl!"

Salih turned an ashen face upon the tall young man who leaned over him, and slumped back upon his bench.

" Ah, my little Tino," he gasped. " You —surprised me. I was deep in my thoughts."

The tall young man laughed and clapped him again on the shoulder. He was very tall and exceedingly thin—a dissolute appearing type, hawk nosed and with eyes that smiled upon the world viciously and slyly. Exquisitely dressed, from his gray Homburg hat to his unwrinkled white linen spats, he was the universal type of the Latin dandy—one of the few unlovely things which flourish upon the Riviera. His mustache was waxed into tiny black spikes; the hand that held the cigarette was beringed like a woman's; and the bamboo stick which hung from his left arm was gold mounted and slender as a whip.

He regarded Salih with amused eyes.

" I swear I am the only person who ever startled you, my old one," he said, showing his white teeth in a wide smile. " As for your deep thoughts, old fox, keep them for the night time, not for a morning like this. Come walk with me and never mind thinking to-day."

Salih recovered his poise and smiled. In almost the first moment of seeing Tino he had solved his problem. Tino had a safe at home. He had seen it the other afternoon in the library. Tino was obliging, was indebted to him for a thousand favors, all of a more or less unsavory sort, in the past, and he never pried into the affairs of others. He disliked too much to have other people prying into his.

Salih Nasar's mind was working rapidly and clearly. He matured a plan in the time it took him to link his arm in that of his friend and start down the terrace.

" My little Tino," he said in a voice of regret, " this is to be my last day here. I must leave early to-morrow—for Italy."

" Is your business then finished?"

" Yes, happily. It was not complicated. By the way, seeing you puts a little thought into my head. I have a little package—documents—of considerable value, which I should like to put into safe custody until I leave. It is a thing I do not care to intrust to a bank, for very good reasons, and—equally—I am not anxious to carry it upon my person.

" Would I be encroaching too much upon your good nature if I asked the hospitality of your strong box for my little packet until to-morrow? I can stop for it in the morning on my way, as I shall go by motor to San Remo. There is no decent train eastward—and I must be in Genoa by nightfall."

The tall youth beamed upon him.

" But certainly, my old one. Bring along your little package. And, look! I will not even ask you what it is. But "—he peered about cautiously and bent his lips to Salih's ear in mock seriousness—" I already know. Why do you come to Monte Carlo—you of all people? You have come to secure the letters you wrote to some lady when you were younger and—less plump." He pointed an accusing finger. " You have recovered them, and you escape with them before the jealous and furious husband finds them and slits your throat—tchk!—like that!"

He swept a lean brown hand through the air in a vivid, sanguinary gesture, his white eyeballs rolling.

" But no!" He put a finger to his forehead. " No. It is not a woman. One woman should be nothing to you—you who have but to pull aside a curtain, clap your hands, and dozens—I know not but that it may be hundreds, old fox—come to kneel at your feet!" He heaved a long, regretful sigh. " Your religion, my Salih, would save us Occidentals a deal of trouble and worry and heart burnings—and money," he added ruefully.

" No, it is not a woman. Ah, I have it! Come, we will fetch the package and put it in the safe quickly, before the *Sûreté* finds out that you have there the secret plans

of the port and the arsenal, which will allow the frigates of your sultan to come down upon us and utterly destroy the entire Monegasque navy "—he waved a hand dramatically toward the harbor where lay the prince's yacht—" and put to the sword the Monegasque army of eighteen privates and one field marshal. Come! I will keep your papers. If it be treason "—he snapped his fingers—" I do it for my Salih! *Allons!*"

Salih smiled, but it was not at Tino's good spirits. He was smiling at his luck and chuckling to himself in satisfaction. Things were coming right. The jewels would be out of his hands and quite safe. He could leave Monte Carlo by motor with a minimum chance of arousing suspicion—simply drive away, as if for a day's trip to San Remo, and never return. On the way he would stop at Tino's villa, take the package from the safe—*et voila!*

The younger man halted abruptly.

" But stop," he said. " I am stupid. The plan does not march. You come tomorrow morning, on your way to San Remo —and I am not there. I attend a dinner in Nice to-night and leave there early in the morning for Paris, in my motor."

Salih's hopes, which he had built up around this wonderful plan of his, were dashed. He turned an immobile face to his companion, but his thoughts were black.

But Tino was speaking again.

" Well, after all, that will arrange itself. It is not necessary that I should be at home. I will give you the combination and instruct Felix that you are to be admitted and will open the safe. My car is in the Place. We can go now if you are ready?"

Salih drew a long breath of relief. That had been a dangerous hurdle, and he was well over it.

" You are very good, my little Tino. It is agreed, then. But my package is at the hotel. I will meet you at the door in two minutes."

In the seclusion of his room Salih took the casket from his pocket, and wrapped it carefully in many folds of coarse paper, to make it look like a packet of documents.

As he came out again through the revolving door, Tino's roadster swung up to the curb. The huge bemedaled Senegalese who officiates at the entrance of the hotel sprang to open the door of the car. Salih crossed the terrace and stepped in beside Tino. He did not turn to look behind him or he might have seen something which would have quite spoiled the pleasure of his drive; for as the turned away and sped up the sunlit avenue, Charlie Trench came out of the shadow of the vestibule.

" Do you know the man that drove up in that car?" he demanded of the negro.

" *Oui, monsieur.* It was the Marquis de Pucelli. He is going to Cap Martin, to his villa." The lethargic Trench was galvanized into action. He tore down the steps and up to the cab rank at the upper end of the place. The driver of the single car that stood there was sound asleep on his seat. Trench yanked him awake, and hurled himself into the rear seat.

" Take the road to Cap Martin," he snapped, " and be quick about it. Speed up until you can see a light blue roadster with the top up, then slow down and keep it in sight."

IX.

When Jimmy reached the hotel toward the middle of the morning, despondent and discouraged, there was no sign of Trench. He had left no message at the desk and a search of the place yielded no trace of him. Salih, too, was nowhere to be found. So he started out to beat every covert that he knew. He drew a blank at the Casino. The Sporting Club was not open until the afternoon. He searched the terrace from end to end, and covered every nook and path in the garden. Then he began systematically exploring the shops in the rue des Moulins and around the Place. Not a sign of either Trench or Salih. He was tempted to go over to the Rock and look about for them in old Monaco, but reflected that the home of Monegasque officialdom was an unlikely spot for Salih this morning. He was afraid, too, that Trench might turn up unexpectedly and it would never do to miss him. With the turn things had taken, every moment might count.

Finally he planted himself on one of the benches that fringe the Place, in full view of the Casino and of their hotel, to wait until one or the other of them should turn up. It is said that if one sits long enough at the corner table on the sidewalk in front of the Café de la Paix in Paris, one will eventually see every one in the world. It can be said with less stretching of the truth, that every one in Monte Carlo is sure to pass, at least twice a day, the seat which Jimmy had chosen.

He did not have long to wait. A little before noon he caught sight of a red fez under a white, green lined umbrella, and the frock coated figure of Salih crossing the street toward the hotel. His face wore an expression of extreme beatitude. As he looked around at Jimmy, a flicker of annoyance, a suspicion of tension appeared on it, and just a trace of hesitation in his rapid and confident bearing. He looked Jimmy full in the eyes, but gave no sign of recognition.

He passed on into the hotel, and Jimmy turned swiftly to look up in the direction from which he had come. Sure enough, there was Trench, a hundred yards or so away, tacking down through the gardens. He ran to meet him.

"Well," Trench said breathlessly. "Out with it. What's the lurid story of your morning's work?"

He sat down on the edge of a bench. His eyes were shining with a degree of excitement that Jimmy had never seen in them before, and his manner was new, alive, aggressive. He was no longer Trench, the consul. He had had a great morning and he was hungry for more.

Jimmy sank down beside him, and looked at him dolefully.

"I hope you've something to report," he said, "for if you've wasted *your* morning we're done. Charlie, we were absolutely right. I found the place where they had been—behind one of the tiles—but they were gone. There was just an empty brass box. That's the result of our fool performance in the parlor. The tile had been taken out since yesterday. I'm sure of that. It was all chipped—fresh marks—and there were pieces of cement on the ground. Of course, it was Salih. We simply didn't bluff him."

"Sure, I know it. He took the stuff last night."

"You know it!" Jimmy ejaculated. "For Heaven's sake, Charlie, spill it! What have you found out?"

Trench's eyes were glowing with enthusiasm as he launched into his story.

"Well, I trailed him from the hotel down to the terrace. He seemed worried and nervous—kept looking over his shoulder. I lost him for a few minutes, and when I saw him again he was with another man."

"Who?"

"Wait a minute. Salih was all smiles. They talked a minute and then separated. Salih came back to the hotel, went upstairs, and was down again in a jiffy with a brown paper package in his hand—trying to stuff it into his breast pocket. That package started a very fruitful train of thought in my mind, I can tell you. The other man was waiting for him in a big blue car, and they drove off." He looked at Jimmy with a face devoid of expression. "Who do you think the other man was?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Boujassy? Prince of Monaco?"

"Don't be an ass. Listen. It was the Marquis de Pucelli. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Pucelli?" Jimmy roared, and brought his fist down with a smash on the bench between them. "Whew! That's a lovely neighborhood for those jewels! How do you know it was Pucelli?"

"Doorman told me."

"Well, go on. What next?"

"I grabbed another car and followed them to Cap Martin. They went to Pucelli's villa. I passed the gate just after they had turned in and stopped a little way down the road. I was stumped. I couldn't do any gumshoeing myself because Salih would know me, and yet I had to find out what was going on inside there. So I took a chance. I told my chauffeur to go back to the house and ask at the front door for some direction or other—anything. Then I flashed a fifty franc note at him and told him to get as far inside the house as he could, and report everything he saw and

heard. I described Salih and Pucelli and warned him to keep his eyes open for the package."

"Well, he came back in a few minutes, pleased as Punch. He had asked where Lady Somebody's villa was. The servant left him standing in the open doorway, while he opened the door of the front room—leading off the hall. My man stepped into the hall as if to wait, and could see right into the room. He said there was a young man on his knees on the floor in front of an open safe, with a brown paper parcel in one hand, and an older man—the one in the fez—standing beside him. The one standing had a pencil in his hand—my man was sure of that. Just as the door opened he heard one of them say: 'Left, seven.' The voice apparently broke off as the door opened. Both men in the room turned around and the younger one stood up and came to the door."

"Gee!" murmured Jimmy. "He was giving him the combination! But why should he?"

Trench shook his head.

"Can't tell you. Well, that's all at Cap Martin. My man got his information as to Lady So-and-So's villa and left. When he got back to me he apologized for not having been able to stay any longer! We backed up the road a little farther—just around a turn—and the chauffeur reconnoitered. In about ten minutes the blue car came out again and we trailed it back to the Hotel Victoria."

"Keeping his date," interrupted Jimmy.

"Salih got out—he'd been driven back by a chauffeur—and has been sitting in the garden there for the last hour, talking to Mme. Dulac. They sat in a little summer house in the corner of the garden, and I couldn't get near enough to hear anything. I stayed across the street in the news shop watching for him to come out, and paid my board there by making purchases." He patted his bulging pockets. "I have every postcard view ever taken of Monte Carlo and environs, a souvenir spoon, a paper cutter made of olive wood, and a batch of lottery tickets. I damn near bought out the shop. Well, he finally came out, came down the hill, and here we are."

Jimmy drew a long breath and threw at his friend a look of new found and honest admiration.

"Charlie, I've expected every minute to see you draw the needle from your waistcoat pocket, take a shot in the arm and call me 'My dear Watson.' You're a marvel! M. Lecoq was a mere traffic cop beside you. You're wasted in diplomacy."

"When I'm kicked out of the service—as I probably will be—I'm going to open a *bureau privé* in Paris, and that chauffeur of mine will get a job."

"Yes," agreed Jimmy, "fifty franc notes are wonderful things to develop one's powers of observation. By the way"—he fished a pair of visiting cards from his pocket—"do you suppose this means anything? I found these waiting for me when I got back to the hotel just now. Boujassy's cards. He's called on me. Do you think he's suspicious?"

"I shouldn't say so. He met you yesterday, and this is just a formal call. They all do it. He probably called on me, too."

"I wonder why he left two cards?"

Trench shook his head.

"That is funny," he said thoughtfully. Then his face slowly broke into a delighted grin. "Why, of course," he said, "one of them is for your wife!"

"Great guns!" Jimmy groaned. "I'd almost forgotten. You don't suppose he asked for her, do you—and was told at the desk that I had no wife?"

"No, he probably didn't come himself—simply sent a *gendarme* or some subordinate over with his cards. Don't worry about it. It was just a matter of courtesy."

"All right, I won't borrow trouble," Jimmy said resignedly. "But we're not getting anywhere. What do we do next?"

Trench looked hopelessly devoid of ideas.

"I give up. We're up against a stone wall. I don't want to go to the police any more than you do. That's the last resort."

"Yes," Jimmy admitted, "the very last."

"Well, outside of that, our hands are tied as long as the stuff is in that safe."

"Not necessarily."

"Don't talk nonsense. You're no burglar, and, anyhow, you don't know the combination, and can't get it."

"Oh, as to burglary," Jimmy scoffed, "my conscience would be clear enough—"

"Well, mine wouldn't," retorted Trench. "This sleuthing business is one thing, but going to jail is another. I'm enjoying myself, so far, but I'm going to stay inside the law. The package isn't going to lie in that safe forever, and we may get another chance at it later if we're wide awake."

There was a silence between the two for a time.

Finally Jimmy jumped up.

"Charlie, I'm going to see Mme. Dulac."

"Mme. Dulac!" Trench vociferated. "Are you crazy? She's hand in glove with Salih!"

"Maybe, I'm not so sure. She's not a crook. She's our kind. She's in some trouble, and I know she feels under obligation to me, and—she likes me. Yesterday in the hotel she seemed mighty worried to see me mixed up in this thing." He paused a moment, and squared his shoulders. "I'm going to sound her out, Charlie. It can't do any harm, and I don't want to miss any opportunities. I'll be back in time for luncheon."

"Well, my young Talleyrand," reflected Trench as he watched his friend's back disappear in the direction of the Victoria, "if you can arrive at any basis for negotiation in that quarter, you're a better diplomat than I am."

X.

YES, Mme. Dulac would see *monsieur*. She would descend immediately. Would *monsieur* take the trouble to be seated in the salon?

Jimmy paced up and down the little empty room, searching his brain for some way to open the extraordinary interview that was coming. Should he ask her to redeem her promise to help him if ever he needed her? Should he tell her openly how much depended upon his success in this astounding adventure? Or was she just a crook after all, a thief's accomplice, whom he could bribe?

Finally, what could he ask her to do? It was not probable that she knew the combination of the safe, and that was the rock upon which his hopes seemed to split. Even assuming that he could enter Pucelli's house, he could get no farther. The grim realization came over him suddenly that he was really thinking of it—actually, seriously planning to rob a safe, if he could!

She entered noiselessly and came to the window where he stood staring out into the garden.

"M. Peyton"—he turned with a start—"it is good of you to come to see me. I have wondered if I would ever have an opportunity to explain—our last meeting."

"*Madame*, I promised I would come," he said.

"I know, but things seem to be a little different since yesterday morning." Then, abandoning any pretense of formality or any thought of fencing with him, she went on earnestly and pleadingly: "Oh, my dear, dear friend, you were so good to me at the station, so understanding, that I cannot bear to have you misjudge me now. Please try to believe that I did not know, until you came into that room yesterday afternoon, that I was working against you. More than that, I had never seen that man, Salih Nasar, before—never in my life until yesterday. Do you not believe me?"

"I do believe you, *madame*," he told her gently, for he was convinced that she spoke the truth, and in the bottom of his heart he knew that he had never doubted her.

He hesitated before he spoke again.

"I do not quite know why I am here, or quite what I want to say, but it is now I who need help."

"Oh," she cried, leaning toward him. "If I can help you, you know I will. Anything you ask!"

"I think I shall tell you," he replied slowly, "just how I happen to know about your—dealings with Salih Nasar, and just why I need your help. Since I came to Monte Carlo—since yesterday"—his voice dropped a shade and a note of self-consciousness crept into it—"I have fallen in love with a girl whom I have seen just three times."

He was not looking at Mme. Dulac now, but sat gazing out of the window in front of him.

"I met her yesterday afternoon at La Turbie, and it was through her that I found

out about the jewels that this man is hunting. I have only seen her three times, but I'm going to marry her."

There was silence in the room for a moment. Then he heard her speaking again.

"Who is this girl?" she was asking in a voice so clear and steady that he did not even look around.

"Why, you must know who she is from what I have told you—Giselle de Grimaldi."

"De Grimaldi," she echoed. "Yes—of course. You have succeeded in falling in love very quickly in Monte Carlo. She is a fortunate girl." She closed her eyes and strove to compose her features against the moment when he should turn and look at her.

Jimmy was speaking again.

"She told me that her father owed a lot of money to an Italian—the Marquis de Pucelli—and that she was being forced to marry this cad, so that he would cancel the debt. She told me all this because I had noticed the Moorish well in her garden and remembered seeing an advertisement inquiring for just such a well. I do not need to tell you all that as you know it already, but I promised her to find out who put in the advertisement. If I can help her get those jewels she'll not have to marry—" He swung around and faced her. "Isn't it rotten?" he cried. "Don't you see now why I want to find them for her?"

"Yes," Mme. Dulac said. "I see—now. But, my dear, it is going to be very hard, though I will help you all I can. Salih Nasar found them last night."

"I know it," Jimmy said, nodding.

"You know it?" she repeated, incredulous. "But how?"

Then he told her of finding out who S. N. was, of the conversation he and Trench had overheard, of his search behind the tiles, of the brass box and Giselle's heartbroken realization that the jewels were really gone.

She listened, absorbed, the whole mystery of that meeting in the blue room becoming clear to her.

"You see," she said gently, when he had finished, "he has them. It is almost impossible now."

"I haven't told you all of it," returned Jimmy. "There is just a chance. My friend followed Salih this morning to Pucelli's villa—"

"He knows Pucelli?" she faltered.

"Yes. Isn't it the irony of fate? He put the jewels, I don't know why, into Pucelli's safe, and Pucelli gave him the combination. Trench's chauffeur spied on them and saw it all."

"In Pucelli's safe! *Bon Dieu!* You do not know the combination?"

"No—only a fragment of it. 'Left, seven.'"

They looked at each other in silence, each of them hesitating to voice the thought that was uppermost in their minds. Finally, Mme. Dulac stood up and put her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes were moist and her voice still trembling a little with the emotion that had shaken her.

"My friend," she said gently, "I will help you all I can. If it is humanly possible I will find out that combination for you. Then—you must—use it, in any way you can."

Jimmy understood. He remembered, too, that Pucelli would not be at home—that he was leaving to-day for Paris. The thing that had been insinuating itself into his brain, ever since Trench had told him of the safe, was crystallizing into a resolve. Mme. Dulac's courageous words made up his mind for him.

"I can find a way," he said bluntly.

"There is one thing you do not know," she went on, a little worried line appearing between her eyes. "Salih has just been here. Of the jewels, he only told me that he had found them and put them into safe keeping; but he said that he intended to leave to-morrow morning. So you and I have only to-night."

"It's all I want," Jimmy said.

"He has asked me to dine with him to-night, and we will probably play in the Casino afterward. I accepted because I dared not refuse. You see, my friend, I came to Monte Carlo to do something that requires money, and when I saw that advertisement in the paper I resolved to see this man and sell him the information he wanted, for I knew the well and knew why he wanted it.

" He promised me fifty thousand francs for my information. He has not paid me yet, and I think that, having found the jewels, he is trying to cheat me. He says he will pay me to-night. That is why I accepted his invitation—because I knew that I must keep on friendly terms with him and not jeopardize my chance of winning my fifty thousand francs.

" But I shudder to think of having to walk by the side of that unspeakable creature, of facing him across a dinner table, of having the world see me with him, and think—what it must think—ugh!" She closed her eyes and a shiver of disgust passed through her. " But now I am more thankful than ever that I accepted."

" You are doing a very generous thing for me, *madame*," said Jimmy softly.

" Do not thank me for that, my friend," she replied. " Remember what you have done for me."

She paused.

" I am to meet this man at seven to-night. I do not know where we dine. You must follow us and find out. As to the Casino—" She hesitated a moment, and Jimmy could see that she was confused and embarrassed. " He will get my visitor's card for me; but I must tell you that it is not certain that I will be "—she stumbled over the word—" allowed to enter. I am not supposed to be here—to come to Monaco at all—because once I lost everything I had at roulette, and the Casino paid for my ticket home.

" The penalty for that is that one shall never come to Monaco again. I tell you this because if they happen to recognize me "—she shrugged her shoulders in a half humorous gesture of resignation—" I should have to leave, and I could not help you after that.

" That is all I have to say, *monsieur*. I swear I will do my utmost to find out what you want. It may be possible. I do not know. I must have extraordinary luck or —get them from his pocket. If I succeed I will contrive some way to reach you, if I cannot come to you myself."

She clasped her hands to her breast and leaned toward him.

" Oh, I *will* try!" she cried. " But you must be within reach of me all the time. Be alert, for I may not be able to speak to you."

" I will," Jimmy asserted with conviction. " Don't be afraid of that." Then he added more slowly: " Mme. Dulac, is this the way all women repay a little trifling service?"

" Ah, *monsieur*," she smiled, " does not that depend upon the woman—and upon the man who did the service?"

XI.

THE afternoon had proved uneventful, though it had not been difficult to keep track of Salih. While the sun was still warm upon the terrace he had sat there smoking cigarette after cigarette and staring at the procession that sauntered by. At four he had gone to the Sporting Club for *trente et quarante* and Jimmy and Trench, from the roulette table in the adjoining room, had watched his broad back for two long hours.

They saw him safely back to the hotel at dusk, and later had waited in the shadows across from the Victoria until he came out with Mme. Dulac upon his arm. All this time he had not, apparently, noticed them, and they could not be certain whether or not he had had an inkling that he was being spied upon but when they had followed the couple, at a discreet interval, into the white and gold luxuriousness of Ciro's and saw their quarry at a distant table, the merest flicker of the lids over his apathetic eyes had showed them that he had marked them down.

When he had left the Victoria at noon Jimmy had been faced with the question of telling Trench what he had decided to do. He realized that finding the combination was almost a forlorn hope, but he had made up his mind that if Mme. Dulac succeeded he would do the rest. Trench, so far, had entered into the spirit of the adventure, and had given invaluable help, but it was certain that he would do everything in his power to dissuade his friend from this final step.

It would be better not to tell Trench. His help was not really needed, and Jimmy

did not want to spend the day arguing and explaining. Besides, he reflected, this should be *his* game, from now on, to win or lose.

So when he had recounted to Trench his visit to Mme. Dulac, he had told everything except the one important thing—her promise to try to get the combination. They were to keep up their watch upon Salih, and be ready to act, in whatever way they could, as soon as he took the jewels from Pucelli's safe. Meanwhile, Mme. Dulac was on their side, and would tell them all that she could discover as to Salih's plans. That would keep Trench interested, he reflected, and keep him quiet.

Trench had listened skeptically, and refused to share Jimmy's faith in the woman.

"She's a crook, my boy," he had declared with conviction. "I've seen hundreds just like her down here. Do you suppose any decent woman would play around in public with a damned fat Turk as she is doing? She admitted that she took the Casino's *douceur de voyage,* and is breaking the law by being here at all."

But Jimmy had shaken his head and refused to argue.

No sign came from Mme. Dulac, though Jimmy hardly took his eyes from her face during the whole dinner. Each time a waiter approached their table he wondered whether he were bringing a message that would mean that the last act in his adventure was beginning in real earnest.

As she and Salih rose to leave and passed by them on their way out, Jimmy half rose and bowed, but she gave no sign of recognition beyond the merest inclination of the head. No doorman waited, when they in their turn left the restaurant, to slip a folded paper into his hand. She had nothing to tell him yet.

Seemingly she had no difficulty in satisfying the Argus eyed and omniscient gentlemen who preside in the *bureaux* of the Casino, just inside the doors. The two men watched her disappear into the building with her companion, and a quarter of an hour later they left their post of observation across from the entrance and followed.

It was only a few moments before they caught sight of their quarry again. They had found seats at one of the crowded tables and were already playing. Jimmy, with Trench after him, wormed his way through the spectators gathered around the table, on the end nearest to Mme. Dulac, and peered over the intervening shoulders, looking down the line of faces. Mme. Dulac had a modest pile of counters on the green cloth before her, and was playing listlessly and for small stakes.

She seemed nervous and ill at ease. Salih, seen indistinctly in profile, on the other side of her, was playing methodically, stolidly, and always for the maximum. His hands would move slowly out at each play, with the regularity and precision of an automaton, would place the bets, and then move slowly back to be folded together on the table until the play was completed. He was winning, and his piles of counters were mounting higher and higher.

As they watched, Mme. Dulac lost the last of her chips. She turned to Salih and whispered something. Without even turning his head, he unclasped his hands, silently pushed a portion of his winnings along the table toward her, and went on playing. The hot color mounted to her face. He was treating her like a *cocotte!* But what else could she expect? Was she not deliberately letting him place the only construction possible upon her presence?

She picked up a few of the counters, with disgust and shame welling up like physical nausea within her. As she leaned forward to play them she looked down the table for an instant, and saw Jimmy's eyes upon her. He raised his brows in a question. For just a second, before she leaned back again she looked straight at him—a look that told him of failure. Her lips formed the syllable "no" and slowly and almost imperceptibly she shook her head.

Trench had not seen the signal. He was tired of standing in the crowd, and he was hot and uncomfortable.

"Let's get out of here," he complained. "If you want to keep within reach of her, you can do it just as well by hanging around some place where there's a little air. She knows you're here; that's enough."

They edged their way back into the clear

space behind the crowd and wandered down the long room between the tables. Jimmy took his friend by the arm.

"Charlie," he said despondently, "it's an awful job we're up against. Maybe we will have to open up to old Boujassy after all. One thing is sure. I'm bound to get them some way. That girl is not going to be permitted to do this rotten thing. Why, Charlie, I'm crazy about her. She is not going to marry that bounder if I have to kidnap her myself—and, do you know"—he stopped and glared at Trench—"I think she'd come!"

"Well, you're not going to kidnap her to-night, so cheer up, and let's play, or something."

"All right, but let's go to that same table. I want to keep within sight of them."

They crossed to the opposite side, and after a moment one seat was given up by a disgusted and disillusioned American, and Jimmy slipped into it. Trench stood behind him for a moment, but as there seemed to be no other chance for a place he tapped Jimmy on the shoulder, motioned to another table, and moved away.

The chair Jimmy had taken was almost opposite that of Mme. Dulac. As he took his place and tossed a note to the *croupier,* she had raised her head, looked sidewise at Salih, and again her lips had uttered a soundless "no." Salih had barely glanced at him and then resumed his fixed stare at the board.

The Moor was losing now, losing heavily, and the stacks of counters which had been piled up in front of his folded hands in opulent ranks were dwindling rapidly. Mme. Dulac had still a few pieces left from the stake which he had pushed toward her, but she was not playing. She was too unhappy and too full of the hopelessness of her task. At dinner Salih had opened a huge pocketbook upon the table to find his card to give to her. One side of it was stuffed with papers, and she had hungrily devoured every scrap of writing she could see as he flipped the contents over in his hands, hunting for the card. Somewhere there the combination might be written. But the time had been too short, and the infinitesimal chance of her getting the pocketbook, or of his dropping the paper on which the combination was written, or any other hoped for but well-nigh impossible opportunity, had not been given to her.

She sat staring down at the table, trying not to look across at Jimmy and see the disappointment in his eyes. Glancing sidewise, she was merely conscious of the black sleeved arm and brown hand of Salih as he reached out to make his plays.

Suddenly her heart seemed almost to stop. The confusion of the noises about her, the singsong chant of the *croupier,* the rattle of the ball in the wheel, and the voices of the players seemed to recede and die away as her whole mind became vividly and acutely conscious of the thing she saw. Something was written on Salih's white cuff—something that flashed into view as his arm stretched out over the board and then disappeared under his sleeve as he drew back. Why had she not thought of that?

She leaned toward him and put her hand upon his arm.

"Look, *monsieur,*" she said, "thirty-two has come up twice in the last five plays. Why do you not play it?"

To play the number he must reach past her. He turned.

"*Eh bien,*" he grunted, and his arm stretched out in front of her.

She leaned forward at the same moment, and in the fraction of a second that his cuff was disclosed she saw a word written there, and five numbers! "*Gauche*—7—22—4—" she read; and then he tossed the piece to the end *croupier,* and drew back his hand.

Though her eyes and brain had been in that instant sharpened to an alertness that blotted out everything in the world except those numbers, the instant had been too short.

"Play it again," she urged.

Again the hand moved past her. There it was! She would remember it all now. "19—4" were the last two. "Left—7—22—4—19—4." She closed her eyes tightly and repeated them to herself, over and over again, trying to photograph the sequence upon her mind.

She did not know whether Salih's thirty-two had won or not. She had no time to look. All her senses seemed concentrated upon those five numbers and upon the incredible fact that the key to success was in her hands.

She raised her head and looked across at Jimmy, her new found knowledge written plainly in her face for him to read. She caught his glance, and the slow nod she gave him was scarcely necessary, so clear was the message her eyes held. She turned to Salih.

"I am a little fatigued, my friend," she murmured, "and a trifle faint from the warmth here. Do not trouble yourself. I will sit for a little while in the lounge, where it is cooler. No matter if I lose my seat. I shall stand behind you when I return."

"I will accompany you," Salih answered ponderously, beginning to raise himself out of his chair.

She flung out a hand to stop him.

"But no. It is not necessary then. Do not disturb your play. I will remain."

Salih grunted once more and relapsed into his seat.

"As you will," he said.

Was his offer to leave his game mere politeness, or was it suspicion? She wondered in desperation. Was he putting two and two together—the scene yesterday in the blue room, and the fact that the Americans had dined near them to-night, and that one of them had now chosen a seat opposite them in a room of a dozen tables? She must get away, if only for a moment, and she must be alone. Apparently it was not to be easy.

She racked her brain for an excuse—some pretext to leave him, some way of reaching Jimmy. She was beginning to be a little panicky. It was growing late, and to-night was the last chance!

She stared at the crowd about her—at Jimmy sitting across the way, his eyes watchful and his color high—at the painted figures on the green cloth and the counters scattered over its surface. She wondered if any one of these people was as intent upon his game as she was upon the problem she had to solve. Silly people playing a silly game! Numbers! Red and black—odd and even! Grown people who to-morrow might be doing grown people's work, lost in the hysterical excitement of a childish game! Just squares and painted numbers!

Numbers! A sudden blinding flash of comprehension leaped at her, drove vividly through her awakened brain, and the figures before her seemed to grow larger as she looked at them. Of course, that was the way, if only she could make him understand!

She looked down at the remains of her stake. She had only four five-franc plaques left; she had brought no money; and the combination had five numbers which must be signaled. M. Peyton knew one of the numbers, but did not know that it was the first. She must have five chips to play.

"*Monsieur*, I think I shall play a little more." She looked up at Salih with a smile. "You would be so obliging—you see I have only—"

She pointed to the four yellow plaques in her hand.

Salih looked around at her.

"I am in miserable luck, *madame*. I regret. If *madame* will have patience, perhaps later—"

He became absorbed again in the whirling of the wheel.

She thought quickly. Later might be never. He was losing steadily. She glanced at the watch on her wrist and noted the hour with a start of surprise. Yes, she must try it now, though she had five numbers to play and only four chips. That meant that she must trust to the remote chance of winning once in four times, in order to have something with which to play the fifth number!

She picked up the first and held it between her thumb and forefinger, looking hard at Jimmy under her lashes. He looked across and could see that she was trying to tell him something. She glanced quickly from him to the piece in her hand and then back again to his face.

Deliberately she placed the chip at the end of her rake and pushed it onto the number seven, tapping it into place with the handle; then she slowly nodded her

head once more. Again she looked at Jimmy, and then back to the square she had chosen.

To her joy, she saw his eyes widen and fill with comprehension. He bent his head and raised it again. He had understood her signal.

The ball fell with a click into a compartment. She had lost, but as Jimmy reached for his pencil and wrote something in the notebook in which all serious players keep a record of each play, she knew that it was not the winning number which he wrote—but seven.

Again she played—twenty-two. It lay directly in front of him—between them. Again she lost and again Jimmy wrote something down in his book and smiled.

Number four next. She tossed her third piece to the *croupier*. It was too far away for her to place. "*Nombre quatre, monsieur, merci.*" It was pushed onto the square. The wheel stopped and once more her bet was lost and raked in. Ninteen had won.

She picked up her last plaque with a sinking heart. Nineteen had won last time, and nineteen was the number she must now play—the fourth number in the combination. She *must* win—it was her last chance yet to do so nineteen must repeat.

With her pulses hammering and her hands trembling and cold as ice, she slowly pushed the little ivory disk out upon the board and onto the number nineteen. Then she closed her eyes. Jimmy, watching her covertly, saw that something was amiss, and in a flash he knew what it was! Four numbers did not seem quite long enough for the combination of a safe!

"*Faites vos jeux, messieurs!*"

The ball clicked from the rim of the wheel and began to circle, dropping down to the center and snapping back again to the rim. Slower and slower it rolled until she could hear it rattling over the metal partition between the compartments.

"*Rien ne va plus!*" the *croupier* called.

Still she sat motionless with eyes closed. She dared not look at the wheel. The rattling stopped.

"*Dix-neuf, rouge, impair et passe*"

Nineteen! A repeat, and she had won! She had won on her fourth play, and now she could play her fifth number!

The look in her eyes was all Jimmy needed to make him sure that he had been right, that she had not yet finished. She drew toward her the pile of pink twenty franc plaques and the few extra yellows that the *croupier* had mechanically counted out for her and filled her lungs with a deep, long breath of relief. Jimmy made an entry in his book and resumed his watch.

"I felicitate you, *madame*," murmured Salih, in her ear. "You have all the luck."

She played her last number—four—with an eye still upon Jimmy, and as the chip was raked away and he looked up from his book, she swept the remainder of her winnings into her lap and folded her hands.

"You do not play again, *madame?*" inquired Salih in surprise.

"I have finished," she replied.

XII.

SALIH NASAR stepped into the automobile which waited for him at the door of the hotel. M. Mallet, standing on the steps above him, bowed engagingly and rubbed his plump hands together.

"You have another glorious morning, *monsieur*. A splendid day for your little trip. You can easily lunch at San Remo and return by nightfall. *Bon voyage, monsieur.*"

"*Au revoir,*" returned Salih. "Until to-night."

He smiled thoughtfully all the way to Cap Martin and chuckled softly to himself. Once he leaned forward and tapped the chauffeur on the shoulder.

"Will you stop for an instant at the Villa of the Marquis de Pucelli?"

He was admitted by a servant who greeted him with a smile of recognition and ushered him into the library. The curtains were drawn wide, and the sun streamed in from the broad terrace outside, flooding the room with golden morning light. Salih could hear the chirping of birds in the garden and catch the fragrance of jasmine from the vine that framed the open window. It was a glorious morning

indeed and he was very happy. He smiled upon the man and murmured:

"*Monsieur le Marquis* has given instructions concerning the safe, is it not so, Félix?"

"*Parfaitment, monsieur* is to consider himself at home. If *monsieur* will excuse me?"

Félix withdrew, and closed the door behind him.

Salih did not hurry. He had all his life before him now. He dropped to his knees before the safe which stood in the corner by the desk and drew a notebook from his pocket. He adjusted his spectacles upon his nose, and, with eyes upon his book, slowly and painstakingly clicked off the combination with his free hand.

The door yielded and swung outward, and with a contented sigh he stretched out his fingers, took the package from its hiding place and slipped it triumphantly into his pocket. There was no further need for worry. In an hour he would be in Italy.

Still smiling happily he came out upon the terrace and with Félix at his elbow, climbed into the automobile. He leaned forward to the chauffeur.

"To San Remo now—take the upper road."

"*Bon voyage*, monsieur," murmured Félix.

But Salih did not even hear him. He was too gloriously conscious of the satisfying pressure of the package against his side—the casket containing those talismanic gems, the Tears of the Peri.

About the time that the Moor, in Monte Carlo, was waking to the blue and gold of that most perfect morning for his exodus, the Marquis de Pucelli was slipping on his dressing-gown in his hotel bedroom in Nice, a dozen miles away.

He had intended to make an early start for Paris, but it had been late when he returned from the dinner the night before and he had overslept. Nevertheless he drew a chair up to the table where his tray had been laid and breakfasted leisurely. He was not used to hurrying. He had never hurried in his life. If he should not reach Paris to-morrow, the next day would do as well. There was no need for haste in this matter of the wedding gift.

When he had finished he pushed back his chair and rang for a servant.

"Will you have my chauffeur notified to have the car ready in a quarter of an hour?" he directed. "My luggage may be fetched at the same time."

"*Bien, Monsieur le Marquis.*" The man withdrew.

Pucelli finished dressing, unhurried, did what little packing remained to be done, then threw himself into a chair by the open window, morning paper in hand, and lit a cigarette. For a few minutes he puffed lazily, idly turning over the pages of the *Eclaireur*.

Suddenly he started forward, bolt upright in his seat, and focussed his unbelieving eyes upon the sheet. For a moment he did not move, but stared open mouthed at what he saw there. Then he sprang to his feet, and threw the paper from him. His face cleared and his lips parted in a smile of dawning comprehension.

"So that was it, was it, old sly one?" he muttered. "I should take a hand in this myself, if I am to be a member of the family."

He seemed to come to a decision quickly. He glanced at his watch with a frown, snatched up his hat, snapped the locks of the traveling bags, and flung himself out of the room.

The chauffeur was waiting with the car at the door of the hotel.

"I am returning to the villa, Antoine, you will remain with the luggage until I communicate with you."

Antoine had been too long in the service of the marquis to show surprise or even to feel it. He touched his cap and opened the door. Pucelli sprang to the driving seat, started the motor, and the car shot off up the broad promenade along the beach toward Cap Martin.

He flashed through Villefranche and Beaulieu at forty miles an hour and on the straightaways along the sea below Eze he pushed the car to its limit. He did not know at what hour Salih intended to start, but he knew now the reason for his sudden departure and knew that the Moor would

waste no time retrieving his package and quitting the Riviera for good.

He slowed up for the sharp turn after Eze, cursing the delay, and roared into the long smooth stretch beyond. He must reach the villa before Salih. If only he had not overslept!

Through the early morning traffic of Monte Carlo's main avenue he made his way, fuming at his paltry twenty miles per hour, but once in the open road again he let the blue roadster out in a final sprint.

Just twenty minutes after he had left Nice he whirled into the driveway of his villa and stopped, with a screeching of brakes and a backward fling of gravel from the wheels under the *porte cochère*. Félix hurried out onto the terrace to meet him, wide-eyed with astonishment.. "M. le Marquis returns? We are not warned. Nothing is prepared!" he babbled.

Pucelli jerked the door open and sprang out.

"Has M. Salih Nasar arrived yet?" he shot at the man.

"But yes, he stopped for his effects, I admitted him to the library as M. le Marquis instructed me. He left hardly ten minutes ago for San Remo."

Pucelli clenched his lean brown hands and raised them over his head with an oath.

"Peste!" he muttered, hopelessly. "What devil prompted me to leave last night."

He strode a few paces across the terrace, toward the door, then suddenly whirled about to face Félix again, his eyes lit with the fire of a sudden resolve.

"Do you know which road he took?"

"Yes, M. le Marquis. He told the chauffeur to go by the upper road."

"Did he inquire for me?"

"He assumed M. le Marquis was absent. He did not inquire."

"Ten minutes!" Pucelli murmured. He dashed down the steps and into the car once more and before the astonished Félix could spring to help him, was whirling down the driveway.

His reckless dash from Nice was nothing compared to this last despairing effort, now that he knew that the Moor had the package once more in his possession. He hurled his car up the cliff road like a madman. His sense of fear was so drowned in the hopeless anger that had come upon him that he hardly slackened speed on the dizzy turns where his wheels would skid almost to the edge of the precipice. Higher and higher he mounted and still the road ahead of him was deserted as curve after curve was rounded.

Then, as he came around one of these, almost at the top, a car appeared ahead and he could see Salih's fez over the back. He overhauled it just as he reached the Grimaldi's wall and shot alongside. He threw a flashing smile at Salih and waved his hand. "Stop, my friend," he called out." "I shall drive you to San Remo."

Salih turned his head in alarm, torn from the pleasant reverie into which he had fallen, and put his hand instinctively to his pocket. The startled glance which he threw at the car alongside softened for an instant to a look of annoyance as he recognized Pucelli. Then quickly he recovered himself and smiled back. He signaled the chauffeur to stop and the two cars came to a standstill.

"Behold, my Salih," he declaimed, "I did not leave on my little trip after all. I waited over for the pleasure of driving you to San Remo. But I omitted to tell Félix to call me and so, stupidly, I was not notified until you had gone. Come. It is better late than never. Send back your car." He smiled ingratiatingly at the Moor.

"My good Tino! Truly, you are too kind." the other protested, masking his annoyance. "I must not impose on you." He wanted more than anything in the world to be alone, to savor the joy of his success in peace, without this chattering Tino beside him.

"Impose on me, my friend!" Pucelli cried jovially, opening the door. "Out with you, quickly."

Salih realized that objections were futile. He climbed slowly down. After all, it was only for an hour or two.

"*Eh bien,* great impulsive one, I accept."

His chauffeur pocketed his money, backed the car around, and started down the long slope. Pucelli waited beside the Moor until it had disappeared around the

curve far down the road. Then he whirled about quickly and the look in his face brought Salih's heart pounding against his ribs.

The little eyes twinkled as they looked down into his and the smile which he had so often seen was twisted into something that chilled his blood.

"I did go to Nice last night." Pucelli began very softly, leaning toward him. "But I returned this morning—suddenly. Do you know why?"

Salih gazed at him, fascinated, but could only shake his head.

"I was on my way to Paris to choose a wedding gift for my fiancée. Do you know the name of my fiancée, old fox?"

Again Salih shook his head. What was Tino talking about? His knees were shaking with fear.

"Her name is Mlle. de Grimaldi," whispered Pucelli.

Salih was startled out of his silence. He stepped back in surprise and his jaw dropped.

"De Grimaldi!" he croaked.

"Ah," breathed Pucelli, still smiling. "I see that the name carries some meaning to you. Well, my friend, M. Salih Nasar, I have decided that it will not be necessary to go to Paris for my wedding gift, when I can find such an eminently appropriate one so close at hand—and at no expense. Be good enough"—he bowed in mock deference—"to hand me the package which you placed in my safe yesterday."

Salih's heart turned to ice in his breast. Yet not a sign of his terror appeared in the blank look he cast at Pucelli. His eyes opened wide and he stared up at him with a puzzled frown.

"My dear Tino," he ejaculated. "Have you gone mad? Is this a joke? My private documents con be of no possible—"

"Documents!" Pucelli sneered. "Come. No more play acting."

"Is this robbery then?"

"No, it is restitution, old fox. I read your notice in the newspaper this morning in Nice—you forgot to cancel it, did you not? *Eh bien,* I naturally know the story of the Grimaldi well and after learning what Monsieur S. N. of the Hotel de Paris was doing here, it did not take a particularly brilliant intellect to guess what your package contained. It occured to me when I handled it yesterday that it was a trifle heavy for documents—and the name of de Grimaldi startled you, *hein?*"

He paused a moment and smiled down upon Salih.

"The game is up, my old one. It will be my great pleasure to return your booty to its rightful owners. It should be a delightful surprise for my wife after the ceremony." He advanced a step, threateningly. "The package!"

Salih glanced about him in a panic. Behind him was the low stone embankment that guarded the edge of the precipice, in front the gray wall that masked Grimaldi's gardens. The white road stretched away on either side, deserted as far as one could see. There was only the roadster.

For a moment he stared past Pucelli; then suddenly he hurled himself forward in a despairing effort to reach the car. He felt an arm close about his neck and at the touch his fear vanished in his rage. The blood of his forbears surged up within him, and he turned to give battle to the Christian on the spot where, centuries before, his ancestor had fallen.

Two wiry arms wrapped themselves about him, but his strength was greater than the Italian had bargained for. Again and again he wrenched himself loose and leaped for Pucelli's throat, only to find his own arms pinioned once more. And each time he could feel a hand creeping toward the pocket inside his tightly buttoned coat.

Back and forth over the stones beside the roadway they struggled, panting, inarticulate, with faces grimly set. But the Moor's long unused muscles could not hold out forever against the younger man. Pucelli succeeded at last in tearing open his coat and before he could twist himself out of danger, had grasped his collar with both hands and forced it back upon his shoulders. A lean brown hand, freed for an instant, darted forward like a flash. The fingers closed over the package and jerked it out.

With all his strength, Pucelli hurled Salih from him and leaped back, but, with a

snarl, the Moor was on him again, clutching at his treasure. In the shock of their meeting the package was knocked to the ground and the two men, locked now in an embrace which neither dared to loose, swayed and stumbled drunkenly toward the edge of the cliff.

Over Salih's shoulder Pucelli marked the nearness of the precipice. Putting forth every ounce of strength in his tired body, he pushed the Moor back inch by inch toward the low balustrade. As their feet touched it, Salih screamed out in terror and instinctively turned his head to look into the abyss behind him. In that second Pucelli wrenched his arms free. His hands closed about Salih's throat and slowly he forced him backward, down upon the wall. For a moment more the doomed man fought, tearing with ineffectual hands at the fingers that were choking him. Little by little his struggles ceased until he lay inert, his head and shoulders hanging out over the edge.

"*Bon voyage,* old fox," Pucelli panted. He let go, and the unconscious form toppled over the edge and plunged downward onto the rocks which had received the body of his ancestor in that struggle with another Italian nine centuries before.

Pucelli stepped back from the balustrade. He swayed upon his feet a little and laughed brokenly. His eye fastened upon Salih's red fez lying beside the wall. He picked it up and tossed it over the edge. Then he sank down with his back against the coping and a fit of trembling shook him. Reaction swept over him like a wave. He sat staring at the brown paper package lying on the stones at his feet—his reward for the thing he had done.

He looked about. No one was yet upon the road. Finally he reached out and touched the package. He drew it toward him and with fingers that trembled with the terror that was shaking his whole body he tore away the string which bound it and ripped off the enveloping folds of paper. As he drew out the silver casket his fear seemed to recede a little, and there was something of eagerness in the hands that fumbled at the double catch. He threw back the lid and uttered a gasp of dismay. The box was quite empty save for a white card which lay on the bottom—an engraved visiting card.

He snatched it up and read:

M. PAUL BOUJASSY
Officier de la Légion d'Honneur
Chef de la Sûreté de
S. A. Albert Ier de Monaco

And written underneath, in a round American hand, were the words: "*Bon voyage, M. Salih Nasar.*"

XIII.

"YOUNG man," said Trench severely as he and Jimmy sat on the terrace smoking after a late and leisurely breakfast, "do you know what time it is? If I had a pocketful of jewelry to deliver to a young lady several miles away, I wouldn't sit around half the morning thinking about it. You go up and turn over that property—and don't make a fool of yourself either," he added significantly.

Jimmy stood up.

"You're right. I've been sitting here knowing I ought to go, and yet—Charlie, it's the first time in my life I was ever nervous like this. Now that I've got them and everything is all right—what am I going to say to her?"

"Say to her!" sniffed Trench in disgust. "Come on. The morning's half gone."

He steered him down the steps and into a car.

"I'll go along with you and drop you off wherever you want. Then I'll go on to La Turbie and sit around for a while, and stop for you on my way back."

He got in beside the plastic and unresisting Jimmy, and they moved off. Hardly a word was said during the ascent. Trench was at peace with all the world. He had passed through three stirring but terrible days for him, and could scarcely believe that he was really out of the woods, with his reputation untarnished. Jimmy was

plainly nervous. He fidgeted in his seat, looked at his watch, smoked a long procession of cigarettes rapidly and furiously, and from time to time patted the breast pocket of his coat.

Only once did he do more than vaguely answer Trench's occasional remarks. As they rounded a turn high up on the cliff he waved his hand toward the distant blue mass of the Italian shore and turned upon Trench a face wreathed in smiles.

" He's just about crossing the border into Italy," he said. Then there was an unbroken silence for the rest of the trip.

They had passed only one car on the way—a low hung, blue roadster that flashed by them, going down. Jimmy would not have known its driver even if he had taken the trouble to turn his head, and the blue car was going at such a terrific speed that even Trench did not recognize the face that bent low over the wheel—a lean, brown face, with lips that were compressed into a thin red line, and panic-stricken and furious eyes.

Jimmy stopped the car at the entrance to the little road and climbed out.

" I'll come back in an hour or so," Trench said. " I'll turn a little way into that road and wait for you."

Jimmy looked over his shoulder as he strode off. " Don't be too long," he called back anxiously.

He reached the gate and looked into the garden. She was not in her accustomed place, and he entered and came to the well, wondering if anything were wrong. After a moment he saw her hurrying toward him down the path from the direction of the villa.

He had left her yesterday morning a disconsolate, heartbroken little girl. Now he saw her smiling and radiant, her eyes dancing with a joy that he could not understand. She came to him and held out her hand.

" Good morning, *monsieur*," she said a little breathlessly. " I have been waiting for you, really, but it has not been possible for me to be in the garden all the time. There is one window in the library from which I can see the little gate, and I watched for you there. Oh, you are good to come. Is there any news at all?"

" I found out yesterday that Salih intended to leave Monte Carlo this morning," Jimmy began, " so, of course, that left me only a very little time, *mademoiselle*."

" Oh, I understand," she said, consolingly, but still smiling. " One cannot do the impossible."

" But I learned where the jewels had been put—until last night," he went on.

" Oh, where?"

" In the safe in the Marquis de Pucelli's library. He is a friend of Salih, it seems."

" Pucelli?" she whispered in horror. She was not smiling now. " Oh, what does it mean?"

" Nothing, *mademoiselle*. Forgive me! I should not have frightened you. Pucelli did not know what they were—and "—after a pause—" they are not there now."

" Where are they? Go on, please."

Jimmy slipped a hand into his coat and drew out a knotted handkerchief.

" They are here, *mademoiselle*."

He put it into her hands. She looked at it uncomprehendingly for a moment, then up at Jimmy's face. She shook her head as if refusing to believe it.

" It is not really—"

He nodded.

" Oh!" she whispered. " Oh, it is not possible!"

She sank down upon the coping of the well, and loosening the knots with shaking fingers, drew out the necklace. She held it in her cupped hands for a moment, then pressed it to her heart with a cry.

" Oh, how beautiful!" she choked. " It's true, isn't it?"

She looked suddenly up at him. For a moment she had forgotten.

" But they were in Pucelli's safe!"

He nodded again.

" Yes," he said, embarrassed. " But I found out how to open it—found the combination—by a piece of luck—and then went there while Salih was at the Casino last night. You had told me, you know, that Pucelli had gone away. His servant left me in the library for a few minutes while I pretended to write a note. It was simple. I wish you wouldn't thank me."

She stared at him in amazement, trying to understand this man who had accom-

plished such an incredible thing for her and who would not be thanked. She was afraid that nothing she could say would ever half tell him what he had really done—and she was afraid to trust herself even to begin to tell him.

"M. Peyton, I have not any words in which to thank you. It is beyond thanks, almost."

He interrupted her quickly with a wry smile. "No, please!" He could not keep hold upon himself much longer, he thought.

"All of us are so indebted to you—and when my father knows he will be able, perhaps, to express what we feel. You shall meet my father—and my mother," she added, and the look she had worn when she came into the garden crept back into her eyes.

"Your mother? I did not know—you have not spoken of your mother," he began.

"No, *monsieur*"—her face lit up—"I have had no mother for many years, until this morning. Oh, M. Peyton, that is my great news that I was going to tell you. Think what a wonderful morning this has been for me, for before I knew that you were bringing this"—she held out the necklace—"I found my beautiful mother again. She has come back."

"Oh!" said Jimmy blankly.

"I have never been told much about it. My father and mother were separated when I was a very little girl. I have never seen her since then and she has not even been to Monte Carlo for many years. Father has never permitted me to speak of her.

"Then, *monsieur*"—she put out a hand and timidly touched his sleeve—"this morning, a little while ago, my father called me into his library, and there was a lady, smiling at me. 'This is your mother, Giselle,' he said, and I have never known his voice to be so kind. 'She has come back to live with us.' We have been talking all the morning, and—oh, *monsieur*, it is so nice to have a mother!

"That is why I could not be waiting for you here. But I have told them all about the jewels, and about you. Father was so happy to-day that I knew he would not be very angry with me for talking to you. Of course, he was surprised, but my mother shook her head and said something to him that I could not hear, and he did not even scold me—as he should have. I slipped away just now when I saw you coming," she added irrelevantly.

"I am glad you are so happy," said Jimmy lamely. This new development confused him. He vaguely wondered what he should say next. When was he to see her again? When—

Suddenly she looked toward the house and sprang up eagerly.

"Oh, here is my mother now," she cried.

Jimmy followed her with his eyes as she ran up the path and put her arm around the waist of a tall lady who was advancing toward him. The lady's face he could see only indistinctly as her head was bent over Giselle as they walked, but he saw that she was beautiful and vaguely familiar. Suddenly she raised her head as she came nearer, and he caught his breath sharply and stared at her, his face tense with amazement. She smiled graciously and held out her hand.

"M. Peyton, I can begin to repay my obligations now," she said.

"Mme. Dulac!" he stammered, taking her hand.

"Not Mme. Dulac any more, *monsieur*. I am Léonie de Grimaldi. I am afraid you have never been properly presented to my daughter." She put an arm around the girl. "This is why I came to Monte Carlo, M. Peyton. This is why I needed money and why I have prayed that you could succeed with Salih Nasar. Otherwise, if we had failed, I should have taken her away—to save her."

Giselle stood looking from one to the other, mystified.

"Do you know him, mother?"

"Yes, my daughter, I know him. If it had not been for him I might not be here now."

"I don't understand," Giselle faltered.

Jimmy's brain was whirling. Things were happening too rapidly for him.

"I had no idea, *madame*, when I spoke to you yesterday!" He looked at Giselle. "I did not—"

"I know, *monsieur*, but I am glad that you told me."

Giselle felt that everything was so complicated. She would know in time, but there was so much she could not fathom now. What had *monsieur* told her mother yesterday, she wondered? Then she thought of the necklace which she had thrust into her bosom when she had run to meet her. She drew it out.

"I do not understand at all how you knew M. Peyton, but, oh, *mother,*" she cried, "see what he has done! I told you he was helping me. Look! I can hardly believe it yet, but he has found them. He brought them to me just now."

Mme. de Grimaldi took the necklace from her hand and smiled upon her tenderly.

"I know it, my dear."

"You knew it?"

"Yes, dear, M. Peyton told me before he knew that he was telling your mother, but I had not seen them until now."

She gazed at the wonderful things she held in her hand.

"They are more beautiful than I had even dreamed," she said musingly. She looked at Jimmy. "*Monsieur,* you have brought to all of us more happiness than you can ever know." Again she put her hands on his shoulders as she had done yesterday—long ago—in the parlor of the hotel, and looked into his eyes. "Little by little we may be able to repay you, my dear," she whispered under her breath.

"Mother," Giselle cried, "please tell me what it means. There is so much to explain!"

Mme. de Grimaldi smiled upon them both.

"M. Peyton can do that better than I, my daughter. You can, can you not, *monsieur?*" she said significantly.

"Yes, *madame.* I would like to try," he answered, looking straight into her eyes.

She smiled and turned to go.

"In a little while you must come in and I will present you to my husband. Explain to her, my friend, everything that she does not know. And you, darling, must show M. Peyton the garden. I think he has not seen it all yet."

Jimmy flashed a look at Giselle that made her drop her eyes and glance away.

"No, *madame,*" he said boldly, "I have just had a glimpse of it—not nearly enough."

"*Au revoir,* then, my children. Do not be long."

She disappeared up the path toward the villa. Giselle sat down upon the well's edge and lifted her eyes to his face. He tried to speak, but could find no words that were worthy. She was staring at him with glowing eyes, her lips parted in a smile whose loveliness he had never before imagined, and her bosom rising and falling under the slim, brown hand that rested upon it.

"I wonder," she ventured finally, her voice coming very clear and sweet in the silent garden. "I wonder whether you know how much you have helped. You help me to a happiness of which I only dreamed—before you came—and I can do nothing for you, except to say, '*Merci, monsieur.*'"

Jimmy took a step forward and sat down by her side. He was terribly afraid of himself and his courage was ebbing away. She had turned her head from him, so that her face was hidden.

"But *I* don't need any help," he said softly. He waited a moment, then great daring, moved a little closer. His hand touched hers, and he drew it away quickly, in a panic lest he had offended her.

"Well"—he could hardly catch her whispered words—"you seem to need it now."

Trench had waited in the narrow road beside the wall, it seemed to him, for hours, and had begun to wonder whether his friend had not gone back to Monte Carlo alone.

He was in a villainous humor. The place was full of flies, the leather cushions of the car were infernally hot, he had left his pipe at home, and he was beginning to get very hungry.

He tried the horn. He honked a few times, then listened; then honked again at intervals. Finally he could stand it no longer. He climbed out of the car and stalked away up the road under the shadow of the gray wall, muttering to himself something about people who chose the hottest, most fly infested spots for you when they wanted to keep you waiting.

Far ahead of him he could see two jutting stone pillars and, as he came closer, a gate. He reached it and looked in.

Jimmy was standing in the garden a little distance away, beside the well. His broad back was turned toward Trench and his head was bent. He seemed to be alone. Lying on the gravel path beside him, a scintillating, glittering heap, was the amazing necklace which Jimmy had dangled before his incredulous eyes on his return last night. What could have happened?

" Hey!" Trench began. " What—"

Then he saw Jimmy bend his head still lower and a flash of white appeared over his shoulder—an arm—

" I *beg* your pardon," he whispered, and tiptoed off down the road.

THE END.

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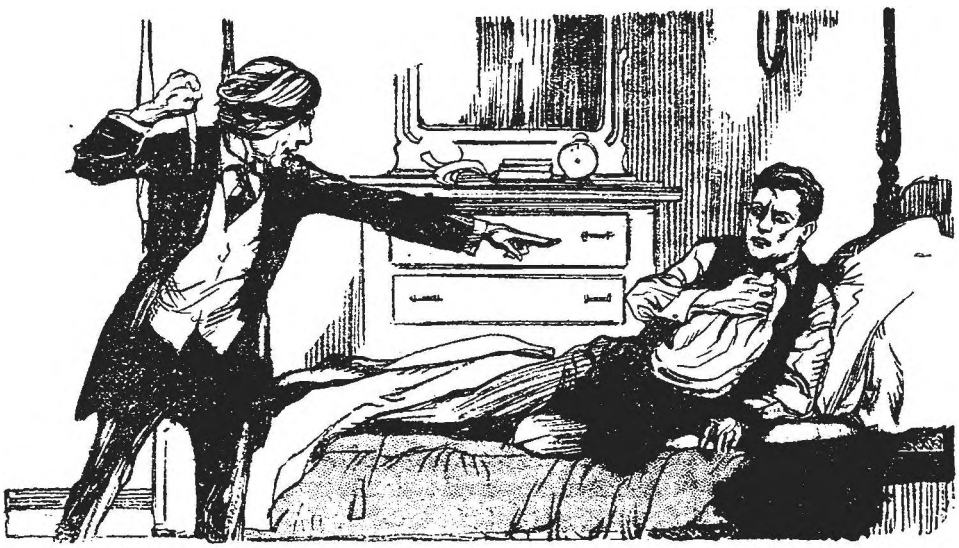
OLD MORGAN'S GOLD

THERE lies to the north'ard of Cuba
An island, unnamed and unknown;
A blot on the breast of the ocean,
Accursed and silent and lone,
And never a beast nor a sea bird
Its plague stricken jungles enfold,
But deep in its festering swamp lands
Old Morgan keeps watch on his gold.
The ghost of old Morgan, the pirate,
Grim author of horrors untold,
Forever and ever is guarding
The grave of his ill gotten gold.

'Mid eddying mists and miasmas
Strange shadows come creeping by night,
Come stealthy and fearful and furtive,
Each swinging a flickering light.
And these are the crime sodden spirits
Who once in his crew were enrolled—
They gather to watch Henry Morgan
Count over his double damned gold:
" Here's one for you and one for you,
And two doubloons for me;
Here's one to drink the hangman luck,
And one for the devil's fee."

There's hate in the hollow eyes of them,
There's greed in their grinning jaws,
As for the price of their blasted souls
They reach out their fleshless claws.
But as each ghoul in that ghastly band
On his wage of sin lays hold
It's vanished out of his grasping palm,
And gone in old Morgan's gold.
And so they sit, and they watch and wait,
As shuddering night grows old,
While over and over Morgan's ghost
Is counting old Morgan's gold.

James Stuart Montgomery.



Pit of the Golden Dragon

By WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

Author of "February-Third Joe," "Watch the Yankee," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

THE six o'clock train brings three men to Galesburg, Kansas—Wismer, a bank examiner; Cooper, who is engaged to Gertrude Hadley, daughter of the president of a local bank, and an East Indian anxious to avoid attention. Wilse Dilling, a cripple, night telegraph operator at the station, who is secretly in love with Gertrude, suspects that the accounts of old Micah Hadley may not be in shape for an examination. He goes to the bank to warn him, and the old man, on the verge of prostration, confesses that he has speculated and lost seventy thousand dollars of the bank's money.

Cooper, calling on Gertrude, sees the face of the mysterious East Indian peering at him through the window. Greatly agitated, he leaves the girl and rushes back to his hotel. Meanwhile Wilse Dilling has decided to make a desperate effort to save Gertrude and her father from the ruin and dishonor that threaten.

CHAPTER VI.

CONFRONTED.

STRING BEAN ANNIE — chambermaid, waitress and general all around workgirl at the Galesburg House—was preparing Cooper's room for the night, when the fellow entered after his flight from the Hadley home. Cooper ordered her out.

Now if there was one thing to which Annie strenuously objected, it was being ordered out—out of anywhere. Obviously, Annie wanted to be "in" and to stay in. She was one of those odd fish cast up from the great sea of human life, who had drifted into Galesburg, secured a job, and made friends without much being known of her past.

She had a shape like a string bean, responsible for her nickname, vague brown eyes, frizzled bangs, and a propensity for always doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. But the drummer who took Annie for a dolt, or made advances, was slapping

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the face of Kismet. She had her code. Also, her vague eyes took in much. Also, she had a certain dignity and pride, and when Cooper talked gruffly to her she made an issue of it—outside the keyhole.

"He was scairt, that's what he was," commented Annie later. "White as a spirit, he was, and his eyes was big and round and sickish, just like he'd been seein' corpses fresh from the grave. So I watched him.

"I thought he'd maybe had a fight with his girl, at first. But through the keyhole I seen him go to his grips and pull out a nawful revolver. Then I seen him try all the windows and make sure they was locked.

"When he'd done that, he took off his wraps and had a drink. Then he commenced walking up and down and sweatin' so's I could almost see it on the rugs next day."

Annie's duties called her elsewhere that night, however.

The Galesburg House was a long, two story building of red brick. There are two verandas on the Main Street front, the upper on a level with the second floor. The windows of the rooms are tall and deep, the sills being a mere fifteen inches above the veranda flooring outside. There were two windows from Cooper's room out upon this second story veranda—the windows String Bean Annie saw the fellow lock so carefully.

Cooper fought valiantly to preserve his poise and common sense as he paced his room that night. It was a sorry business.

Twice before had he glimpsed that same evil face outside a window—he seemed dreaming to behold it back here in prosaic, mediocre, grubby Galesburg; yet the contrast only added to its evil.

He had seen it by moonlight outside the home of a new found business acquaintance in Bakir, India—twisted, distorted, with hate and revenge.

He had seen it dissolve into shadow the other side a glass door in a patrician hotel corridor in San Francisco. Now it had apparently followed him here, the most ordinary workaday community of Galesburg—a horrible touch of the bizarre, mystic East set down in the most commonplace of American surroundings.

Why?

There was nothing necromantic about it. It was logical—and sordid.

In Bakir there had been a high caste native girl. Cooper had met her at the house of a business friend. Oriental nights, the flavor of exotic moonlight, temple bells. The white man had gone one evening to the little house between the city gate and the shop of the lacquer merchant. Many white men did so. What was one dusky native woman among all the myriads of the East? He had seen her twice after that. Then came word by a devious, ominous way that she was dead—murdered.

Cooper was a marked man. No need for his business friend to excoriate him for his indiscretion and advise him to leave for home at once.

In San Francisco he had thought that perhaps his conscience was playing him tricks. The face in the corridor might have had nothing whatever to do with himself. But there was sickening confirmation now in the features he had looked in so plainly this evening. The same man was after him, though why he had not struck before was yet to be explained.

As the hours of that memorable night deepened, the fellow's panic only increased. If the Indian were after his life, he could not demand police protection without explaining his adventure and its dénouement. If the Indian were not after his life, why follow him half around the globe?

Shortly after one o'clock the silhouette of a man passed the window outside the second story piazza. Despite the careful locking, that window was raised. The prowler stepped through. A moment later the light in Cooper's room was extinguished.

There was no outcry. Cooper, his clothes still on his fagged body, watched groggily when his eyes had opened. Before him stood a personage. Tall, proud, ominous, sinister, the intruder had come from nowhere, apparently. And somehow the white man was powerless to use his gun.

He tried to cry out, and could not. To attempt capture of this personage would level the finger of vile accusation at himself. It was all an ugly dream—a nightmare.

The intruder spoke. His English was very slow, careful, precise, after the manner of educated Orientals whose grammar is fashioned word by word with difficulty.

"We meet with our faces turned to one another at last," the shape declared. "You would flee and make escape. But we meet."

Cooper fought for strength in his paralyzed limbs. He got to his feet and backed crazily against the bureau.

"What do you want of me *here?*" he cried hoarsely.

"The thing which you love best in the world—that is the thing which I seek."

"The thing—I love best—in the world? What do you mean?"

"Many times could I have killed you. But killing—bah! What is killing? The sleep comes. It is only merciful. There is no suffering—for you. And I shall make suffering for you, greatly. I shall make suffering for you through the thing you love best in all the world—the thing which I have seen."

It was a page out of the Arabian Nights. Yet it was not. It was too ghastly real.

"I tell you I don't know what you mean."

"Then you deal in lies, son of a pig! You remember the Bakir Gate and the little house by the purple temple? Ah, I see that I am right. The woman—she was sister to me. I have followed because—she died."

"But I didn't kill her. She was murdered."

"You took my honor. It is the law. Her honor was my honor, and the honor of the men who bear her name. You have been in the East. You should have had understanding. You did not think that one would follow. But I have followed and I am here. And I shall make you suffer. I can make exchange."

"Exchange!"

A horrid shudder rent Cooper. There was something irrepressibly, fatally mesmeric about this shape.

"It is written: 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.' And I write: 'A woman for a woman.' For that is but honor for honor. To-night I have seen the fair one lying in your arms. I shall see you pay. Through her I shall see you pay."

"You'd make an innocent third party—a woman—because I—"

"Through her shall you pay—because she is what you love best—and it will hurt the son of a pig the most."

"Like hell I will! This is civilized America, not the heathen Orient."

"Remember, there shall be no warning. I shall strike when you least expect."

Cooper's gaze was riveted, fascinated. He quailed before a personality stronger than his own—a fatalist who would stop at nothing.

As he held his glance the brown man was about to speak again, when a sound came in the hall outside.

String Bean Annie, stopping on her way to her room to visualize the status of events through Cooper's keyhole, had beheld the sinister silhouette against the opposite windows. Now she was on her sudden way downstairs, arousing the house.

"I seen a nigger, big as a house, with a butcher knife at Mr. Cooper's throat!" cried Annie crazily. "Hurry up! He's bein' murdered!"

They hammered on Cooper's door, and it was opened. They pushed in fearfully, Annie in the lead.

"Where is he?" she demanded, clutching two groggy eyed drummers behind her for support.

"Where's who?" returned Cooper hoarsely. "There's nobody here but myself. I've been asleep!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLAST.

IT is for record that shortly after two o'clock in the very early morning of April 11, with the town somnolent beneath a groggy drizzle, an indistinct shape of quite another type from the Indian's dragged itself from the vicinity of an empty

shed behind the Nevins Block, down the back alley, to the rear of the Citizens Bank.

This shape, the figure of a man who could not use his legs, propelled itself along by its arms. Slung about the cripple's neck were some tools in a cloth roll. Out of one pocket showed the top of a sinister container. One of his big hands clutched an iron bar.

Deep in the alley shadows at the cellar windows of the bank, the cripple ceased motion. Close to the wall he huddled and applied his heavy instrument to the bars. One after one they were pried off. A window light was broken, a nail drawn. After a tortuous twisting to get his muscular torso through the opening, Wilse Dilling had entered the basement of the Citizens National Bank.

Down upon the coal he lowered himself until he could clutch the overhead pipes. Along them he swung himself to the stairs. On those stairs he dropped off without accident and crawled upward to the back door.

Into the bank he admitted himself and finally halted before the door of the antiquated vault. On the floor he deposited tools and explosive he had procured in the two hours that had intervened.

Producing a flashlamp, Wilse blinked it on and laid it along the floor so that it illumined the front of the big safe door near the bottom. He unrolled the cloth packet of tools, choose a bit and fitted it to the collapsible stock. Selecting an effective spot, he applied the point to the steel and began to drill.

It was twenty minutes past two when he began his hole; it was twenty minutes past three before he had punctured the steel lining and could apply his explosive.

Just how to go about blowing a bank vault with neatness and dispatch he had only a layman's idea. But there was this difference between Dilling and the bona fide yegg—Wilse was not there to force an entrance and rob. He was there to supply circumstantial evidence that robbers had been at work, the amount of their depredations at least corresponding to the amount old man Hadley was short in his accounts. To work havoc inside the big steel box was his only objective—the missing money would double cinch the theory of robbery. There were a thousand chances for a slip, but Wilse was too resolute to admit them. Desperate ends required desperate chances, he told himself again. Sheer audacity might win and make the hoax successful, where a half hearted attempt would only result in failure, apprehension, conviction, State prison.

If he were caught—well, in the last extreme he could take the blame for the theft upon himself. If Micah Hadley maintained a discreet silence no one would ever know; the name and happiness of the girl he loved would be saved. As for himself, what was he? Only a common telegrapher with twisted legs—a life and career of little value.

Of possible loss to depositors and stockholders greater than seventy thousand dollars, resulting from the damage to the vault, he took no heed. That might be made up in other ways, later. Time enough to cover that with another ruse when the exigency of the moment and the night had been met successfully.

To stage a perfect robbery was his only objective. He would do it if his life was forfeit. Destroy the books and evidence. Much of the rest would lie on the knees of the god of luck, on the knees of the god of luck and his own determination, grit, sagacity and will power.

So, his hole completed, he set to work fixing his explosive. Having access to all keys of the local railroad property, nitroglycerine employed by the construction gang had been easy to procure. He unscrewed the container top now and produced his tiny funnel.

Into the hole he emptied the deadly stuff and set his fuse. But before he struck his match to fire it he cleared away all clews to his identity. His tools he wrapped carefully and slung about his neck again. He returned the container to his pocket and swept up the filings and dirt. He made certain his way of exit to stairs, cellar and alley was open. Then he felt for matches.

It was very quiet outside. The town slumbered heavily. Now and then the

wind swayed the arc lamps or the rain tapped lightly against the windows but noise of human pedestrians abroad in the zero hour of early morning there was none —not even the rumble of the first milk wagons.

So Wilse was ready for the big action.

He had brought along an abnormal length of fuse, allowing himself plenty of time to reach a place of safety regardless of his handicap. It was set and ready for firing. He picked up the flashlamp and blinked it off. A moment later came the long scratch of a match head along the floor—the sharp, acrid smell of something burning.

The fuse was lighted.

Wilse saw it sputtering venomously.

Then he clawed his way down the bank lobby on his hips and hands, to the back. Down the cellar stairs he hurried. Securing a firm finger grip along the studding that edged the stair opening, he swung himself again to the water pipes. Hand over hand, grotesquely, he traversed the distance to the window showing dimly over the coal.

It was the work of a moment to hook his iron fingers over the sill of that aperture where the bars had been twisted open. He pulled himself through.

A lugubrious, flexible something imbued with life, he crawled low along the left hand alley wall and deeper into enveloping mist.

The explosion, when it came, was terrific.

The fuse had taken a far longer time to burn than the cripple had expected. But that it had burned was demonstrated emphatically. That detonation rocked the business section, broke glass, awakened hundreds in the vicinity. By the time they were aware that a catastrophe had occurred and were excitedly calling to one another from hurriedly opened windows, some one had turned in a fire alarm.

If the cripple had hoped to destroy records of old Hadley's felony within that vault, he had succeeded beyond his wildest hope. The whole front of the Citizens bank seemed blown into Main Street. Everything combustible at the moment within the safe was a crackling flame.

The lad who had been relieved at his key in the station by Wilse long before the detonation came, burst in through the waiting room door.

"Wilse! Wilse! It's robbery!" he yelled. "Yeggs have blown the Citizens bank and Gertie Hadley's been hurt terribly. Her father hasn't been home tonight. She finally went down to the bank to see if he'd met with an accident in it —alone. She got there just as the big blow came. What shall I do? Will you need me here or can I go on up and help out?"

"Gertie *hurt?*"

"Burned by the flame when it came. Mike Hennessy, the cop, was hurt too. Gertie had found him in Whipple's Lunch a few minutes before and made him let her into the bank with his watchman's keys—that's about all I know yet."

"Go on up and help," ordered Wilse in voice strangely steady. "I'll be here when I'm wanted!"

The lad needed no second permission. He was out of the waiting room and across the platform in a burst of speed.

Somewhere steam sirens were blowing. The town was awakening to a general alarm.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMORSE.

WILSE DILLING sat in his room. Another evening had come. The weather had cleared; there was a moon. Its weird, blue light fell on the cripple now. He sat before his little writing table near the window opening upon the Hadley home. And gall and wormwood were consuming his soul and making a husk of his body.

He had kept to his room all day. The ordeal had taken toll of his nerves.

At six o'clock he had gone down into the lower hall to phone to the substitute operator and ask the lad to take his place at the station key again. His claim of illness had not been bogus. But is was illness of the spirit more than the body.

Sick at heart, the cripple had spent six-

teen hours in purgatory. On the other side of his window, thirty feet away, the girl he loved cried out or moaned incessantly in her blindness and pain—which he had administered. That was the terrible part of it all. Being apprehended and slated for punishment, he was prepared to endure. It was more than he could endure to realize what was passing in the lighted bedroom in the home across the way.

Shortly before noon the *Galesburg Daily Sentinel* had printed an extra edition. The newspaper was open on Dilling's bed behind him now, its great headlines telling the tragic aftermath:

BANK PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER BLINDED

Citizens National Entered by Yeggs at Early Hour This Morning—Vault Fired and Looted as Girl Comes Looking for Father.

DETECTIVES SUMMONED FROM OUTSIDE CITIES TO AID

Amount of Loot Not Yet Determined—Fire Department Quickly Extinguishes Blaze and Saves Business Section—Few Clews

Miss Gertrude Hadley, daughter of President Micah Hadley of the Citizens National Bank, will probably lose her eyesight permanently as a result of entering the institution with Officer Hennessy around three o'clock this morning just as yeggs blew the big vault with nitroglycerine. Miss Hadley's burns are not serious, although extremely painful. She is resting as comfortably as can be expected at her father's home in School Street while the best detective talent the Amerian Bankers' Association can employ is hurrying to Galesburg to apprehend the perpetrators of the biggest bank robbery in this part of the State for years.

Mystery surrounds the blowing of the vault and it may be days before the exact truth of what has happened is known. Micah Hadley, for twenty-seven years president of the bank, was found wandering in a dazed condition out on the Cummings road at daylight this morning and is unable to give a coherent account of how he came there. It is believed from marks upon his head and body that he was the victim of an assault by the robbers who sought to get either his bank keys from him or the combination to the vault. Failing, they used nitroglycerine. He was last seen normal when he entered the bank late yesterday afternoon as the clerical force was quitting for the day. Advised of what had happened, he exhibited symptoms of unbalanced mentality and talked of suicide. Brought back to town, he suddenly lapsed into reticence which three hours of questioning failed to break.

When her father failed to appear at home after two o'clock this morning, the alarmed daughter started down to the bank. President Hadley is a sufferer from heart trouble. Miss Hadley feared he might have succumbed to an attack while in the bank alone. Unable to discern any sign of life in the bank, she searched the business section until she happened to pass the head of the alley that runs behind the bank. According to officer Hennessy's story, she claimed to him that she believed she saw the indistinct shape of a crouching man leave one of the basement windows and disappear into the early morning mist. Alarmed, she continued her search until she found the night policeman and got him to go with her into the bank to ascertain if anything was amiss. Approximately a half hour was consumed.

With his watchman's keys, supplied for exactly such a contingency, Hennessy accompanied Miss Hadley into the place, their nostrils stung at once by the acrid odor of something afire. They had rounded the corner of the counter before the vault when the big blow came. Both were blinded and knocked unconscious. It is believed that the robbers, hidden in the vicinity, entered the vault over the prostrate bodies of girl and policeman, grasped what loot was available and fled before the town realized what had happened.

Jim Doherty, baggage master at the station, claims he saw a suspicious character alight from the wrong side of the six o'clock shuttle train last evening and disappear into shadow opposite the railroad yards. This may have been one of the yeggs. Wilse Dilling, night operator at the station, maintains he heard no signal given by the burglar alarm, a fact corroborated by Ned Porter, his assistant. Wilse went out during the night several times for different purposes, as he often does for lunch or the delivery of emergency messages. Some one was at the Western Union key continually, however

The fire which resulted from the detonation was quickly extinguished before it got much headway. Bank Examiner Wismer, who happened to arrive in town last evening to go through the books of the institution to-day, took charge of the affairs of the wrecked bank this morning. He ordered it closed and a thorough examination started to determine how much loot the yeggs realized.

There was much more to the article. It covered three columns on the front page

and most of the second. Wilse had read it over and over so many times since noon that he could almost repeat it without the paper. But though it narrated, it did not explain. And certainly it failed to minimize the pitiable horror of the tragedy next door. Nothing but the frail chance that, having escaped suspicion thus far, he might yet save himself and the Hadley honor kept him from trundling himself down to the business section, giving himself up and suffering whatever punishment might be meted, in penance.

When he could bring himself to consider it, the fact that suspicion had not yet rested upon him up to another evening was uncanny. There were so many loopholes, so many clews, that it was preposterous to expect he would continue unscathed.

Old man Hadley might talk and blurt out the truth at any moment. Someone might have seen him in the vicinity of the bank, prior to the explosion. Ned Porter might give him away innocently enough. True, the extra-long fuse he had employed had allowed him an alibi in Ned's testimony. But when the keen detectives of the bankers' association arrived and took up the investigation, they might look deeper than the word of a mere boy. The fact remained that to date there was still a chance—still a chance for success excepting the awful thing which had occurred next door.

Blind!

There were agonizing moments when the telegrapher stared blindly ahead of him as though his brain had become a barren thing. Then over the features came an expression of self-loathing, self-condemnation, horrible in its intensity. Finally beneath the soothing moonlight, he dropped his head on his hands.

"Oh, God," he cried brokenly, "I planned and did it for *her*. Maybe it was criminal Maybe it was wrong. But I meant right, to save her, that she might be happy. If I could go back over the past twenty-four hours, I couldn't do any different. Help her, God! Give her back her sight. It's too awful—to see her always blinded and know that I'm to blame. Better death, than that. Show me the way, how to move, what to do—to right the wrong I've done. Oh, God, hear me, hear me! For her sake, hear me! For I've muddled everything terribly and can't go further myself!"

The telegrapher's mental agony was suddenly interrupted by a sharp rap on his door. He started, forced down a dry swallow and steeled himself.

"Come in!" he ordered.

It was Mrs. Pease, his landlady.

"Wilse, Mr. Hadley is downstairs. He says he's got to see you—and I'm thinkin' he ain't so crazy as they say."

"Perhaps he's recovered from that assault he must have suffered. Tell him to come up."

Wilse lighted his desk-light while the banker climbed the stairs. He entered after a brief, introductory knock. Wilse brought himself to meet the banker's face. Mrs. Pease had surmised correctly. Micah Hadley had recovered his normal mentality. But how changed!

In a handful of hours, it seemed, the banker's hair had whitened; there were ghastly lines in his haggard face; he was shrunken and broken and old. He made certain that no one was listening outside on the landing. Then he groped his way forward after shutting the door.

"Wilse," he choked, sinking into a chair and putting out a skinny, palsied hand toward one of the cripple's knees, "the Almighty came to my rescue and saved me. But He extracted a terrible price. I would have gone to jail for a hundred years before I'd have had it happen."

His manner of speaking, his attitude toward the cripple, admitted the intimacy and the secret between them.

"You mean—the accident to Gertrude?" demanded the younger man in a voice he scarcely recognized as his own.

The aged father bowed his head.

"So would I," announced Wilse Dilling. "But what do you mean about the Almighty saving you?"

"Sending the thugs to break the vault last night, Wilse—that night of all nights in the year. It was Providence, Wilse. It never could be anything else."

Dilling stared hard at Hadely. Then

his glance broke away. With an effort he returned with finality:

"Yes, it never could be anything else."

"Wilse, just the records would have ruined me, the *very* records—were among those that burned. Wilse, I'm saved—provided—"

"Yes? What?"

"Provided—you—never—tell!"

A long silence came in the third-story room.

The old banker watched the cripple with eyes so trouble-filled that even Wilse's heart was touched.

The cripple took a long time to clear his throat.

"And do you think I would?" he returned.

"That's one of the things I come up to see you about. I'll never rest easy till I have your promise. The records are destroyed, but there mustn't even be a breath of suspicion—not now, when Providence has been so good."

Dilling suddenly looked the banker straight in the eye and spoke hard and true.

"Mr. Hadley, I'll tell you something—something that's simple enough, but Gertrude must never know."

"Yes, yes?"

"Mr. Hadley, you know how I'm fixed—my legs! I'm a cripple. I can't get around like other men. But that doesn't make me different than other men, inside."

"Inside?"

"In my brain, in my feelings, in my heart. There I'm like other men. And being like other men, I can't help loving—a woman.

"That is why I'm going to tell you now what I have never said before; what I may never say again—to set your fears at rest. Mr. Hadley—for four years I have loved Gertrude too dearly to bring one ounce of shame or sorrow upon her head by compromising her father with any information which I may possess.

"That's why I went to you in the bank last night. That's why I've said nothing to-day. That's why no one outside of ourselves, in so far as I am concerned or can help it, will ever know. If I had been made like normal men, I would have tried to make Gertie love me. But I'm not like other men and I couldn't ask her to love me through compassion. It's got to pass, like lots of other things I've given up. I've been hoping and saving for a long time that I might regain the use of my legs. But they'll come too late to win your daughter for my wife. Let it be so. All I can say is, perhaps now you'll understand."

Old man Hadley stared blankly. Then his glance dropped and for a half moment he toyed with his skinny fingers. Finally he spoke, gaze still averted, sorrowfully:

"I been knowing a long time that you liked Gertie. I may be an old man and sort of forgot how it feels to love, but I ain't so old that I couldn't see that. And I'll tell you one thing, Wilse—you needn't count too much on Gertie marrying that Cooper. I had a talk with him this afternoon and—I ain't so sure."

Wilse gasped—as though from a sudden splash of icy water thrown upon him.

"What do you mean?" he whispered tensely.

"You're in on my secret now, Wilse. I can talk to you like a son already—like one of my family. He's thought all along, Cooper has, that of course he was marrying some money. That was all right and proper, perhaps. He had a right to do it because in my time I've had a lot. But I gave him to understand that this bank business probably cleans me out. And he didn't take kindly to it at all. What's more, with Gertie being blind—"

"Go on! Yes? What?"

"He's a smart young fellow and has his own way to make. A blind wife—would be—sort of an awful handicap. He don't take kindly to that prospect, either."

Wilse started abruptly.

"You mean he'd go back on her, break off with her, *because she's blind?*"

The father did not reply. Tears forced themselves from his eyes and rolled down his haggard cheeks. After all, he was a broken old man almost at the end of his time.

"My God!" cried the other. "I could kill a fellow for being as yellow as that!"

"I don't know how it's all going to

come out," the father continued after a time. "Most everything I've got has gone and I don't feel I can go back in the bank. I got the place that I could sell. It'd bring enough to support us in a rented house for a while and perhaps leave enough to bury me. What catches me worst is that if Gertie's got a fighting chance to save her sight, I won't have the cash to finance it, if it costs a lot. We don't positively know yet whether she's lost it permanently or not—her sight, I mean. And then when she finds Cooper don't want to support a blind woman all his days, in case I can't finance it—"

"Well?"

"—it's a damn fine price I'm paying for my foolishness, Wilse. And the innocent have got to suffer! That's the cruelty of it."

"Is she—suffering much pain right now?" the cripple asked hoarsely.

"She was out of her head all morning, calling for Cooper. She's been better this afternoon and evening."

"Calling for Cooper? Why? Wasn't he with her?"

"No. I'm afraid, Wilse, that he don't think as much of her as she does of him."

The cripple sat a long time thereafter, staring straight ahead of him. Once or twice he swallowed hard.

"That's too bad!" he said. Then: "Oh, well! After all, it's the folks who have had to go without things all their lives who appreciate them most—even love. The rest can't!"

Then for the first time the cripple smiled—a wonderful, spiritual smile—a smile of self-confidence, infinite trust in a higher something or some one into whose hands he committed himself. "Don't do any more worrying, Mr. Hadley," he said. "Providence has intervened once, as you said. Perhaps it may do so again. With me you know the big secret is safe. Keep on with your rôle of a lapsed memory and leave the rest to God."

"To God! You're a good young man, Wilse Dilling."

"No, I'm not! I'm no better than the rest, anywhere. Only sometimes when I get right up against it, I find it's a pretty good plan to—to—pass the buck to the Almighty, so to speak!"

"Good-by, Wilse!" said the banker brokenly.

"Good-by, Mr. Hadley."

Sorrow laden, the old man went out and down the stairs.

CHAPTER IX.

COOPER'S PREDICAMENT.

COOPER entered his room at the Galesburg House and dropped into a chair without removing hat or coat.

What was he going to do?

For seven tedious hours, since noon, he had been a prisoner in the Hadley home. The blinded girl had cried piteously for him not to leave her—again and again had begged him to reiterate his loyalty and affection for her, despite the awful thing which had happened.

He had tried to reassure her as best he could. But it was a sorry business. Every reiteration only tended to make the final break with her the more difficult and heart-rending; only bound him closer to her. And if it turned out that she was to be permanently blind, how could he undo it all and gracefully withdraw from an alliance as fatal to himself, his future and his prospects as it was pathetic and absurd?

He had remained by her bed until every muscle in his soft body ached. He had pitied her—God, how he pitied her! And yet the prospect of marrying her loomed as intolerable as that afternoon had finally become tedious.

The man was not wholly bad; he was weak. Perhaps it would be fairer to record it that he "did not know his own mind." The son of wealthy, doting parents, he had always had every wish gratified. Left at maturity to make his own way, he was handicapped with a certain snobbish selfishness that was bound to make him consider himself first and others afterward. He had been sought after in his college days and been called handsome so many times by women and had been free to exercise his whimsical choice in feminine associates so widely that he hardly knew the meaning of

love—women to him were playthings more than comrades. He had drifted into an engagement with the Hadley girl largely through propinquity while living in the town, because she was in every way a desirable woman.

But now that she was blinded and marred—and would probably be a burden to any man whom she married—the old dissatisfaction was quickly rampant again. Could he trust himself with her? If he drifted on into an alliance, would it not end in chaos the moment he saw another woman who was all the girl had been before this blasting accident? If so, why go ahead with the farce longer? Why not break it off now before the situation got more tragic?

The town talk that her father had been suddenly impoverished by the looting of the bank and that the girl would bring him nothing with her marriage did not matter so much. It was the girl herself of whom he was thinking. The kind of love which could look beyond such a terrific handicap and stay strong and sure and fine, was all right for the story books. But in real life it was quite another matter.

What was he to do?

But this was not all which made his predicament. He could pack his baggage and leave the place under excuse of a business trip, never returning again.

But there was the Shadow. There was the Indian.

That was the trap. The Indian believed he loved the stricken girl better than anything else in life. The Indian had threatened to strike when least expected, because of that damnable indiscretion in the Orient. If he ran away it would prove to his Nemesis that the white girl was not the greatest thing in his life, in which case the Oriental might strike to the injury or death of himself. He had not seen the Indian again since String Bean Annie had aroused the hotel and the brown man had deftly departed through the window. But somehow he felt the other had not left town, that he was still watching and waiting, that at the first suspicious move toward escape, he would be called on personally to pay the price.

What was he to do, indeed?

Cooper was not utterly conscienceless in all this. He was human and felt genuinely sorry for Gertie Hadley. He was sorry, too, for that scrape in Bakir and vowed he would never get into another so long as he lived. But his training had been such that he could not view others except through the eyes of his own self-interest. He had already begun to pity himself and the future looked dour.

He sat for twenty minutes with his hat and coat unremoved, turning his difficulties over in his mind.

Downstairs, all the afternoon and into the early evening, the investigation to determine who might be responsible for the looting of the Citizens' Bank was going on. The drummer's sample room of the hotel had been given over to the three Chicago detectives and it was crowded with people. He could hear the excited hum of large numbers of voices and the coming and going of many feet. The town boiled with interest, seething hot.

He knew that Wilse Dilling had been "on the carpet" all the afternoon, that Banker Hadley had told a weird story about being struck on the head as he worked alone in the bank earlier that evening, after which he could remember nothing until found wandering dazed on the road outside of town. But thus far nothing tangible had been proved. He wondered at what moment he might be summoned to contradict again the chambermaid's testimony concerning a suspicious looking character that had been seen two nights before in his room.

A pretty mess he had returned home to find himself embroiled in. He sank deeper and deeper into a slough of self-pity, only arousing himself to go to the upper drawer of the dresser and procure himself a fortifying drink.

He was about to close the drawer and turn away when something on top of the dresser caught and held his attention. It was a slip of paper. It contained crudely printed words and was fastened to the bureau scarf with a common pin.

Cooper unfastened the slip and turned it so the light fell upon it. With a new

qualm of panic breaking through him, he read:

> Take her who has lost her sight to Dr. Hochi in city of San Francisco. Do not disobey. Soon she shall see again. She must be made to see. There is no painful loss to you while the woman is blind.

Cooper read and reread the message. He went over and sat down on the bed.

How the Indian managed to know all that was going on in the gossipy little town without showing himself at a time when all strange characters were under instant suspicion was something he wondered at, but could not waste time upon.

The brown man was watching. That he had been in that very room to leave that note only aggravated the predicament. It meant that he, Cooper, would have to go on pretending that Gertie was the greatest thing in his life, for if he relaxed in that love-hoax, the Indian might strike him down in the dark. His own skin would be forfeit.

The young man felt balked, blocked, the victim of circumstances he could not control. It galled him as much as it frightened him. Could this be modern America—where such a danger hung over a man?

Suddenly his vanity and self-reliance dropped from him like a garment. He wanted his mother—the one who had always pampered him and smoothed out situations such as these; he wanted her terribly.

He was only a spoiled boy at heart. He fell upon the bed on his arms and wept convulsively.

CHAPTER X.

WILSE DILLING'S SACRIFICE.

THE following evening Wilse Dilling was back on night duty at the station. Another twenty-four hours had passed. The investigation conducted all the previous day in the Galesburg House, had gone strangely—strangely because Wilse could not understand why he was not connected with the felony at once. Lying near by on the telegraph desk was the afternoon's issue of the *Sentinel* left there by Doherty. It told the story in headlines:

LOCAL BANK BREAK BELIEVED WORK OF WELL-KNOWN YEGGS

"Soupy Joe" Sawn and "Red Mike" Horrity Known to Have Headed This Way After Discharge Last Month from Leavenworth

AMOUNT OF LOOT NOT YET DETERMINED

Rigid Investigation Halted Until Crooks Are Located—Banker Hadley Suffering from Complete Breakdown

The cripple's nerves, however, were showing the result of the strain. He was easily startled and garbled his messages badly. He had passed through the inquisition of the previous afternoon with a success that in itself was most unnerving. Perhaps the utter absurdity of the crippled telegrapher turning bank robber and escaping deftly without legs in the short time between the blowing of the safe and the finding of Miss Hadley did more than all else to cause suspicion to pass him by. Bank examiner Wismer had been his worst inquisitor. But the cripple had been thinking of a blinded girl and an old man whom life had broken, and he had fought that battle of wits dextrously.

At any rate, something had caused the detectives to think it a professional job and on that premise the investigation locally was temporarily abandoned. The situation had not materially changed since the preceding day. Therein was some poor measure of consolation. If anything, it had shifted for the better.

Mechanically, the cripple's "sending hand" cleared away the peak of the late afternoon's business. Finally he came to the night letters. He had the Chicago wire open and was working as fast as his confused mental condition permitted. Suddenly he glanced at the signature of the message in hand, with a jolt. Thereupon his sending hand went lifeless and the Chicago operator ticked for the balance without result.

Wilse sat staring into space, unmindful of the angry demands of the key.

"What the devil's the matter, kid?" demanded Doherty, late in leaving. "Can't you hear 'em calling?"

"Let 'em call! Who filed this message for Boston?"

"Mrs. Hadley—wife of the banker. Ain't it all down there plain?"

"Plain? Too plain! *God!*"

"Yeah, 'tis kind of too bad about Gert. Nice kid, Gert. I always liked her. From that message, kind of looks as if they thought she might always be blind. Must be hard hit, them Hadleys, too, by what's happened to the bank."

Wilse locked his key for a moment and read the message again.

Galesburg, Kan., April 13, 1912.

JEROME HADLEY,
975 State Street, Boston, Mass.:

Can you loan me at once return wire thirty-five hundred dollars send daughter Gertrude San Francisco eye operation? Required at once restore sight lost by explosion when robbers blew my bank. All my funds involved in robbery. Need terribly great. Gertrude may always be blind if action is not taken at once. I apologize for any past hard feeling between us. Am asking it for her.

MICAH.

There was little the telegrapher could do just then but despatch the message. But through the long watches of that night, alone in the dusty little railroad office handling its business mechanically, the cripple's heart was bruised that little more.

If it had not entailed such a cruel effort, he would have walked the floor. But he could not walk the floor. Walking the floor was out of the question. He could only sit there and hold himself to his task, tortured by the thought of the fate which seemed almost certain to await the girl he loved, *a fate for which he alone was responsible.*

There were times when he wondered at his own strength, why he did not collapse with the realization and the strain. There were other periods when his brain was numb to the tragedy and enormity of it all. And over his head constanly hung the suspense of discovery, the penalty, the shame, hideous wrong heaped on hideous wrong which the girl must surely suffer if the story of what had actually happened came out now.

There was something uncanny in the way he had succeeded so far. The man was naturally religious. He wondered, if his faith remained strong enough, if he would continue to succeed? Subconsciously that faith began to grow as time went on and his secret remained a secret.

Morning arrived at last. He went out and trundled himself home through the clammy dawn. At noon, by deliberate intent, he was back at the office.

"Any answer come through from Gertie Hadley's uncle?" he demanded of Doherty, busy with his wire.

The day man nodded. Intent on his work he reached up absently and secured a yellow slip in a pigeon-hole over the desk. He handed it to the cripple standing behind. As Doherty's key continued to click out railroad business, Wilse read with a tightened heart, what Jerome Hadley had replied:

Boston, Mass., April 14, 1912.

MICAH HADLEY, Galesburg, Kan.:

Sorry to hear about Gertrude. Would help if I could. Regret have not the funds available for wiring you at present.

JEROME.

Wilse laid his hand on Doherty's shoulder.

"I'm going back to Pease's for dinner. I'll deliver this to the Hadleys as I go by."

Doherty nodded that he understood.

But Wilse did not leave at once. He crossed to a desk against the east wall of the office and removed the rubber cover from an old blind typewriter. He slipped in a fresh telegram blank. He rewrote a more appropriate wire for delivery to the Hadley home. Finished to his satisfaction, it read:

Boston, Mass., April 14, 1912.

MICAH HADLEY, Galesburg, Kan.:

Sorry about Gertrude. Glad to be of service. Wiring you the money herewith on condition you never try to thank me or mention it again.

JEROME.

This altered message Wilse sealed in an envelope and slipped in his pocket. The

first he ripped to flakes and threw in the door of the sheet iron stove.

Across to the Galesburg Savings Bank he trundled himself. He presented his bank book. In it a balance of three thousand six hundred and twelve dollars and fifty cents was recorded—money which stood for one small legacy and years of frugality that some day he might have a high priced operation on the bones of his legs.

When he emerged from the bank a few minutes later, however, he had thirty-five hundred-dollar bills in his hand and a bank balance of one hundred and twelve dollars and fifty cents.

He carried the money around all the afternoon. He could not find the courage to deliver it to the Hadleys.

But old Micah came into the office after supper to learn if anything had been heard from the message to his estranged brother in Boston.

Wilse paid the money over.

When the last bill had slipped from his hand and Micah had signed a formal receipt and gone, Wilse dropped down in his chair. Looking at his lower limbs, he said whimsically:

"Legs, I guess you're just naturally going to stay twisted until I haven't any more use for you. But, anyhow—maybe—it makes amends!"

CHAPTER XI.

WILSE'S CONFESSIONAL.

COOPER saw a way out. The Hadleys had raised the money among themselves in the East to send the stricken daughter to San Francisco for treatment by a great Japanese eye specialist who had wrought marvelous cures among the soldiers blinded in the Russian war. He would go with them. Let the brown man follow; he could exact little retribution for that. The young man felt he would be keeping up the semblance of great affection wherein lay his only immediate safety.

Once in San Francisco, many things might happen. If the treatment failed and the girl was pronounced permanently blinded, it would be far easier for Cooper to drop out of sight there than in provincial Galesburg, where his every move might be followed by the Shadow.

Clandestine passage back to the Orient might be arranged, or he might change his appearance and hide away in the myriad dwellings of the great city. Or, if the girl's sight was restored and she became again the girl he had first loved, he might appeal to the San Francisco police for protection without any fear of the scandal reaching back to provincial Kansas. Or possibly, in the seaport, sinister agencies might perhaps be retained which would dispose of the Indian in their own way. By all means, he would accompany the Hadleys to the coast. Time enough to decide what his plan of action was to be, when he got there. To get out of Galesburg successfully was the thing.

The town quickly knew that Gertie was going to San Francisco. Her burns were not sufficiently serious to defer the very necessary operation on her eyes. Wilse heard that many friends had called upon her during the last afternoon she expected to be in town. He wanted to bid the girl good-by, also. Just before supper he called at her house. Mrs. Hadley answered the bell.

"Yes?" she demanded petulantly when she beheld who stood outside.

"I—just called—to say good-by to Gertie," the cripple stammered. "I heard she was going away to-morrow."

"She is going away to-morrow. But you can't see her to-night. She's too tired out. Everybody in town has been trapsing in here this afternoon, and by morning she won't have a shred of strength left."

"I'm—sorry. I didn't mean to intrude."

"That's all right. You're not intruding, and I'll tell Gertie you asked after her. But you ought to have some consideration."

"I—can't see her—even to say good-by?"

"Under the circumstances, I don't think you should ask it. She's seen no one but her *closest* friends."

The rebuff was so crass that Dilling lacked the courage to go further. He

turned and swung back down the veranda steps.

Never had the Cooper fellow been more attentive than he was the last two days before they left. And the girl's happiness was heart throbbing. That the man loved her, whether blinded or not, was what mattered greatly—the biggest thing in her life.

Jim Doherty wanted to attend a lodge convention in Kansas City the day the Hadleys left. So Wilse Dilling's distress was further aggravated by being on duty at the station and going through the ordeal of preparing their tickets and watching them depart.

Like all the simple and terrible tragedies of life, the things we would have said at steamship docks, at hospital steps, at railroad stations, are always left unsaid. The blind girl never even came near the ticket window. Mrs. Hadley attended to that. And what Mrs. Hadley failed to do in keeping Wilse busy, other passengers and the trunk line wire did.

At twelve thirty the train pulled in.

There came the usual bustle in waiting room and on platform, the farewells, the last throwing on of baggage, the promises and admonitions between relatives to write. Between her mother and father and the overattentive Cooper, the girl was led out upon the platform.

Wilse caught one glimpse of her as she was being assisted into the coach. That was all.

The train pulled out. Platform and tracks were empty. The man wilted down in his chair with hands clasped tightly before him, and man tears dripped unheeded from the point of his cleft chin.

That night Wilse Dilling climbed to his lonely room looking out on a house next door that was empty and dark. He locked his door, dropped off hat and coat, and swung over to the chair before his writing table. For a long time he sat there in the semidarkness.

Then in the great heart hunger of that first night he snapped on his desk lamp. He pulled paper and pen toward him. The poet in him, the tender lover—the fine, rare spirit made delicate and sensitive beyond other men because of life's handicap—began recording words on the paper.

He wrote another letter to Gertrude Hadley. It was like scores of similar letters the girl never received or knew of. They were never posted. Indeed, they never left Wilse's room nor his desk. The writing finished, his soul longing and heart hunger temporarily anæsthetized by the relief of the written sentiment, he always locked them away in his desk as though the girl had received them and would reply in kind.

"Let me believe that I have given you back your eyes, dear heart," he wrote in his poignant loneliness—"eyes to see the sunrise, and the dews glistening on the grass like liquid silver in the morning. Eyes to see the winging flash of the dragon flies in the heat of the summer midday, or the tints of sweet, wild roses blowing in the winds of far off hilltops on golden afternoons.

"Let me think that I have given you back your eyes to watch the sunsets and the twinkling stars of evening. Faces of those you love will remain distinct and vital to you, whatever else you lose. Scenes about the town that have been familiar to you from your girlhood, always and ever you may know them. The pink blown apple trees in the pregnant hush of the springtime; clouds like fairy isles of love floating in the seas of summer sky; riotous hillsides of autumn when all the world is scarlet that deepens to russet and gold; mountain tops crusted with glitter on fine clear winter mornings, or ruddy windows across the twilight snow banks that mean a hearth fire and a welcome. To return these things in their fullness is my poor, poor privilege. I took it away from you, dear heart, but I was trying to help when I did it. Now I am happy because that much of a poor privilege is allotted to me."

Just a freak character—a telegrapher with twisted legs, in a grubby little iron town out in Kansas—so the community knew him. So he fancied he knew himself. But the real man he was behind the deformity, or in spite of it, was disclosed as he wrote onward and poured out his unrequited passion in the moonlit mellowness of that boarding house chamber.

"Give me the joy of knowing that you can go forward with the plans for your wedding, my dearest, untouched by sorrow, unsmirched by the tarnished honor of those you have loved and believed in. May you marry the man whom you love with no regret. May you look into the faces of sleeping little children and watch over them as they grow to maturity nobly because you have mothered them—though I am not their father.

"All the deep toned world of art and books and music, of lights and color and movement—let me believe that I have restored it to you, dear heart. And God know I have given freely. For I love you, dear girl. I love you greatly."

Twice there were long pauses between the paragraphs. A sigh escaped him which was unsteady. Then he went writing onward.

"Bright days, gray days, dark days, bright days again, many of them—through them you will go down the years. Some you love may falter by the wayside. New friends may come; new joys take their places. But they will be more to you than a hand which has touched yours and gone, to touch your hand no longer. They will live with you far more than lost, whispered memories, voices in the dark which are forever silenced.

"I hope I have cheated the darkness that much for you, my dearest. I have robbed it of its victim, though I may never walk for doing so. Oh, Gertrude, my dear one—a thousand times I may say it since you will never know—I love you. I have tried the best that I knew to prove it, according to my light. And if there is any happiness for me to-night, it is because as you speed away from me across the miles, you are happy also in the poignant hope which dwells in your heart. Good night, my beloved. May God watch over you and protect you—better than I have been able to do—as I have tried so poorly to do—and failed."

Such was Wilse Dilling's confessional.

He finished the writing, folded the leaves, placed them in an envelope, addressed it, tied it with the rest in a packet—a packet bound with lavender ribbon.

Twenty-four hours later he was speeding across the State of Utah on another train after the Hadley party—a great, livid fear in his heart for the safety of the girl to whom the letters were indited.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

THE COWBOY TO HIS FRIEND IN NEED

YOU'RE very well polished, I'm free to confess—
Well balanced, well rounded, a power for right;
But cool and collected no steer could be less;
You're primed for continual fight!

Your voice is a bellicose bark of ill will,
On hatred and choler you seem to have fed;
But when I control you, your temper is nil;
In fact, you're most easily led.

Though lead is your diet and fight is your fun,
I simply can't give you the jolt;
For I love you, you blessed old son-of-a-gun,
You forty-five caliber Colt!

Burke Jenkins.

And Jill Came Tumbling After

By JACKSON V. SCHOLZ

JIGGS MONTAGUE wanted to cuss. Not that he had the slightest intention of denying himself this luxury, but Jiggs was methodical, and, being methodical, he naturally weighed the matter pro and con. His philosophy was simple.

"If I don't," he reasoned, "I'll bust, if I do I won't."

So Jiggs cussed.

Systematically and lustily he relieved himself of the choicest epithets of a really remarkable vocabulary. The absence of an audience and even the fact that he could not hear himself did not detract in the least from the vicious pleasure he experienced in breaking a few commandments. He paused for breath, concentrated a moment, added one he had overlooked and poked his head over the side of the cockpit in search of a landing place.

It was that man demoralizing motor again. For the second time now in forty-five minutes the brute had started to stutter. He had been forced to land before and now, rather than attempt to get home on eleven cylinders, he would have to land again. He knew what the trouble was, the same exhaust valve spring had worked loose once more. He could fix it in five minutes with a screw driver and a pair of pliers, but, unfortunately, not while in the air. Therefore land he must.

Now Jiggs was rather finicky about landing places. He had always maintained that, if necessary, he could land one of his boats on *terra firma* and live to explain how it was done, but he frankly hoped that he would never have to resort to such extremes to save his neck. Furthermore, a decidedly unpleasant experience on the open sea had

convinced him of the difficulties to be overcome in bringing a flying boat, with a dead motor, safely down on the uneven swells of a playful ocean. And just how playful the ocean can become with the shell-like hull of an HS-2 can only be explained by the land lubber who had spent five eventful hours in such a predicament.

The present situation, however, offered no occasion for alarm. On the second leg of his weekly trip from Havana he had left the naval station at Key West about an hour before and was at present following the southern shore line of Florida, which is so picturesquely multiplied by one of Nature's whims. Bordered, it seemed, with a jeweled fringe of countless islands and slender keys, studded with innumerable inlets and tiny bays ranging in color from the deepest blue to the whitest green. Far to his right the black, brittle thread of that marvelous railway crawled unhesitatingly from key to key, taking advantage of every coral outcropping, spanning the intervening spaces with trestles of man-made stone, it stretched away to its destination—Key West.

Inland from the coast, as far as the eye could reach, extended the Everglades. A desolate expanse of swamp and fever, a sneering challenge to the advance of engineering science.

"Not such a cheerful place from the standpoint of companionship," Jiggs told himself, "but it 'll do to fix a motor." And glancing again at the parallel streaks on the water which indicate the direction of the wind, he cut his "gun," banked the boat into an easy spiral and dropped leisurely toward the small, well protected bay which he had selected.

As the huge craft came to a plunging, wallowing halt and stood panting in protest at its recent exertions, the flyer reached up, switched off the spark and, chuckling to himself at the spasmodic kicks of the dying monster behind him, pushed up his goggles and looked about.

The bay was a little larger than he had expected. A half mile long, perhaps, and about a quarter of a mile across, it was completely surrounded, except for the narrow opening into the gulf, by a dense growth of palms and underbrush. A slender strip of white sand on the northern shore broke the monotony of the all prevailing green and gave the whole scene the tidy, spic and span appearance, Jiggs thought, of a—a freshly painted pontoon.

Hoisting himself stiffly from the cockpit and climbing out on the nose of the boat he exercised his cramped legs on the narrow runway, making a mental note at the time to attach a new spring to the rudder bar to help take up some of that darn torque. The clock on the instrument board advised him that he had plenty of time to spare, now that he was down, so tossing his helmet back into the seat he finally located a cigarette and a match in the crowded, single pocket of his monkey suit and composed himself for a smoke with his back braced against the slanting surface of the engine strut.

Now Jigg had two passions, poker and woman. In the former he generally managed to break even, which phenomenal luck undoubtedly went to prove that old adage to the effect that Cupid frowns on the man who cashes in more chips than he bought. In the latter, which, by the way, was purposely introduced in the singular, the reader, of course, has already deduced that Jiggs had had a bit of hard luck. Yes, he sympathized deeply with that fool who made his prayer to a ra—but he could hardly accept the part that followed as a fair description of the girl in question. But, then, of course, this girl was an exception.

She weighed one hundred and twenty pounds in her boy's bathing suit. One hundred and twenty pounds of sunshine and tempest, thistledown and T N T. A sweet, lovable little fiend of sophisticated innocence. This was Jill.

It might be of further interest to know that she was the conscious possessor of a pair of enormous and irresponsible brown eyes, the kind that are always speaking out of their turn and constantly making explanations so embarrassing—unless the owner is equal to the occasion. But Jill was—always. And her upper lip was short and the result was a cherubic pout, and a cherubic pout is sometimes quite an asset if you don't overdo the thing. But Jill didn't.

Of course there were plenty of satellites, which is one of the penalties exacted from all stars of such compelling magnitude. Rotating on their daily axes or revolving in their yearly orbits, they gladly and uncomplainingly received their quota of daylight and darkness, preening themselves in the sunshine of her good humor or groveling in the awful darkness of her displeasure. And Jiggs, poor devil, was the least of these.

You can't help feeling sorry for a man who is one hundred per cent duffer in the presence of a girl. The average male, whether he admits it or not, is pretty much of a dub when pitted against the whimsical vagaries of a member of the weaker sex, and those who, through the very intensity of their desire to be clever, are as helpless as an hour old kitten, are surely to be pitied.

Girls in general had always exercised a paralyzing influence over Jiggs's vocal apparatus, but one girl in particular invariably reduced him to a gibbering idiot with distressing regularity. His brain at such times, functioning quite normally, stubbornly refused to coöperate with his tongue causing weird and often painful complications. There were times, though, when the mood of his tormentor changed, when, with quiet understanding, she smoothed the conversational highway of all obstructions and helped him carefully over the rough places to a chummy companionship of mutual understanding. It was for these moments that Jiggs had existed. And now she was gone.

For three blissful weeks he had furnished amusement for a select group at a certain Miami hotel by his clumsy attentions to this much sought after and badly spoiled young lady. His capacity for abuse was marvelous and it was generally conceded that as a glutton for punishment Jiggs had few superiors. But he always came back for more and always got it. And so it was rumored that this very characteristic of patient stubbornness was the primary cause of the big row.

Jill, in a moment of exasperation, had accused him quite pointedly of being stupid, *et cetera;* dull, *et cetera;* witless, *et cetera,* and, strange to say, the camel had given a slight shudder at this final outrage and squealed in protest. What happened after that was just a little vague, but, oh, Lord, if he could only remember his own words and forget hers! At the conclusion she had dived off the float, swum ashore and, after dressing, had braved the perils of a crowded bus rather than accept the hospitality of his car back to town.

That was the last Jiggs had seen of Jill. Her father had arrived next day from the North and whisked her off in his private car—where, her aunt with whom she had been staying, had been unable to say.

Thus it ended, and as Jiggs thoughtfully lighted his second cigarette he continued to speculate for the thousandth time upon what he might have said on that deplorable occasion and what he should have said.

"Now, for instance," he mused, "if, when she accused me of being about as interesting to talk to as her pet parrot I should have smiled easylike and said that it had taken me some time to realize why the poor bird had never learned more than three words, and when she asked why, I'd have said: 'Well, what good would they do him? You'd never give him a chance to use them.' But instead I squirmed around like a ten-year-old schoolgirl, and I—I—think I agreed with her. Gosh, if I only had it to do over again"—the cigarette struck the water with a spiteful hiss—"things would be a lot different. In the first place, I'd—"

"Ahoy, there!"

In the short space of three endless seconds Jiggs completed four mental loops, a wicked snap stall and crashed in a tail spin. Alas, for his brave resolutions—he didn't have to be told the owner of that voice; the shriveling sensation in his stomach and the usual sudden contraction of his throat more than supplied the unnecessary introduction. A convulsive clutch at the engine strut restored his physical equilibrium, saved him the humiliation of an involuntary bath and brought him face to face with the one person whom he worshiped and feared the most.

Treading water daintily, she awaited with experienced patience his slow return to rationality. True, she had expected a reception somewhat similar to this, but was, nevertheless, maliciously pleased to note

that her victim had sustained an even greater shock than she had hoped to inflict.

"Well," she pouted at last, extending a slim, glistening arm suggestively in his direction, "aren't you going to help me up?"

Mutely, with the intelligent movements of an automaton he grasped the cool, wet little hand and helped her up the sloping side to a seat on the runway. After which demonstration that he was not entirely petrified, he backed hastily away, slipped on the smooth surface of the hull, executed a few more contortions to prove that he didn't have to fall into the water unless he wanted to, and finally accepted Jill's curt suggestion to be seated. But Jiggs knew that the worst was yet to come.

She always made him start the conversation. Merely another diabolical way of putting him at ease. And now, under the confusing steadiness of her merciless eyes, he was passing breathlessly through the perspiration stage and quailing at the knowledge that he was about to say something—anything to break the spell of that awful silence and get it over with. So—

"How—where—uh—uh—why, you're all wet!"

How could any one beat that for a beginning? Of course she laughed and a blessed sense of humor saved the day for Jiggs. He laughed, too.

"You poor lamb," was Jill's first comforting remark, "you're almost scared to death."

"Well, naturally, I thought mermaids were extinct."

"Why—why, Jiggs," she gasped, "I never—who—*you've* been practicing on somebody. Now fess up, who is she?"

But Jiggs had skidded into another spin. Jill's surprise had been nothing compared to his. Such brilliancy in repartee had far exceeded his fondest dreams and he had shocked himself into another idiotic silence by the revelation of such unexpected talent.

"And now," she resumed, "that you have apologized for the shameful way in which you abused me at our last meeting and have admitted the existence of another girl who has replaced me in your affections, what's that funny little fan for back of the driver's seat?"

By frantic manipulation of his mental controls Jiggs had reduced the tail spin to a shallow glide, and at this sudden burst of leniency on the part of his companion he at last found himself launched on a subject that he knew something about.

"Oh, that, sure," he explained with relief. "That's a gas pump. That small propeller is run by the force of the wind and in turn operates a pump which raises the gasoline from the big tanks in the hull to an auxiliary tank built into the center section of the top wing. From there the gas is fed to the motor by gravity. Yes, sir, you'd be surprised to see the amount of gasoline that those twelve cylinders can get away with in one hour. There are two tanks just beneath that trapdoor, and each one will hold— Say, what are you doing here, anyway!"

Jill chose to ignore the fact that his brain had slipped a cog.

"You're not very flattering, Jiggs," she replied. "You should have allowed me to remain under the impression that you had found my hiding place through the force of your devotion. Now, isn't that the truth?"

"No—motor trouble." Jiggs was also frank.

"Oh-h, now I'm sure there's another girl!" she sighed resignedly. "No!" as his mouth flew open. "Don't try to explain, I'd rather not know the particulars, and besides, you'd say something stupid."

She lapsed into a thoughtful silence and studied her subdued victim critically through half closed eyes. A little smile quirked the corners of her mouth as a result of her observations, and hugging her knees a bit closer, she addressed the strong, clean cut profile of the man before her.

"Jiggs!"

He startled guiltily. "What?"

"Can you fight?"

"Huh!" He whirled to face her and grinned sheepishly as he interpreted her mood to be still playful. "I can fly better," he countered, which, on the whole, he thought was a pretty good comeback. He was soon disillusioned, though, on this point and was thrown into a mild panic at the disastrous results of his latest witicism. She was preparing to leave.

"H-hold on, there," he cried desperately. "Sure, I can fight!" He would have admitted an ability to swim the Atlantic if necessary; and as she settled back to her former position: "Whew, I thought you were going. Now what's the trouble?"

"Well," she began, "it's like this. Father, you know, was called suddenly to California and his plans at first were to take me along, because he figured that I was having just a little too much fun at Miami and was badly in need of some parental supervision. Of course I disagreed with him, and after a somewhat stormy session he compromised.

"Now, father has a brother, Uncle Bob, who has some queer ideas every now and then that he likes to put down on paper, and among other peculiarities he is a bug on solitude. He owns this little bay and a few miles of the surrounding country, and if you can find any place more solitary I'll —I'll—ugh—" She shivered prettily and cast a billigerent glance at the sandy strip on shore.

"Uncle Bob," she continued, "agreed to take me in custody for a few weeks. Poor dear, he didn't realize what he was undertaking"—Jiggs smiled in sympathy—"and has had plenty of time to regret his careless burst of brotherly sentiment. But that's immaterial. Now comes the exciting part. Enter the villain.

"Uncle Bob has a friend who is paying him several months' visit. Benton is his name and, although he is old enough to know better, he has appointed himself a voluntary guardian of one for little Jill. I haven't had much trouble with him yet—now don't look so ferocious—but I can't help but feel that what he needs more than anything at present is a good manhandling.

"Please Jiggs!" she cried in alarm as he jumped angrily to his feet. "Sit down or you'll fall overboard. You can't do anything now, and if you will listen a moment I'll tell you what I have planned.

"Benton's attentions to me are, of course, unknown to my uncle. I haven't told him because I'm sure he wouldn't understand, and, frankly," she admitted naïvely, "I was hoping for a more romantic solution.

"The only time I am not under observation is when I am in swimming. They presume, I imagine, that a bathing suit, though chic, is hardly suitable for traveling very far. Quite a clever deduction, for a man. The house, which is really a darling place, is even camouflaged from the air; another idea of uncle's, and the only stairway from the second floor leads directly into the living room. At night either Benton or Uncle Bob is on guard, 'cause, you see," she chuckled, "I promised to run away at the first opportunity."

"Every Thursday—to-day is Wednesday, isn't it?" Jiggs nodded. "Uncle Bob goes up to Miami on business, leaving Benton, myself, and the servants alone. He never gets back until late in the evening, which will give you all the time necessary."

"Exactly," agreed Jiggs dryly. "Necessary for what?"

"Why, to rescue me, silly."

"Oh!"

"All you have to do is to slip quietly into the living room, tie Benton up, and then come upstairs after me and force in my door, which they keep locked."

"Oh!"

"And then," she concluded, "you will bring me back to Miami and leave me with my aunt."

"I understand," Jiggs lied. He was fighting for time. "And would you mind telling me," he added a bit pettishly, "how in the deuce you expect me to land in this two by four puddle after dark? Why not come back with me right now or else let me go ashore and start the fireworks?"

"Goodness, Jiggsie, you *are* nice when you're angry, but don't be foolish, it's all arranged. And about the landing—" A tiny cloud of apprehension obscured for a moment the radiance of her self-assurance, but was soon dispelled by a breeze of inspiration. "Oh, that's for you to worry about," she informed him, "I'll expect you at nine o'clock. By-by."

And rising swiftly she cut the water in a clean dive, leaving an extremely nonplused young man to stare dully at spot marked X.

As her head bobbed above the water he found his voice.

"Say, listen!" he yelled frantically, "I—"

"And I forgot to tell you," she called back, "that Benton is frightfully strong and has a terrible temper."

For several minutes Jiggs watched the rhythmic rising and falling of two brown arms as Jill crawled steadily toward the shore. Reaching the strip of sand she turned, waved farewell and disappeared.

To say that Jiggs's mental condition was calm and tranquil would be a gross insult to his intelligence. To detail his emotions would be to describe a kaleidoscope and substitute thoughts for colors. Jiggs was no fool, but he was working under a decided handicap.

Acting blindly with practically nothing definite upon which to build his plans, would he finally succeed in landing himself in some absurd predicament or was he about to face a real tangible danger in the service of the one person for whom he would gladly die—under favorable conditions. He did not even trouble to debate with himself the fact of whether or not he would go to the rescue the following night, that point had already been settled for him. But it did seem just a bit unreasonable that so many of the details had been left to the uncertain competence of his own judgment.

He awoke from his reverie with a start to notice that the sun was about to knock off for the day. A light evening breeze had begun to ruffle the surface of the water. Hastily pulling out his tool kit he tightened the offending spring and cranking the motor he stuffed his ears with cotton, and taxied slowly to the far end of the bay to get as much run as possible into the wind. Once in the air he circled the bay a couple of times at an altitude of several hundred feet, and having memorized every topographical feature in the near vicinity for future reference, he turned the long, ugly nose toward the north and was soon lost on the horizon.

Twenty-two hours later he again lifted his great bird off the water and with many misgivings headed south. He had spent the entire day in a general overhauling of motor and rigging "because," he reasoned, "it's bad enough to worry over what I'm liable to do myself, without the added uncertainty of a flying hearse on my hands."

True to his word the almanac man had produced a moon which, gleaming palely through the gathering dusk, gave promise of a silver brilliance later on and contributed mightily to Jiggs's hopes for a safe landing.

In an hour's time, with constant reference to his compass, he reached the pinpoint position on his navigating chart directly above his destination. He had been flying at six thousand feet to deaden the noise of his motor, and now, with a doubtful shrug of his shoulders, he shoved her over the hump, banked into a tight spiral and began his descent.

To judge the distance of the water within a few inches when approaching it at a speed of eighty miles an hour requires skill in the daytime. To exercise the same judgment at night necessitates either a barrel of luck or an uncanny amount of flying instinct. A power landing, in which the pilot may feel his way down by an intermittent use of the motor, was comprativelly safe, but requires more space than the diminutive bay afforded, and besides, Jiggs had no intention of using his motor again unless absolutely necessary. So, with a short fervent prayer to the god of happy landings, he grinned at the screaming wires and hurtled toward the patch of water below.

He left his spiral and straightened into his final glide with the cool confidence of perfect control. He flattened and dived, flattened and dived, skimmed the trees in as shallow a glide as he dared and squashed carefully toward the surface. The big boat struck, porpoised once—stubbornly Jiggs kept his hand from the throttle—porpoised again and flopped at last like a wounded bird amid a smother of spray.

Jiggs breathed again and noted with satisfaction that he had come to rest within several yards of the beach. "Didn't have much to spare," he soliloquized as he discarded his shoes and slipped gingerly over the side into a few feet of water. "I'll haul her up tail first for a quick get-away, give her a short once over and then—heaven help me."

A brief examination of the boat showed it to be none the worse for its recent shak-

up and Jiggs now approached the matter in hand with a calmness that surprised himself. Of course, he was scared, darned scared, and he made no effort to deceive himself on this point as he followed the narrow, gloomy path leading from the beach. He clenched his teeth to forestall a suspicious inclination of his lower jaw to tremble and, taking up another notch in his belt, padded softly through the darkness.

The path ended abruptly against the very walls of a house which was separated from the forest by only a narrow strip of lawn. Following this, after a moment's hesitation, Jiggs came to the front of the building and crept stealthily up the steps onto the tiled floor of an immense veranda. A thin shaft of light from the drawn curtains of a window fell eerily across the tiles.

Standing upright he grasped the handle of the door in sweating fingers. It opened silently and he found himself in the gripping darkness of what he dully imagined must be the hall. Mechanically he moved toward another door, discernible only by the light under the threshold, touched the knob, turned it swiftly and stepped inside.

Blinded at first by the sudden light he squinted pugnaciously about the apparently deserted room and finally came to the conclusion that he was alone. He moved a few steps forward as his eyes became accustomed to the glare and stopped suddenly with a sharp intake of breath. A figure was rising slowly from a deep chair by the fireplace. Tensing every muscle, Jiggs prepared for the worst and was soon gazing into a pair of gray, twinkling eyes. Involuntarily he relaxed and the figure spoke.

"Mr. Montague, I believe. I am Jill's father. Won't you be seated?"

Blankly Jiggs stared into the stern, kind eyed face of the man before him as he vainly strove to adjust his scattered thoughts to meet this sudden and unexpected turn of events. His wonderful castle of ideals had been rudely dynamited and as he groped aimlessly in the smoking ruins he wrestled helplessly with a problem that better men than he had failed to solve. The ridiculousness of his present situation somehow failed to appeal to his sense of humor, but he realized vaguely that he was more or less bound by certain conventions to explain his presence to his patient host.

"I—I hope, sir," he stammered at last, "that you will accept my apologies for this —ah—intrusion. There has evidently been some misunderstanding and—I—well, I'm the goat."

The older man took him kindly by the shoulders and forced him gently into a chair.

"Son," he said sadly, "forget it. *I've* been the goat for twenty years and expect to qualify in that capacity for the rest of my life. Yes," he continued after a short silence, "I've tried everything, and your presence here to-night explodes my latest theory that isolation would bring her to her senses.

"I was expecting you this evening. Jill told me only that you would be here, nothing else. I have furthermore taken the liberty to make inquiries concerning you. You are the junior member of Montague & Son Importing Company, whose headquarters are in Miami. Yes, I thought so.

"I will not embarrass you by a request for the details of your visit this evening; my imagination is still quite active. But I do insist that you accept *my* apology for what ever inconvenience this little excursion has cost you. You see I can sympathize and understand."

But Jiggs had scarcely heard. He was undergoing a tremendous revolution. The poignant pain of his disappointment was rapidly giving way to a smoldering anger, which, fanned by the injustice of his humiliation, suddenly burst forth into a righteous wrath. He jerked forward in his chair.

"Listen," he said earnestly, "I've just been struck by an idea which I think is a corker. You may not agree, but anyway here's the dope."

He talked excitedly for five minutes, inspired by the look of admiration that crept slowly over the face of the other. As he paused, flushed and breathless, the father of Jill impulsively stretched forth his hand.

"My boy," he said as Jiggs grasped it eagerly, "you're a genius and a damn fool.

No one but a genius could think of it and no one but a damn fool would attempt it. If my consent is what you want, go to it!"

Jill was waiting. For what she was not exactly sure, but it would be strange indeed if her well laid plans did not materialize in some sort of excitement. Perched cross legged in the corner of a huge divan she scrutinized intently the tip of a pink finger as she concentrated deeply and with puckered brows on the peculiarities of a certain aviator of her acquaintance.

As yet no twinge of conscience had ruffled the smooth serenity of her perfect conceit; her only misgiving being that her victim might fail to react as she had hoped and spoil her anticipated pleasure by a failure to coöperate in her little farce.

Her meditations were violently interrupted. She stiffened upright at the sound of a muffled crash in the room below; another followed and another. Then silence.

In a furor of alarm she sprang to her feet as footsteps bounded up the stairs and, pressing a clenched hand over her lips, she stifled a cry of fear as the door burst open and a torn, disheveled figure leaped into the room. The figure smiled reassuringly.

"I fixed him," he panted, "and dragged him into the dining room! Quick now, let's get started!"

For a long moment she stared at him with unbelieving, terror stricken eyes.

"Oh, no—no Jiggs," she pleaded, "you couldn't—he was my—Oh!"

With a sudden movement she sped toward the door, but was seized roughly by the arm and whirled back into the room.

"Now listen," said Jiggs coldly. The smile as well as the color had left his face. "For three weeks I've furnished amusement for you at the expense of my self-respect. To-night I risked my neck landing in that bay and have gone to the trouble of beating up a total stranger at your request. And now—we're going through with our little program and the sooner you are ready the sooner we'll get started."

But Jill had had sufficient time to regain her accustomed poise and self-control. She smiled provokingly at the angry Jiggs.

"You dear boy," she dimpled sweetly, "what an adorable cave man you would make if you only had a club. You might at least have brought along an umbrella for effect. Now trot along and let Jill go to bed."

But Jiggs didn't trot along. Instead he began a slow, deliberate advance toward the militant little figure across the room which backed away with increasing apprehension as she read the message of an inflexible will behind the flashing blue of those steady eyes.

Even though she may have sensed intuitively the final outcome, Jill was not the quitting kind and, as her fingers, groping across the top of the dresser at her back, closed around a heavy cut glass bottle of cologne she raised it to a threatening angle.

Jiggs stopped. "Throw it!" he commanded softly.

Her arm remained motionless.

"Throw it!" he repeated. Jill hesitated.

"Then drop it!" he snapped. Jill dropped it.

"Now come on! Or will I have to carry you?"

"Why—why—how dare you?" she gasped. "You—you wouldn't—"

The next instant she was struggling fiercely in a pair of powerful arms. Her own arms, pinned tightly to her sides, were helpless and her tiny feet kicking viciously in the air were just as useless.

Down the stairs and through the disordered living room Jiggs stalked with his animated armful. As he reached the porch her struggles ceased and as they entered the tunnel like path she grew limp. Conquering an impulse to hold her closer, Jiggs risked a downward glance and, wonder of wonders, she was sobbing quietly against his shoulder.

Reaching the boat he deposited her gently in the seat and cranking the motor to a low speed, adjusted his helmet and goggles and slipped in beside her.

"It's only fair to tell you now," he shouted above the clicking exhaust, "that your father is not hurt and I have made arrangements for your reception in Miami." And giving her no time to reply to this bit of information, he opened the throttle wide and was soon roaring over the tops of the trees.

Now that he had time to think things over, Jiggs reviewed each incident of his recent adventure with a warm thrill of satisfaction, but as he glanced covertly at the huddled little figure in the seat beside him, crouching pathetically below the cowl to escape the wind, his satisfaction turned to despair and he reviled himself with every malediction at his command, and he had several, that he, a great hulking brute should glory in the redemption of his self-respect through the persecution of a sweet, innocent angel.

No. Undoubtedly Jiggs's personal stock had never been so low before and was still dropping. The farther they went the lower it dropped and as he groveled hopelessly in a pit of gloom the descent was suddenly checked and, all in the fraction of a second, the stock soared far above par and issued a dividend.

This miracle was accomplished by a touch upon his arm. A very light touch to be sure, but it served to paralyze him with the impossibility of the thing. And as the little hand crept softly up his sleeve toward the wheel and rested at last on his big, sun tanned paw, Jiggs ceased to worry over the complexities of the eternal feminine, and, with a great sigh of happiness, discovered that he could fly exactly as well with one hand as with two.

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THE CARPENTER

LIFE is our carpenter,
And with his tools
He builds in knaves and fools
And splendid men alike—
For each a character.

He scores not all success.
As some fine woods are torn
By ancient forest storm,
So much hard toil is spent
To close that sorry rent.
But see how patiently he drives
His drill and chisel;
While over some he slides
The kindly plane—
Which makes the rough place smooth,
And brings to view
The perfect grain beneath.
Then here and there, a blow
Will make his work complete.

Yet there are days—
He goes exultant on his ways,
His toil repaid,
For he has made
A character so strong
That its life-song
Must reach the goal
Of Immortality.

M. Ray Willis.

Dan Barry's Daughter

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Night Horseman," "Black Jack," "The Seventh Man," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

JOAN, eighteen-year-old beauty who believes herself to be the daughter of Buck Daniels, ranchman, has been zealously guarded by him against the world of young men. This night she hears the call of migrating wild geese, and under the ripe moon she secretly rides away from the ranch house to eavesdrop enviously at a country dance in the schoolhouse. Near by she encounters a tall, broad shouldered youth, and in words and song flirts delicately with him in the darkness. When he tries to learn her identity she flees. Interwoven with this shining promise of romance are the grim threads of tragedy wherein two inoffensive men perish at the hands of a cutthroat, and an innocent man becomes a fugitive because of circumstantial evidence against him. Harry Gloster, this fugitive and wooer of a shadowy beauty, returns to the dance and, manlike, pays extravagant attentions to one of the local belles. Her beau and a half dozen of his cow-puncher friends attempt to chastise Gloster, but he outfights them and is about to dash away when the sheriff arrests him on suspicion Joan auctions off her prize mustang to go on Gloster's bail bond, but a telegram comes to the authorities to hold him for the murder of two men.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROWING DICE WITH DEATH.

NOW that the girl was gone, the center of attention was the horse. And with the horse was unlucky Jud Carter as the cynosure of all eyes.

"And what," said some one "d'you aim to do with that hoss, Jud?"

"Why," announced Jud, still somewhat crestfallen over the sudden disappearance of the girl, but his eye brightening as he looked over the racy lines of Peter, "I reckon that I can use him well enough. Couldn't you?"

"Maybe I could," said the other, "but I dunno that I would."

"What might you be meaning by that?"

"Why d'you think that most of the gents were bidding in on that hoss?"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 30.

"Why—I dunno—"

"Ain't it true that there ain't a man here that would want to pay five hundred for one hoss when he could get five hosses that 'd be good to work cattle with?"

"Maybe that's true."

"Then why did they all bid up?"

"Why—matter of fact—"

"Matter of fact, they were just trying to help that girl out of the trouble that made her need five hundred dollars."

Jud came from a thrifty family. He looked about him in amazement.

"You mean to say that they wanted to *give* away five hundred?"

"No," was the response; "because they figured that it was worth that much to get an introduction to the girl."

Jud Carter passed a work hardened hand across his forehead. But before his wits had cleared after this argument, and while he was still surrounded by men who were striving to show him an impossible point of view, he was removed from his difficulties by a new intervention.

For Joan herself came slowly down the street and through the crowd and went straight to Jud. She carried in her hand, still, the same money which he had given her. And coming to him, she looked up in his face with great, fear stricken, wistful eyes.

"Do you think," she asked, "that I could buy Peter back from you for just as much as you paid? Here is the same money, you see!"

It was the smile from heaven for Jud. He had been swept off his feet a little before —with all of the others around him—but the thought of losing five hundred dollars or the respect of the community had sobered his close figuring brain completely. His throat closed so tight that he could only reach for the money with one hand and gesture to Peter with the other.

All in an instant Joan had given a faint cry of joy and was back in the saddle. A twitch of the reins and Peter was through the midst of them. A word and he was kicking the dust behind him as he galloped down the street.

As for those who had done the bidding for Peter a little while before, they glanced after her with the wistful eyes of youth, seeing that one has only to turn the corner with any man in order to find him in his boyhood again. But while they were still gaping and had not said a word, news came hobbling out to them in the form of the old man who was the office boy, janitor, and all around messenger of the courthouse, with more knowledge about each office in the old building than had the very tenants themselves.

It was he who now spread the word. How he knew no one could guess, for Judge Conley had certainly not told him. But perhaps the walls in that building were overly thin, or else keyholes were overly large. At any rate, he bore tidings of everything—of how the girl had come with five hundred dollars bail to get Sandy Williams free; and of how the judge had placed before her a telegram announcing that Williams was no other than a certain Harry Gloster, who had killed two men a week before, and therefore he was not open to bail of any amount.

This was the news which sent a buzz of wonder through the town. It was a salve for the battered jaws and the sore ribs of the men who had stood up to Harry Gloster the night before and found themselves going down like nine pins. For, after all, a man who was capable of a double murder was capable of almost anything.

But the only one who felt no thrill of excitement was Lee Haines. For when he heard the news it seemed as though a weight had fallen upon his shoulders, bowing him, and that a shadow had dropped across his eyes.

At any rate, he went slowly, slowly back to the hotel, rented his room for another day, and when in the room he first of all carefully removed the bandage from his right hand. That hand was stiff, and the ragged wound in the palm was still unhealed.

But, making a grimace from the pain it caused him, he began to open and shut the fingers. A few drops of blood oozed out as he continued, but he kept working until the hand was supple.

After that, to rest the aching nerves of the hand, he lay on his back on the

bed and ran his eyes over the cracks on the ceiling, and for every branching and turning of the long cracks above him he found branchings and turnings in his own life. He could read them as if they were notes to freshen his memory and bring up to his mind all that ever he had done or seen.

And he had done too much; he had seen too much. So that from time to time he would close his eyes and relax, outworn by the effort, and at such times, his face relaxing, the flesh about his mouth and under his eyes sank in a little so that his face was like a death mask—or like death itself.

The day sloped into the quiet and the shadow of the evening. When he was aware of the incessant beat and metal hammering in the blacksmith shop by its cessation; when the subdued voices which had gone on all the day were hushed away, and there were single calls from children in the street or bursts of laughter from a group of merrymakers, then he sat up on the bed, slowly, and leaned his head in his hand.

There he sat until the darkness was complete. And when he began to move again it was with such a faltering slowness that indeed he seemed a feeble old fellow who has lived out the appointed threescore and ten, instead of a burly and vigorous man in the latter prime of life.

However, what he was doing had a significance which was young enough. He was looking to his revolver. And he was looking to it in the utter blackness of the dark!

His fingers seemed to have eyes for that work. They worked swiftly, and yet were unhurried. The big weapon was first unloaded, and then it was taken apart all in the dark, and all in the dark it was reassembled, the shells inserted again, and the cylinder was spun. And the action was as smooth as silk.

If any one could have watched, they would have wondered not so much at the thing that was done, but that any man would have spent all the countless hours that must have been required in practice before he could have become so familiar with all the parts of a revolver that he would know each by the touch. But such, however, was the skill of Lee Haines, and the fact that he had such a skill threw a sharp light down his past.

When his gun was ready and loaded once more he was still not ready. He lighted a lamp, drew his shade, and spent an hour in a strange practice, which consisted of jerking the gun from the holster on his thigh with lightning speed and leveling it at some object in the room, which might be the knob of the door or the high light which lay along the rim of the bowl on the washstand. Then he began to walk softly to and fro in the room, and when the impulse moved him he jerked out his weapon and whirled, aiming it again.

They were adroit movements, but always they appeared to disappoint Haines. And finally he went to the stained and cracked mirror, and, holding the lamp above his head, he examined his face with a care which plainly showed that he considered himself an old man.

After he set down the lamp he clapped a hat on his head, however, and went straight down the stairs to the rear of the hotel, and thence to the stable which was behind it. There he entered a stall in which was a great black stallion, a giant of his kind, yet built for speed as well as strength. In the days of old he could have galloped at high speed with all the crushing impost of a knight in full armor upon his back.

Even the solid bulk of so big a man as Lee Haines would be nothing to his strength. He could trot along all day, just as a range mustang could trot under the burden of an ordinary man. He saddled the great black horse, arranged the pack behind the saddle, all with the consummate care of one who knows that little details count most in big affairs, and then led the spirited animal out and mounted.

His journey led straight down the street of the village where the greatest number of eyes would fall upon him, but he moment he was clear of the outskirts of the town he turned to the left and made a swift semicircle which brought him back to the vicinity of the jail. Here he dismounted.

There was a thicket behind the building.

It had been cleared away for ten paces, but after this the brush was thick and high enough to hide a mounted man. Here he threw the reins of the black horse and dismounted; and as he did so he heard a girl's voice singing not far away a Mexican waltz song:

"Que viva la rumba;
Que viva, que viva placer."

He listened to the singing for a moment. There was something so joyous and careless in it that it made his mood of the moment darker than ever. She might be still singing, this happy passer-by, when guns were sounding in the jail.

After that he went forward again, circled the building, and came to the front entrance. It was surrounded by a group of men talking idly of idle things, but there was no doubt that they had been drawn there by the knowledge that a murderer was inside.

The door to the office was open, and in it were Sim Hargess and his deputy, with a half dozen others. Lee Haines picked Hargess from the rest and drew him to one side.

"Sheriff," he said, "I have something of importance to tell you. It has to do with your man, Harry Gloster, inside."

"Let's have it, then."

"Rather have you alone when I tell it."

The sheriff regarded him for a moment of doubt, then he sent the others from the room and shut the door behind them.

"I guess you got no objections to George staying?" he said.

"I'd rather have you alone, sheriff."

Again the sheriff hesitated. But eventually, with a shrug, he bade George follow the others.

"Mind if I lock the door behind him?" asked Haines, doing the thing before he received an answer.

"What the devil!" growled Hargess. "You afraid that they'll break in to hear what you have to say?"

"They'd spoil everything for me," answered Haines seriously, "if they should hear. Sit down, sheriff. It won't take me long once I'm started to—"

He stepped to a chair as he spoke, and the sheriff leaned to be seated, but as he did so his eyes caught on a glint of metal. He cursed softly and straightened again, staring into the muzzle of Haines's revolver.

"Very neat, damn you!" he said bitterly.

"Sorry, sheriff. But put them up quick. I'm pressed for time even with the door locked."

The sheriff raised his hands obediently.

"The keys?" demanded Haines.

"On the desk there."

"Thanks. What horse is that tied behind the jail?"

"Mine."

"Going to have to borrow that roan, sheriff. Return him to you when I get a chance."

"You'll sweat for this one of these days."

"Most likely I shall. Step inside, will you?"

He waved to the jail entrance, and Sim Hargess obediently led the way. Obedience was in his manner, but not in his mind, however, for as he stepped through the door into the cell room he leaped to the side of the door with a shout and drew his revolver as he whirled.

It took Lee Haines by surprise. Otherwise there would have been no time for even the shout. But as it was, he tapped the sheriff over the head with the long barreled weapon which he carried. The sheriff dropped on his face, as loosely sprawling as if a ten ton wagon had rolled over him.

Outside the building there was an answering yell of inquiry from Deputy George. At the door it was taken up by the clamor of a dozen voices.

CHAPTER XIV.

FREEDOM HAS ITS SHACKLES.

THAT calling transformed the leisurely movements of Haines into wild haste. He leaned to scoop up the gun which was still clasped by the unnerved fingers of the sheriff; then he raced down the aisle to the cell of Harry Gloster.

"Harry!" he called as he ran. "We're

leaving together. Take this!" He tossed the revolver to him. "Now if I can find the key that fits this damned door--"

He began to work feverishly, groaning as every key failed to fit the lock. Gloster had merely scooped up his hat and placed it on his head, completing his readiness to leave. Now he took the revolver, spun it in his hand, and then tossed it onto his bunk.

"I'll leave this where it 'll do no harm," he said. "A gun like that is apt to do a lot of killing if a man doesn't look out."

Haines favored him and the discarded weapon with a glance of rapt wonder.

"That's a fool's idea!" he declared. "But—" Here the lock turned and the door was cast open by Gloster's shoulder.

"Now for the rear door!" cried Haines. "Right outside the sheriff's horse is tied. Jump into the saddle. I'll cut the reins loose. Fast, Gloster, for God's sake!"

Down the sides of the building ran voices, and at the front door there was a furious battering. And far away up and down the village street, they could hear the shouts and the beating of hoofs as men, attracted by the clamor at the jail, threw themselves into the saddle and scurried for the scene of action.

The two inside reached the rear door, twisted at the knob, and found it locked. It meant another search among the keys, and such a search meant a delay which would render all escape hopeless.

Haines, with a groan, started to fit the keys, however—since even hopeless work is better than inaction—but Gloster warned him away, and as he stepped aside a human battering ram went past him and hurled itself against the door.

It was a stout door. The safety of the cells depended on the tool-proof steel of the bars, alone, but nevertheless, all the approaches to the building were strongly blocked. And now the door flung back the heavy body of Gloster as if he were a rubber ball. He staggered away, found footing once more, and returned to the charge, shooting straight ahead, then swerving at the last instant and giving the wood the rubbery mass of muscle on his shoulders as a pad for his weight.

The shock cracked the lock as if it were castiron. The door flew open and spilled Gloster into the outer night where he was welcomed by a yell from half a dozen throats.

Lee Haines jumped out to join the fracas, his deadly long revolver poised. But Gloster arose from the shadow at his feet, where he had falen, and struck the weapon out of his hand.

"No shooting for me!" he commanded, and lunged at the sheriff's roan horse.

As for Haines, with an oath of helpless anger, he stooped, caught up his fallen gun, and arose to find some one running straight on him, firing at every step. No doubt it was the jar of his own running that ruined the aim of the oncomer.

But Haines had no time to find the trigger of his own weapon. He had seized it by the barrel, and now he dashed the heavy butt into the face of his assailant. The man went down with a gasp, and Haines turned toward Gloster long enough to see that the other was hopelessly lost.

Three men had thrown themselves upon him as he was wrenching apart the reins that tethered the roan. And Haines gave up a lost cause and raced for the shelter of the bush.

He was neglected for the instant, as all the rest were focusing on Gloster, and Lee ventured a glance back from the shubbery.

What he saw was Gloster rising out of a cluster of men as a dog shakes himself free from a scrambling, weak-toothed litter of puppies. One of the three was prostrate, a second went down at that instant as if struck with a club; the third staggered away, and then, encouraged by the yells of a solid group which was charging to his assistance, dived in again to the attack.

Haines saw him picked up, heaved into the air as if he were no more than the fragile body of a child, and then flung into the faces of the onrushing men. The leaders went down under the blow. Those behind them were entangled, and before the tangle cleared, Gloster was on the back of the roan and dashing for the crowded shadows of the shubbery.

He plunged past Haines, three steps away, and was gone with a crash among

the young trees. On the scene of the battle, men were picking themselves up, cursing brokenly. A roar of guns followed, the bullets rattling through the brush, and Gloster called hastily: "Haines! Haines! For God's sake, where are you?"

He reined in his horse, heedless of the bullets which were whistling near him. But there was no answer from Haines.

Instead, a slenderer and smaller figure now rushed a horse out of the darkness where he had expected to see the other man come to join. He jerked his horse around and charged the newcomer to strike him to the ground.

But the latter dodged, with a horse as slippery as an eel. And, the next instant, a girl's voice was crying to him: "Follow me! This way! Ride hard!"

Amazement engulfed him, and then he rode as fast as the sheriff's horse would take him, in pursuit of the girl. She led him straight at a thick, low copse. But when he half expected to see her and her horse come to ruin in the wall of brush, they suddenly ducked out of sight in it.

And, at the very verge of the thicket, he saw a narrow opening which twisted to the left, made by grazing cattle, perhaps, breaking a path through to come at nearby water. He reined back the roan and wound through the brush at a more moderate pace, coming out on the farther side into a little hollow which pointed down a shallow arroyo. And in the hollow was the girl, waiting for him.

"You've gained on them!" she cried, clapping her hands together in her delight. "They'll have to ride around the thicket to come on your trail again. Ride fast—ride hard! Or if you stay at all, only stay to take my horse. There's nothing in the country that can come up with him for running—"

He could not believe his ears. Beyond the thicket, men were shouting, men were riding here and there, baffled by his disappearance. These were precious moments to put a distance between himself and them. But instead of taking her advice, he pressed closer to her and peered down into her face. The starlight was bright—bright enough to give him a thousand hints of her beauty, and yet so dim that a shadow still lay across her features.

"You're the girl," he said. "I knew that voice as well as though I'd heard you singing the song—"

"Don't stop to talk!" she cried. "Be gone at once. Don't you hear them? Don't you hear them?"

In fact, the noise of horses and of shouting was spreading, behind them, to either edge of the thicket, and before long the riders would swarm out into the arroyo.

"I can't leave till I know your name."

"Joan. Joan Daniels. Now — quickly—"

"I'm not going yet. What brought you here?"

"I don't know, except that something was telling me that perhaps"—she broke off to say, pressing closer to him and putting a hand on his arm—"the two men they say you killed—"

"I never laid a hand on them. They were my partners, Joan. I came back from hunting. I found them dead, and I ran for it, because I knew that I didn't have any defense—"

"I knew you couldn't have done it. I knew that, but I wanted to hear what—"

"I've been trying to draw your face, Joan, but everything that I've imagined has been wrong. You're a thousand times more beautiful. I'd give a year of life to see you only once in the sunlight—"

"You mustn't talk of that! Don't you hear them coming? Don't you hear them riding around the thicket?"

The hand on his arm trembled. He took it in both his own, and as he drew her a little nearer, she raised her head and looked steadily up into his face. The noise of the riders faded from his mind.

"What is your hair, Joan? In the starlight it looks only like a pale glow of light. Is it gold?"

"It's yellow hair," she said.

"It's metal gold," he answered. "And what color are your eyes, Joan?"

"Blue. Now go, Harry, for God's sake, go!"

"You're not happy with me here?"

"So happy it's like sadness. Oh, being near you is a wild happiness! And when

I touch you, it's as though I took all of your strength into my hand."

"And when I touch you, Joan, I feel as if I'd taken the blue out of the sky and all the gold out of the mountains, and all the laughing and the singing out of the world."

"Hush!" she pleaded. "If you say such things, I'll be begging you to stay. And now they come—oh, don't you see?"

"What do I care? I'm living a year every second. I've spent a whole life of happiness right here trying to tell you how much I love you, Joan. But the words don't tell you what I mean."

"Then for my sake go!"

"Ask me again, Joan."

"For my sake."

"And you care for me—just a little to begin with?"

"Yes!"

"Then—" He took her in his arms, but with her face raised to his, something weakened and snapped in him. And in her face and her eyes he found a solemn power which kept him from touching her with his lips.

Another moment and he was spurring away for freedom.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

IT was just as Gloster plunged into the wood near the jail that a bullet struck Haines. And there was a sting of irony that went almost as deep as the plunging bullet in the knowledge that he was struck by a random shot. After the thousand dangers he had faced, to be killed by accident—

He thought of all that as he sagged against a tree trunk, watching with dim eyes the shadowy horsemen who were racing through the wood in the pursuit of the escaped man. Then, as he strove to get to the black stallion, his foot caught. He fell heavily and struck the side of his head against a stump.

He lay only a few moments on the ground, but it seemed to him an enternity. He was faint and weak when his eyes opened again, and the roar of voices in the town and about the jail had grown into a heavy chorus.

He felt of the blood which trickled from his wounds where the bullet had entered and left his body, and he knew that he was indeed no better than a dead man. What he wanted most of all was to get into the open, lie flat on his back and, watching the cold stars grow dim, so die. If only he could find water in the sands, for a fire of thirst was burning in him, closing his dry throat.

Stumbling on in this fashion through the wood, with shadows already swinging before his eyes, he ran against a projecting branch, a stiff and strong-tipped bough which cut against the wound. He clapped his hand over the place, felt the blood gush, and staggered weakly on toward the black horse.

The stallion remained honestly where he had been placed, but his low neigh of greeting came faint and far to Lee. He reached for the pommel and then found that he would never have the strength to pull himself into the saddle.

"Lee Haines!" some one was calling.

"Not he!" answered Haines, staggering as he turned. "Not Haines, Gloster. Come get me, and be damned to you—"

And then his misting eyes saw that it was only a girl who stood before him, and he knew that it was a girl's voice that had spoken.

"It *is* Haines!" she was crying eagerly.

"Where's Gloster?"

"He's gone as fast as a fast horse can take him away."

"Thank God!"

They were interrupted by a rushing of men and horses through the brush, and the clamor of a score of voices calling. Already the light cavalry of the town had swept into the pursuit; others were following. A cluster plunged past the girl and Haines not a dozen feet away. But they were looking for moving figures, and these stationary shadows remained unseen.

"Why aren't you riding?" she asked.

"Riding?" Haines echoed. "I'll go as far as water and stay there. Is there water near here—"

He coughed, and the excruciating pain stopped his voice. She stepped close to him, and as the agony abated a little, he could see that it was the girl who had sold Peter that day and bought him back again.

"You're wounded—badly," she was saying.

"I'm nicked—nothing bad. If you can tell me where there's water and—"

He stumbled and would have fallen, but her shoulder caught under his, and held him strongly up. She drew one of his dangling arms around her neck. Her right arm she passed around him, and now half his weight slumped lifelessly upon her.

"Try to walk—slowly!" she gasped, and they staggered on through the darkness.

"Doesn't amount to anything," she heard him say. "I'll just tie up the place they nicked me—be all right in a minute and—you go along about your business—nobody must find you with me—"

But no matter how bravely he talked, she saw that his head had fallen far forword so that he was blinded to the way they went, and every moment the weight she was carrying increased. There was a wild fear in her. She felt that at any moment it might overtake her and paralyze her. And so she fought it back savagely and centered all her mind on the need of the big man whose weight was lurching to and fro against her.

She had seen an old cabin, more than half ruined, which stood among the trees, and to this she now led Lee Haines. He was barely past the door when he slumped down, his weight tearing away from her gripping hands, while he murmured: "I'll just sit down here to rest a minute. Be all right—you run along now—"

His weakening voice and his fall told her a thousand things more than his words.

"Have you a match?" she cried. "Oh, quickly!"

"Here's one. Did I hear water running some place near?"

She took the box of matches from his hand. It was always that way, she understood, with men who had been badly wounded. A torturing thirst burned in them.

She struck a light and looked anxiously around her. The cabin was a wreck indeed. There was no flooring. Half of the roof had caved in under the weight of a falling branch which thrust a great cluster of dead boughs and twigs into the building. Red rust was eating the remnants of an iron stove to dust in a corner.

In another space there was a bunk built against the wall. It must have been two or more years since the place was inhabited, yet by the bunk stood a singularly vivid memento of the man who had once dwelt here. It was a candlestick with a short section of time-yellowed candle still in it.

Here her match burned out. With a second one she lighted the candle.

"Not too much light!" Haines gasped. "I want to die away from 'em. I don't want them around me yapping and asking questions. Put something around it. And a little water—"

His voice was cut away by another cough and she saw his big limbs contracted by a spasm of agony. No doubt that wound was grimly serious, but water seemed to her the most crying need.

Not ten steps from the door she found the pump, still used by random passers-by, it appeared, for it was primed. She filled Haines's canteen with clear, cool water and brought it back to him.

He caught it with a great shaking hand that spilled half the contents down his breast. She had to hold it for him and his eyes made her shudder. They were like the tortured eyes of a dumb beast dying in agony. But this creature who lay mute was a man!

After that she looked to his wound. His whole right side was adrip with blood, and when she cut away the shirt with his own knife, she saw a purple rimmed hole—

Blackness swam across her eyes. Then she got swaying to her feet.

"I'll have a doctor here in one minute—"

He shook his head with such an expression of earnest entreaty in his face that she paused.

"All this needs is to be plugged—to stop bleeding. After that, I'll be all right—"

"You can't be sure! And when I see it—"

"I know. You've never seen a fellow clipped with a slug before. But this is nothing. Leaves you weak for a little while. After that, when the blood stops running—a man is all right. I'll be walking around in an hour!"

She studied his face anxiously, but he smiled back at her, and she dropped to her knees beside him.

"Then tell me what to do. Tell me how to help you!"

"If I had a pad of cloth—"

She turned from him, ripped away her underskirt, and tore it into strips. He followed her movements, nodding with a sort of weak admiration.

"Very strong for a girl," he said. "*Very* strong! Never would dream it from the size of your wrist."

She wondered that he could say such things; but after all she decided that he must be very familiar with wounds and must know that this one was not deadly. She made pads of the cloth.

With his own hands he placed those pads over the wound behind and the wound in front. Then she tied the bandage around him, drawing it to such a point of tightness as he demanded.

After that, he wanted water again. She brought it, and again held the canteen to his lips.

Some of the pain was gone from his eyes, now. And in its place there was a shadow like sleepiness, very like it!

She was rejoiced when he smiled faintly at her, and in her happiness, smiling back to him, she took one of his hands and cherished it between both her own.

CHAPTER XVI.

EYES THAT SAW NOT.

IT appeared to her that he was growing momentarily older and older, that his cheeks were thinner and that his eyes were sinking into a shadow, while a pale circle came around his mouth. His lips seemed tinted with blue.

"You're sure that this is the right thing to do—that there's no danger?" she asked.

"Not a bit."

"What can I do now?"

"Go home and go to bed and forget that you saw me."

"Do you really want me to do that?"

"Of course. You mustn't be found with me."

"But who'll take care of you?"

"I'll be away in half an hour."

"Away?"

"On my horse, I mean."

"You couldn't possibly ride, after being so hurt."

"You don't know. I've been sliced up worse than this before. This is an old, old story!"

She hesitated, but at last she shook her head with conviction.

"I won't say a word if you don't want to be bothered," she assured him. "But I want to stay here to try to make you comfortable. For instance, don't you want something under your head?"

And taking off her jacket, she rolled it and placed it under his head. Whatever his words had been, he accepted her ministrations. And looking down into his eyes as she leaned above him, it seemed to her that they were bottomless wells of gratitude.

"That's good," he whispered to her. "But why are you doing these things for me?"

"You risked yourself to save another man," she explained. "Isn't it right that I should help you?"

"Is Gloster your brother?"

"Oh, no;"

"Ah," nodded Haines. "I see how it is! Poor girl, you're engaged to Harry."

"But I'm not, you know."

"What!"

"He's never even seen me."

He stared blankly at her.

"Well," he said, "I'll ask no questions. And no matter what's against Gloster, he's a man. As for what I've done for him, it's nothing. He's already done as much for me. Hand and hand about, you know, that's the only way people can get on."

"He's helped you? Tell me about that!"

He smiled at her eagerness, with that sleepy shadow, as she thought it, gradually deepening in his eyes.

"An enemy of mine found me when I had this hand bandaged the other day."

He exposed that hand, with blood crusted on the palm from the use of his revolver. The friction of the butt must have caused him exquisite pain, and the girl shuddered at the raw-edged wound.

"It was about to be my finish," went on Lee Haines, "but Harry Gloster stepped in between me and the other fellow's gun."

He paused and then added softly: "Never had met me before—never heard of me—hadn't talked with me five minutes—but he jumped right in between me and a fellow who can make a revolver talk seven languages. Gloster hit twice, and that ended the fight. Bare handed work against a revolver. It was a pretty fine thing!"

"But just like him!" cried the girl.

"I thought you didn't know him?"

"I've seen him."

"And having seen him, you know all about him?"

Suddenly he reached for her hand, found it, and drew it close to his breast. And the fingers which touched hers she thought colder than running water.

"My dear," said Haines, "I once knew a girl that was in love with a fellow like Gloster. No, he was really like nobody in the world. But like Gloster, the law made no difference to him. Will you let me tell you what happened to her?"

She nodded.

"She looked like you. That's what put it into my head. She had the same sort of metal gold hair and the same kind of blue eyes. Mind you, she was still as different from you as Gloster is from the man she loved.

"She was very quiet; very gentle; and to see her, you'd wonder how any man—or woman either, for that matter—could bear to make her suffer. But the man she loved—well, to tell you the short of it, he tortured her!"

"Oh," murmured Joan. "How terrible! If a man were so cruel to be—no matter how I loved him—"

"What would you do?"

"I'd leave him, even if my heart were to break."

"Ah, but you see, as I said before, you're quite different from Kate Cumberland."

"Was that her name?"

"Yes."

"Kate was my mother's name," mused the girl. "But won't you tell me what happened?"

"Yes. Dan Barry was the man she loved—but I suppose you've never heard of him?"

"Never."

"There was a time when I thought everyone in the world would know about him sooner or later. Just what he was, I don't know. Nobody knows. He was simply different.

"Old Joe Cumberland, the squarest old rancher that ever lived, was riding about sunset time, one day, and he heard a queer whistling on the brow of a hill. He rode up there and he saw a boy—just a youngster—bare legged and dressed in rags—walking along with his head back, watching the wild geese flying north and whistling up at them."

"Ah?" murmured the girl, and she leaned forward, pushing the candle closer, as though its light on the face of the man might help her to understand his story.

"Joe took the youngster home and raised him. Had a hard time. Dan Barry—he gave that for his name—didn't seem to know where his mother or his father was. And when he was asked where he came from, he simply waved a hand at the southern horizon. And when he was asked where he was going and why, he didn't know. He tried to run away at first, but when he was always caught, he gave it up. Finally he seemed to be quite happy.

"But he was different from other people. He was as quiet as a girl, most of the time. But when he was stirred up, he turned into a fighting devil. A fighting devil," repeated Haines with a sort of religious awe. "And when he fought, though he wasn't a big man, he had the strength of half a dozen men. Imagine a hundred and fifty pound wildcat, you see?

"Cumberland had seen him in a couple of passions when he was a youngster, and he made up his mind that the only way to keep Dan from getting into trouble was to

keep guns out of his hands when he was around other men. He'd let him hunt as much as he pleased, but he never let him wear a gun when he was going to town.

"And Barry lived mostly in the mountains—mighty little at home. He came back with a wounded wolf one day. Barry called it a dog. But he was the singer of a black-coated wolf, and a mighty big one.

"That was the 'dog' that Dan called Black Bart. It was danger on four paws, that wolf. Ready to tear the heart out of any other man and ready to die for Dan.

"Another time he came back with a black stallion, the finest I ever saw. I have a fine horse of my own and it happens to be black, but the Captain isn't worth one of Satan's hoofs. And yet for all that I've never found a horse that could pass the Captain or outlast him.

"But the point of it was that Satan kept the strength of anything that is wild and free. You see? He served Dan, but he served him for love, you might say. Can you understand the difference? There *is* a difference.

"It took me a year to teach the Captain that it didn't pay to buck even if he threw me off, now and then. Now he lets me ride him, but he's waiting to get me at a disadvantage and tear me to bits."

"Why do you keep him?"

Because he's the best horse in the mountains. That's one reason. Another is that I think he's one of Satan's colts. I got him when he was a yearling, and he was in the mustang band that old Satan was still leading. Some of the old blood runs in him. And if he had another Dan Barry on his back—how can I tell?—he might be every bit as good as his father ever was!

"But to get back to Barry himself, I say he used to go around the country on the back of a horse he didn't need a bridle to handle and with a wolf trailing him and doing his errands—"

"How wonderful!" cried the girl; "oh, how wonderful!"

"You think so? A little bit terrible you would have found it, too, if you had seen them as I have seen them. I've watched them play a game, all three of them. Mind you, this was when they thought they were quite unwatched.

"Satan would trot away to a little distance. Then Black Bart attacked Dan—like a demon, with his fur bristling and his great teeth slashing the air a hair's breadth from Dan's face, who would fend the brute off with his hands, dancing here and there like the shadow of a leaf in a whirlpool of wind.

"And Satan would come to the rescue with the sun winking on him, and his mane blowing above his head; just a fraction of a second's pause at the scene of the fight—and then Dan had dived at him, caught him in some way around the neck and then twisted on to his back. So off they would go with Black Bart after them, sailing through the air with his teeth aimed at Dan's throat—imagine catching a hundred and thirty pound wolf coming at you like an arrow with his own speed plus the speed of a racing horse! But that's what Dan Barry would do, and off they would go with Satan carrying both of them and thinking nothing whatever about it!"

"Ah," murmured the girl, "how beautiful and how free! Such a man could do no wrong!"

"Let me tell you what he did. I've been saying all this just to work up to the point. He married beautiful Kate Cumberland. He settled down. He forgot his wildness. They had a youngster. Mind you, I say that he forgot his wildness. Rather I should say that he kept putting the impulses behind him. But finally they broke loose again. Seven men chased him. Seven men killed the horse he was riding—it wasn't Satan—and Dan started to get the seven, one by one. He forgot Kate. He forgot the youngster. He went on a blood trail—"

"Why not?" cried the girl. "If Peter were killed—"

"But for the sake of a borrowed horse—to kill six men? That was why Kate left him. She still loved him, but she saw that she could not stay with him on account of their little girl.

"You see, Dan was willing to leave, but he couldn't bear to let the little girl stay behind him. And that wildness was

beginning to show in the youngster. It drove her mother frantic with fear to see it; and finally, while she was sitting in their cabin one night, she heard a whistling out in the night and she saw the little girl get up from the fire and cross the room and stand there with her baby face pressed against the glass and looking out into the night."

"She wanted to get to her father?"

"God knows! She'd have walked out into the teeth of wolves when she heard that whistle. And when Kate saw that look in the eyes of the baby, she knew—she knew—"

Here the voice of Lee Haines faltered and died away. The flame of the candle had leaped high and, pouring up a steady little stream of black smoke, it had rapidly eaten away the candle itself until now the fire was guttering, half inside the holder and half outside—so that the house was swept with alternate waves of light and shadow, and the only fixed point of illumination was a small circle on the ceiling.

It was in one of these passing shadows that Haines saw something in the face of the girl which shook his nerves. Or at least he thought he saw it; but when the flame spouted up again he changed his mind, only to see it once more when the shadow waved across them again.

"What's the matter?" she asked, frightened.

"Hold the candle higher!" he demanded.

She obeyed.

"Now," he said, his eyes great and shining as he watched her, "I was saying that the girl, when she heard her father's whistling, went to the window and looked out and then she tried to climb up on the sill—"

His voice stopped again, and it seemed to Joan that he watched her with a fascinated horror.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Joan Daniels," she answered; "but tell me more about Dan Barry. It seems to me—I don't know why—it pours me full of wonder, happiness, fear, to hear you speak of him."

"What Daniels?" Haines persisted.

"Buck Daniels."

"What? He wasn't married fifteen years ago. How could he have a daughter of your age?"

"Do you know him?"

He disregarded the question.

"Tell me about your mother."

"She looked a little like me. I mean, she had yellow hair and blue eyes."

"And her name—"

"I told you before—it was Kate."

He had raised himself, tensed with the effort. Now he sank back, supine, with his eyes closed. And Joan leaned anxiously above him.

"What's wrong? Are you worse?" she cried.

"Worse every minute," he said calmly, without opening his eyes.

"I'll get help—"

"Stay close to me, Joan. I've only a minute or two left. I knew when I had one look at the place that slug hit me that I was finished. I've seen too many wounds not to know. Don't go for help. The last thing I can do is to tell you a thing you ought to know."

She took his hands. By the force in her own young arms she seemed striving to drive new life into him.

"I saw it in your face," he murmured, "when the candle began to die—that same wild look I've seen in the face of your father—"

"Wild look—in dad's face?"

"Not Buck Daniels."

His next words were an obscure muttering. She leaned closer and she heard him saying:

"Dan Barry's girl was named Joan. His wife was named Kate, and you—"

He drew a great breath, and then his eyes fixed blankly upon the shattered roof of the cabin.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARE AND HOUNDS.

THE sheriff's roan was as trim a gelding as ever jogged across desert sands, and if it came to a dash over good going he had a turn of speed which would

make a rival sick in half a mile of work. So that, during the first ten minutes of his ride, Harry Gloster watched his progress with the utmost satisfaction and heard the noise of the pursuit beat away into the distance.

But he presently discovered that the roan was beginning to slacken his efforts. His gallop was losing its elasticity, and his fore hoofs struck the earth with a lifeless beat which meant a very great deal to the rider. He recalled the sheriff—a lean and sun withered man who might well be fifty pounds lighter than himself. Perhaps it was his weight which was killing the roan. Perhaps it was the great speed with which he had covered the first two miles out from the town. No doubt, both causes combined. But he presently was sure that he had killed the speed of the mount.

He drew to a walk and dropped out of the saddle. The instant he struck the ground he saw how much worse matters were than he had dreamed. He had to draw the roan along by the reins. The poor animal dragged back on the bit with dull eyes and flagging ears, and his hoofs trailed in the dust; and he got his wind back with amazing slowness.

For a blown horse is not like a blown man. Many a good athlete runs himself to a faint in a half mile race, lies ten minutes flat on his back, consciously relaxing every muscle, and then arises to run a mile event and win it. But when the ribs of a horse begin to heave in a certain manner, his flanks ballooning in and out, and when his head begins to jerk down at every stride, a rest of a few minutes does him little good.

The roan was not yet in this completely run out condition; he had something left, but it tortured Gloster to think of squeezing the last of life out of the beast.

He continued walking until a dull and muffled pounding was plainly audible behind him, and he knew that the pursuers were gaining fast. Then he brought the roan to a trot and went forward at a smart clip, with the gelding beside him. Perhaps he covered a mile in this fashion, but by that time the noise from the rear was very distinct and he dared not linger any more.

In the meanwhile, although the roan was by no means recovered from the effects of that heavy weight in the saddle and the terrific pace of the first two miles, at least it was no longer pulling back on the bridle; and when Gloster, somewhat winded by his efforts on foot, climbed into the saddle again, the horse went off at a trot.

A trot, indeed, was all that could be reasonably managed in the soft silt of the desert. It was muffling the noise of those who came behind. But from what he heard, Gloster knew that they had spread out in a thin, long line, and were coming straight down his trail. They had heard his retreat over the harder ground nearer the town; and now he would be lucky indeed if he managed to get out of sight before the light of the dawn began.

An arroyo crossed his way. He dropped into it with a sigh of relief and raised the gelding to a gallop again. A moment later the dry ravine was filled with a clamoring as the whole posse swung in behind him, and, with the good footing beneath them, they gained upon him at an appalling rate.

Five minutes would see the finish of that race. No—less time than that. They were sweeping around a curve just behind and in ten seconds they would have full view of him. And a view by the clear starlight would be almost as good as a view in the day. Certainly they would open with their guns, and his own thigh was weighted by no revolver, to say nothing of a rifle under his leg.

He swung out of the saddle, balanced his weight on one stirrup for an instant, and then dropped to the ground. The tired gelding would have dropped back to a trot at once. The gentle beast even tried to halt and return to its late rider; but Gloster scooped out a handful of pebbles, sent the horse flying on with the force of them, and then threw himself back against the wall of the ravine.

He was plainly enough visible. The arroyo was not wide, and the stars were deadly bright. He could only hope that, by drawing the brim of his sombrero over his face, and flattening himself against the wall, he would not be seen as the front of the posse rolled by.

They came now, with three or four eager riders rushing in the lead and riding all the harder as they heard the beat of hoofs from their quarry so short a distance before them. These were no short winded sprinters, overburdened by riders of unusual weight. Every one was the favorite mount of the fellow who bestrode it. At least, so they appeared to Gloster; and they rode like avenging whirlwinds.

On they pushed, and then raised a yell, for down the cañon ahead of them the noise of the gelding's gallop had fallen away to a trot.

"Scatter, boys!" yelled the commanding voice of Sheriff Sim Hargess. He had recovered quickly from his hurt and joined in this work to revenge his disgrace. "That devil is slowin' up to fight. Shoot straight when you see him—"

His voice was blotted out by the roar of hoofs as the main body of the posse rode past. In a few more seconds they would find that he was not with the gelding; then a brief search as they scattered in all directions, and finally he must be taken back to prison, trussed up like a calf.

There were forty men in that group, and in the rear came two or three stragglers. One, it appeared, had fallen behind because something had gone wrong with his cinches. At any rate, he was now overtaking the main body hand over hand.

With a secret pang Gloster saw the wide shoulders of that horse working. With such a mount to carry him—

He leaped from his place with a shout. The racing horse, seeing this sudden apparition, snorted and, throwing back its weight, tried to swerve away. That was the moment that Gloster chose for leaping. In spite of its efforts to stop, the horse was dashing away at a smart pace, and the double impact of the speed of the horse and Gloster's leap was all transferred to the luckless rider.

He was smitten from his place as cleanly as any champion in the olden days picked an enemy out of the saddle in the lists and sent him crashing to the ground.

Down he went, and into his place in the saddle slipped Harry Gloster, with a new lease of life if he could take advantage of all the chances. But that would be no easy thing to do. To be sure, the whole posse had whirled past him; to be sure, they were now somewhat tangled in a mass farther down the arroyo, while the leaders were yelling that Gloster was not on the sheriff's roan, and some of the members were still pushing ahead, not having seen what happened to the rear.

But those horses were nearly all out of the great school of the cow ranges. They could turn on a ten cent piece, and it was nothing to weave a way through a crowd of horses, compared with working a calf out from the packed herd.

In their scrambling start Harry Gloster gained some thirty or forty lengths. He might have gained even more. But he had learned one lesson this night, and he was not apt to kill off his mount by too much sprinting in the beginning of a long run.

He saw a narrow cattle path going up the side of the arroyo. Up this he went. The posse stormed after him. They were far too impatient to go up the path one by one; so they crashed up the steep bank with plying spurs and many oaths. There were three falls and a thousand curses, but in a few seconds all were over the edge and headed into the plain beyond.

Nevertheless, they had taken more out of their horses in that brief group of seconds than in a mile of hard running. That handicap might balance the weight of Gloster in the saddle.

So, at least, he hoped. And after the next furious half mile, in which he barely managed to hold them even, his hopes increased. Some of them were using their guns, pumping shot after shot in his direction. But he did not mind this. There was hardly more than a chance in a thousand that a bullet would strike home from revolver fired at night from galloping horses. Even in the daylight he had seen many pounds of ammunition wasted in a similar fashion. Their shooting would simply make them ride slower.

For his own part, he was jockeying his horse with the utmost care, swaying with every stride, leaning to cut the pressure of the wind. Yet all would not do. They began to gain again. The firing stopped.

There was a period of fierce and silent riding, and then he saw that they were creeping up steadily on either flank.

Desperately he looked about him. Had he a gun, he might have driven them back to arm's length and given a chance for some sort of maneuvering. But now all he could do was to use up the last strength of the mustang in a final burst.

Where should he direct his flight? East of him the ground fell away, and the down slope was one temptation. Going down hill his weight would not tell so much against the laboring horse that carried him. And in the hollow there was a long line of trees. Willows, no doubt, were most of them, but they could give him shelter, and if he could gain that screen they would hunt him cautiously. How could they tell that he had no gun, and even if he had one, that he was determined not to use it?

He flattened himself along the neck of his mount, drove home the spurs, and felt the gallant mustang pour out the strength of his heart in the final effort. Down the hill they raced, drawing away from the clustered men of the posse at every jump. A bullet sung at his ear, followed by the creck of the report. And then the trees were before him with the rush of the hard riders just behind. They passed the screen of the first trees. The others entered with a roar.

He kicked his feet out of both stirrups, halted the horse on braced and sliding hoofs, true cow pony fashion, and then swung himself up onto an overhanging branch. A touch of the rowel as he pulled himself up sent the horse on at a fresh gallop, and, lying on the limb, he saw the others rush past him.

He waited until the last had gone by. Then he dropped to the ground and started back, doubling on his tracks and running as he had never run before. If he could gain the top of the rising ground before they found the riderless horse and came back to look for him, he might be able to get a sufficient distance and disappear in the night, but he was scarcely out of the willows when he heard the yell which announced that his second mount of that night had been found.

On he ran. The ground had appeared firm enough when his mustang was racing down the incline, and the slope slight enough. But now his boots were slipping in sand, and the slope was like a mountain-side rolling up against the stars. A short, quick step, driving down on a flat foot, was what he must use.

So he toiled with all his might, grinding his teeth at the constant slipping. He reached the crest. His body would show there against the skyline as if he were a house. So he dropped flat and looked back in time to see the posse come boiling out from the trees.

They scattered here and there, rode toward him, then turned and rode back again. Plainly they did not know what to do, and then he heard the voice of the sheriff as plainly as if the latter had been at his elbow.

"Scatter down the trees. Five of you —you five there!—ride down a mile, then cut through the trees and start working down toward me. Five more ride up a mile and do the same thing. Half a dozen more go through to the opposite side and watch, scattered out. The rest of us will stay here. Take your rifles, boys. If you do any talking, make it short. If you start shooting when you see him, you won't get hanged for it. Now go!"

They were off with yells, and Harry Gloster, lying flat on the sand and gasping in his breath, shuddered with thankfulness. Had he indeed tried to hide in the willows, they would have closed in on him and crushed out his life. Half an hour would have ended him.

He waited to see no more, but crawled a hundred yards on his hands and knees until he was over the ridge and until the voices from the hollow came small and faint to him. Then he arose to his feet and struck away across the sand at a jog trot. He had learned that trick of running from the Indians, who will keep up their dog trot under a furnace of a sun and cover a hundred miles in twenty-four hours, running down horse and man. To be sure, he could not match the Indians, but at least he could run astonishingly well for a man of his bulk.

For a full five miles he did not slacken; then, as the wind freshened to the north and west, coming full in his face, he dropped to a walk, but kept steadily on. He could only pray the wind might raise to a gale and wash sand across his trail, but he crossed firm ground in spots here and there, and those spots, he well knew, would be found, and in every one his flight prints would be like arrows pointing out the direction of his flight to the sheriff.

And the picture of Sim Hargess came before him again, sun withered, wrinkled, and light of limb, as though he had been fashioned on purpose to live in a land of little rain. He was made for the country just as the beasts and birds were made for it. To attempt to escape from him would be like attempting to escape from Nemesis.

A shadow formed against the sky to his right. He dropped to his knees that he might view it more clearly and at a better angle, and it appeared to him that there was a sharpness of outline which could only come from a house. He turned straight toward it, and in a few minutes he was sure.

A little later and he saw the whole cluster of the ranch buildings. It grew in distinctness, and now he put on his best speed. For, as he glanced behind him, he saw that a light was winking on the desert, then other lights, like a swarm of distant fireflies of a giant size. He understood what that meant. They had been using their pocket electric torches to find his trail, and, having found it, they were doubtless tracking him across the desert almost as fast as their horses could gallop.

If the wise old sheriff could do all this by night, how long would Gloster have lasted by the day? He thought of this as he ran, and it gave him a great burst of speed, for he carried his bulk as lightly as any track athlete.

By the time he reached the barns and sheds of the ranch the lights had disappeared behind him. They had made up their minds that he was breaking for the sheds, and, for that matter, he did not need the light to tell him of the rate of their approach, for now in the starlight he could make out the indistinct forms of the horsemen, a great blot of shadow coming rapidly over the sands.

He found the saddles after a brief search in one of the sheds. And with saddle and bridle over his arm he ran out into the corral. The horses milled before him; but he pressed resolutely in, regardless of possible flying heels, for in the distance the beat of hoofs was growing and he could hear a voice calling—that must be the sheriff—"Spread out! Spread out!"

He crowded a horse into a corner and in a moment had the saddle and bridle on it. Then he let down the bars to the corral. They would have their work cut out for them if they tried to catch fresh mounts to follow him, while those mustangs had a thousand acre field to run in. He yelled, and the horses poured through the gap and away into freedom, snorting and tossing their heels in the air.

Other shouts came from the posse as they understood the meaning of the tumult from the corral. He saw a scattered line of horsemen spurring as hard as they could to surround him, and then he gave his pony the reins.

It was all over in two minutes. The fagged mounts of the posse dropped almost instantly behind him; their guns began to pop at random—sure sign that they were beaten on this stage of the hunt, at the least.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HALF QUEEN AND HALF CHILD.

IT did not matter that they were long overdue at home, Peter was sent slowly home that night. For, now and again, Joan was blinded to the way, recalling how Harry Gloster had come thundering out of the jail with the splinters of the broken door showering about him, and how he had beaten the three men to the earth and thrown one of them into the face of the crowd which was attacking.

Whenever she thought of these things she could not help twisting suppositions back and forth in her mind, striving to understand how he could have been so near to mortal danger and yet could have es-

caped without a serious injury. It was almost as if the sheriff and his men had loaded their weapons with blank cartridges. But if they had, Lee Haines would still be living.

Dan Barry, Black Bart, Satan, Joe Cumberland—there was hardly an end to the procession of figures which had been crowded into her mind by the talk with Haines. The tears came when she recalled how calmly and hopelessly he had met his end, and how smoothly he had persuaded her that it was only a trifling wound. Now, when they found him, he would be thrown into a nameless grave.

When she came in sight of the house her fear of Buck Daniels was gone forever. She rode with reckless noise past the house, and Buck himself came running out. She did not heed his challenging shout, but went blithely on to the corral, where she unsaddled Peter and brought him to an ample feed of grain. It was not until she had finished all these things that she went back to the ranch house.

Buck Daniels walked in front of it, up and down, up and down, with a glow of light from his pipe now and again showing the storm in his face. She called to him, received no answer, and went into the kitchen. She was hard at work getting her supper when the door banged heavily, sending a long series of murmurs and squeaks like strange echoes through the house. Buck stood before her with war in his face.

"Well," he said, "what you got to say for yourself?"

She smiled across the stove at him.

"I said 'Hello' when I came in from the corral."

"Hell!" said Buck Daniels, and clamped his teeth together to keep back worse words than this. It was apparent that her smile had done more harm to his peace of mind than her words, although they had been airily independent enough.

"What have you been doing?"

"Finding out the price of Peter."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean five hundred dollars. That's what he's worth."

"You've sold him?"

"Yes."

"Without asking me?"

"I bought him back again."

"Joan, what the devil is in you?"

She shrugged her shoulders and went on with her work. Fried potatoes and a great slice of ham and a mighty cup of coffee and hot milk would not be too much for her.

"You been riding to a fall, Joan, and now doggone me if the time ain't come when you got to hear some talk that ain't going to be like any other talk you ever heard! In the first place what I want—"

"Hush!" whispered Joan.

She raised her hand, and into the silence which she had interposed floated the shrill crying of the wild geese as some thick wedge of them fled up the northern sky. It was a marvelous music to Joan. It chimed and echoed in her very heart of hearts.

She even opened the door, but as she stood there against the outer blackness of the night, looking northward to the sky, Buck caught at her shoulder and drew her back into the room. He closed the door hastily and stood with his shoulders braced against it. His eyes were a little wide, as he faced her, and she thought that there was still a slight tremor of the upper lip as if, the instant before, he had received a great shock.

But she was too filled with great memories this evening to pay much attention to Buck and his ideas of her. The careless smoothness with which she spoke to him was the only tone possible to her. If she had tried to speak soberly, she would have burst into tears and been unable to proceed.

She would have turned back to the stove, but he caught her and stopped her again.

"I've had hell two nights hand running on account of you," he told her, "and I'm damned if I'm going to have it again. Understand?"

She did not answer. She hardly heard the words he had thundered at her.

"Joan! Where have you been?"

"With a man."

"I knew it!" he groaned. "I knew it. Who?"

"A man you know."

"And he hasn't seen the last of me, whoever he is!"

"Lee Haines was his name."

It was a strong name, indeed. It seemed to have the strength of a club to strike down Buck Daniels. He fumbled, found a chair, and lowered himself into it without taking his glance from her face.

"What did Lee tell you? Where is he? Where did you meet him? What did he tell you, Joan?"

"He told me about my father."

It was a second blow and it made him drop his face in his hands. She stood over him, trembling with anger.

"You've kept it away from me all these years, and what right had you to do that? I've lived in the center of a lie!"

He made a gesture as though brushing her words away to get at something more important.

"Did he tell you how—how your father died, Joan?"

"All but that," she answered.

"Thank God!"

"But I'll find it out! I'll find out every word that can be known about him!"

"Joan, I won't let you. We start back East to-morrow. I've made arrangements. We're going to go—"

"Not a step!" she cried. "Oh, do you think I'd give him up? I've been cheated of him all this time, but I'm going to make it up!"

He arose and began to pace the room, swinging through it, back and forth, with an uneven step as his thoughts spurred and checked him. But at last he stopped short and faced her.

"I've got to tell you things I been praying all this time that you wouldn't hear. I'll tell it short, because I ain't got the strength to tell all the small things that go into the making of it. When your father died—when Dan Barry died," he began, his words coming forth haltingly, "I went to Kate—your mother. I told her I wanted to help, and she told me that the great thing to be done was to take you out of a country where Dan had lived and get you into a new place where folks had never heard of him.

"She wanted to go East, but I showed her that there wasn't enough money between us to support us in the East in a city. But there was enough to start a small ranch. That was what we done. We came away down here and got this place between us, and the best way to cover up tracks seemed to be for her and you to take my name."

"She didn't marry you after he died, then?"

"When he died, she died," said Daniels. "That is, all except that part of her that was wrapped up in you. And that part kept her alive for a few years. But she was more'n half dead. You remember how quiet she was—wouldn't speak through a whole day, maybe, except to give you your lessons?"

"Yes. And when she walked around the house, I used to feel, sometimes, as though she were afraid of the noise she was making."

"But I remember her as happy as sunshine, full of singing and laughing. Made people smile just to see her pass. All that had died out of her when Dan was gone. You never knew more'n the shadow of your mother, Joan. And when she come to die, she begged me to take you away from the West as soon as I could—"

He paused for a moment, then went on again.

"She begged me to keep the name of your father away from you—"

A great new thought had come to Joan.

"But how could she ask you to do all these things if you—if you were not even my stepfather?"

"Because she knew that I loved her, Joan, more than I loved God or feared the devil. She knew that she could trust me for her sake to do my best for you, and I've done it, Joan, as well as I could, but I guess that I ain't done more than to make you unhappy—"

"Don't!" gasped Joan. "Oh, when I think how patient and how gentle you've been—when I think of that and how you've—"

Tears flooded down her face.

"I've done no more than any man would of done for her," he insisted calmly. "There was never a woman like her before and there'll never be another like her again. You're a pretty girl, Joan. You got a stronger mind and a stronger body than

she had. But she was sort of half queen and half child, and between them two things she worked on the heart of a man till he'd die to give her one happy day."

"And Dan Barry?" she asked. 'Did it help you to hate him because you loved my mother so much?"

"Joan, the other day I was telling you about one man in all my life that was a friend to me."

"I'll never forget what you said. It seemed as though I'd never known you untill you told me that!"

"Well, Dan Barry was that man. Does that help you to understand?"

Again she was stricken dumb. She had gone for years feeling that the most prossaic man in the world was this same fellow she had called "dad," but now she discovered enough to make her think of endless possibilities in him. And, indeed, she suspected that he belonged to a former generation which was bolder, stronger, more noble than the people among whom she lived.

He was saying now: "But I've never forgotten that as Kate died she asked me to take you East as soon as I could. I've been saving and scraping ever since. And though I ain't got quite enough together, we can make it do. I can find work of some sort that will pay—all I want is your promise to try to go on doing what your mother wanted you to do."

And Joan, drying her eyes, was about to answer in the affirmative when, through the open kitchen window, the faint calling of the northbound wild geese floated into the room, a chill and dissonant sound. It stopped her voice.

Buck Daniels, with a stifled oath, strode to the window and slammed it down to shut out those wild voices, but the old building was full of rifts and cracks which served now as ears. He himself could hear nothing, but he knew from the quivering lips and the far-seeing eyes of the girl that she still was listening.

"Joan!" he called roughly.

She roused herself with a start.

"Yes?"

"I want your answer. You're going with me, Joan?"

She hesitated.

"There ain't nothing more sacred than the wish of a dying mother, Joan!"

But, instead of answering, her head bent back a little, her glance roved far past him, and he knew that her thoughts were flying north and north lighted by a newly risen moon.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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WHEN EAST GOES WEST

HE was a wild, wild
Woolly Western man,
With a steely glint in his eye,
And his chaps hung down
On the pistol side,
And his hat was all awry.

But a wee, wee
Little Eastern girl,
With an awe-struck baby stare.
Came out to see
What the West could be—
And now he combs his hair!

Margaret Severance.

The Westerner

By ROMAINE H. LOWDERMILK

PROFESSOR HARTLEY stood staring down at the scraps of paper in the hot alkali dust at his feet.

His manuscript had been shot from his hand, wantonly. Years of study and toil undone in an instant! The soft nosed bullet had torn a hole he could put his fist through; the lower half of the pages were ripped off and the wooden back splintered.

He raised a stricken face to the group of men on the porch at French Mike's whence came the shot.

Hugo Martin, owner of the rich Midnight gold mine, was jamming his new forty-five back into its carved holster. It was a beautiful weapon, with silver mounted butt and gold filigree work along the barrel. He had been displaying it to the crowd when Professor Hartley appeared on the street.

"Just watch me, boys," Martin had bragged. "I'm a slicker with a six-gun myself." And the new weapon had described a blue and gold arc, then roared.

The manuscript was struck from the professor's hand as though hit by a hammer. The little man had halted like a dropped stone.

"Ha, ha, ha!" There was no humor in Hugo Martin's laugh. He uttered the syllables as three separate words, three dry ejaculations. "Ha, ha, ha!" At best it was an insult. Leering over the crowd he threw wide the screen doors into the bar at French Mike's. "On me," he stated, shortly.

The crowd surged in.

Professor Hartley's gaze returned to his pile of shattered leaves. He smiled bitterly. There lay his hard won manuscript in ruins. He was being made to suffer for a bully's fun, and no man had offered a word or a hand to aid. His vision of the West suddenly faded. One shot from Hugo Martin's big revolver wiped off all the gilt and frayed the tinsel. The West was only a drab, dusty place where one can meet disaster as ingloriously as elsewhere.

He had once regarded Hugo Martin as a big, bluff Westerner. But now he saw

him for what he was—a ruthless man, with a low forehead, piggish eyes and a heavy jaw; a hard man, unscrupulous and arrogant, who as a gambler had won from a drunken placer miner the mine he now owned. Paying enormous taxes, controlling hundreds of votes, Hugo Martin lived like a baron, every man in town his vassal, the law prostituted to his commands. This brutal shot revealed him as a tin horn and a bully.

Professor Hartley was fifty, his small figure stooped and anæmic, his face thin and drawn with the consumption that had sent him west; his hair was gray. As he bent to gather up the scattered pages he looked eighty.

He bore no rancor toward Martin, he made no plans for revenge. Only did he dread the months of labor required to rewrite and rearrange his historical work treating with the growth and development of the West. A light breeze lifted the pieces and sent them swirling. He gathered them hurriedly, without regard for order. There were tears in his eyes.

Something moving a short distance up the road caught his attention. He gathered the remaining papers with his eyes on a man staggering ahead of two laden burros. The man seemed barely able to move along. At last he fell in the road.

The professor hurried to him.

He was a gray bearded old desert rat, a prospector. His clothing and heavy boots were worn and roughly patched. The rope from the leading burro's neck was knotted about his waist, the other animal was securely attached to the first. Their sleek, well filled sides told no tale of struggle through waterless wilderness. Instead, they showed evidence of abundant water and grazing. He bent over the unconscious man.

"Starving," he stated finally. "Simply starving to death. He fainted from weakness." Professor Hartley considered the matter gravely.

Untying the lash rope of the rear burro he attempted to lift off one of the pack boxes. He couldn't budge it. Peering in, he saw only rock—heavy gray rock. With his penknife he sawed at the ropes supporting the box, letting it crash to the ground. The burro dodged expertly and the saddle slewed to the side of the remaining box. Struggling to right the saddle the professor hacked at the other rope. Finally it dropped, and the burro dodged back, sending the professor to the ground. Relieved of its load, the beast sighed gustily, its large eyes lazily viewing the scattered wreckage, its long ears moving complacently.

The professor took the canteen from the pack and spilled some of the water past the prospector's pale lips.

The man gulped greedily, but his famished stomach regurgitated it at once. He rolled over to his stomach, where, grunting, he attempted to arise. Assisted by the professor, he finally stood tottering upon his own feet. He struck at his rescuer.

"Git away," he commanded. "Yuh keep 'way fr'm my gold. This 's mine. All mine!" The old desert rat lurched dazedly, and clung to the pack saddle for support. "Keep 'way, savvy!"

"Let me help you into the saddle," urged the professor. "You can ride on to town, can't you?"

"Mmmm-m-wm," the other nodded weakly. Assisted by the professor, he managed to get astride the saddle.

"Git 'way!" he commanded, shoving the professor aside. "Keep off!" He clawed at the heavy six-shooter sagging at his hip. The professor paled. The burro started to move forward, and his gaunt rider grabbed at the saddle to steady himself.

"Giddap," he grunted, nudging weakly. "Hustle, jackass, we gotta git t' th' recorder's office." He struck out at the professor, but toppled alarmingly and clutched the saddle again. "Giddap!" He sagged forward muttering unintelligibly.

The professor walked at his side, steadying him in the saddle. The burro behind followed patiently, lurching under its burden of rock. Across its load was strapped a heavy rifle and a belt of cartridges.

The professor's first thought had been to take the old prospector to French Mike's, but the heartlessness of that crowd as shown a few minutes ago argued that the

old man would receive scant consideration at their hands. So he steered the burros around to his own rented shack, where he tied them to the porch and got the old man inside.

The professor poked up the fire in the cook stove and opened a can of soup. A pot of beans was already baking in the oven. He bathed the old desert rat's face and hands in warm water, and when the soup warmed, fed him a few spoonfuls. His efforts were soon rewarded by an unmistakable revival. The old gold hunter squirmed and sat up, reaching for the soup. Tipping the pan, he gulped it, then lay back with a satisfied sigh.

The spoon of beans the professor gave him next brought him up reaching for the dish.

"Gosh, I'm hungry," he exclaimed, his mouth full. "Run outa grub a week ago. Thought I c'ud git along 'thout eatin' a week, so jus' kep' a diggin'. Talk 'bout gold! I sure was a diggin' of it up! Say—"

He paused, his mouth half open, staring. His gaze roved about the room, to his food, and to the professor preparing more soup.

"My gold! There was a catch in the old prospector's voice. "My gold's gone!" He fumbled about his middle for the rope that had been knotted there. His eyes, sane and hard, sought the professor's face. "Say, gimme th' rest of them beans, quick!"

He took the pot from the professor's hands and ate ravenously. Finally he set it aside and got to his feet with an effort, swayed and caught at the wall. He fumbled along to the door, where he stood, propped against the casing, looking up the street.

"They's a rush on," he announced grimly. "Look."

Far up the street where the professor had dumped the rock a crowd of men milled and pushed. Not a soul was left in town.

A huge white speedster roared around a corner and sped past the crowd. It was Hugo Martin's car, with an Indian perched on the bumper.

"Got a Injun trailer," the prospector muttered, speculatively. "Might trail me back—but it 'll be no snap. I covers my trail, an' come 'way around. Rocks, jus' rocks the way I come in. A Injun can't trail over rocks, can he?"

"Are they going to—to try to jump your claim?" The professor thrilled at what he was witnessing. A gold rush! This prospector had found a wondrously rich claim, and the others were going to try to get it away from him!

"They kain't jump 'er till they find 'er," the other replied with assurance. "I've dug my discovery hole an' done my location work at th' claim. My location notices are posted over th' hole, an' when I get to th' recorder's office—she's mine!"

"But if they find the claim, destroy your notices, and beat you to the county seat—"

"I—I lose."

The professor exclaimed indignantly. "And if I hadn't scattered your ore" - concern was written large on his wan face —"they'd not have known what was in your packs! But—but at the time it seemed the only way to save you."

"Oh, thet's all right, podner," soothed the prospector; "I'd a died right thar ef yuh hadn't brung me in. I was plumb tuckered out." He moved to the porch post unsteadily and untied the burro the professor had unpacked. Taking the rifle from the other pack he hung it and the cartridge belt over his pack saddle, then he attempted to mount.

"Reckon yuh'll have t' help me," he panted. "I gotta be on my way to th' recorder's office. County seat."

"But you can't ride eleven miles!"

"Can't I!" The old prospector hauled the burro about and, clinging to the fork of the saddle, headed the beast toward the trail to the county seat. "Man, I gotta hurry. Ef thet Hugo Martin an' his crowd find my claim afore I gits back with a bunch to hold 'em off, I'll have hell holdin' it, recorder or no recorder. Thet Martin's a tough hombre, an' he's got th' upper holt in this man's part of th' country." The old man raised a gnarled hand in a gesture of farewell. "S'long. Much 'bliged to yuh fer—bringin' me in. I'll remember yuh, when I gits back."

For a moment the professor watched him riding off alone in the late afternoon sunlight. Here was a lone old man setting out to do what he could toward saving the fortune he had found from Hugo Martin's greedy crowd. The old man on a burro, and Martin and his men in motor cars. The only advantage the old man had was that he knew the location of his find, while it was for Martin to find it if he could.

A sudden wave of fellow feeling swept over the professor for the old desert rat. He ran after him.

"Can't I help you some way?" he begged. "Can't I go and hold down your claim until you come?"

The professor had in mind a comfortable log cabin, a tiny mine shaft, a spring possibly—all nestling somewhere in the hills, needing only the presence of some one to "hold" the claim until properly recorded.

The prospector regarded him thoughtfully. "Yuh're a hot thing to send t' hold down a claim," he said; "but yuh'll be a dang sight better'n nothin—pervided yuh git thar fust. It's a easy claim held, fer it's right on a knoll top; yuh c'n shoot down on all sides."

"Sh-shoot—" quavered the professor. He hadn't considered that.

"Sure. Go git your gun. I'll go back an' onpack that other jackass. I plumb fergot him anyway."

The professor solemnly went to his trunk and brought out the cheap little revolver he had brought West with him.

"Shucks, thet little thing!" The prospector swept it from his hand when he saw it. "Here, put on a real gun." And he buckled his own belt and revolver about the professor. The rifle and its belt he kept for his own use. "Yuh c'n shoot a hand gun easier," he explained.

The feel of the heavy weapon against his thigh seemed to fan the spark of life in the professor's thin body until vitality surged into every wasted muscle, and he felt equal to anything, even to firing it. He went inside the house. When he came out he was wearing somewhat guiltily his cowboy hat and the high heeled boots he had bought a year ago. He had worn them but a few times in the year he had been West, and then only secretly, at night—out under the stars.

"Well, I'll be—" The prospector stared at the little man standing on the porch, poised eagerly in his high heeled boots, his wide hat at a commanding angle and the cartridge belt sagging about his lean hips. "Well, I'll just be damned!" ejaculated the old desert rat. "Mebby they's somethin' to 'im after all!"

The professor mounted the waiting burro. Together the two men rode off to the south until they went down into Gold Creek. Here the prospector motioned to pull up.

"Yuh jus' head thet jackass of yourn straight up this crick," the prospector directed him. "'Bout nine mile up yuh'll come to th' cataract, an' thar yuh turn off to th' left. Thar's a knoll on the fust bench—jus' like a great big beehive with a flat top." He lowered his voice. "The whole hill is rotten with gold! My location is right smack on top. Th' burro'll take yuh to it. Ef anybuddy joins yuh along the way, tell 'em yuh're out huntin' th' mine same's ever'buddy else. But don't yuh go near thet knoll till yuh're well rid of 'em. Martin an' his Injun an' th' rest of his gang thinks it's north up th' road—like I come in. But 'tain't. It's west, up th' crick."

So the professor started off to hold down a gold claim against all comers. Little tremors of fear began to run over him. It was good to be in the saddle, though, on such an errand as this. This was the sort of thing he had hoped to find in the West.

The lash rope he tied about the front fork of the saddle in such a way that a loop dangled on each side, forming stirrups, into which he thrust his trimly booted feet. He pulled his wide hat lower over his face, for the course was westerly and the sun was sinking low. He tried to accustom himself to the burro's steady plodding, and swayed easily in the saddle.

Nine miles on a burro, to one unused to riding, can lengthen out into a long trip. Dusk came down, and with it an air of mystery. The burro's small feet echoed strangely in the dark cañons. Time and again the professor thought he must be

nearing the cataract only to find it the pounding of the water against a bowlder in the creek bed. Three hours passed. He felt he never again would be able to walk. In the darkness he began to fear he had gone beyond the cataract; possibly it was but a riffle like dozens he had passed.

Long after the professor had given up all hope of ever finding the place, the burro turned out of the creek and stumbled up the steep bank to the left. At the right the waters rose tier upon tier in a seething, roaring cataract. So this was the place.

On the bench land the professor peered anxiously for the knoll. It stood out of the plain a hundred yards to the north. Dismounting, he removed the saddle and released the burro. As rapidly as his stiffened muscles would allow he moved toward the knoll.

Something caused him to look back. Outlined against the gray flat were the figures of two men. He had been followed! In the stress of all the journey he had never once thought to look behind. Panic gripped him. He broke into a run—straight for the knoll.

The base of the latter was buried in a gravelly fringe upon which nothing grew, and the professor crossed it in ungainly bounds, terror in his throat. Then he squatted under a mesquite and listened for his pursuers. He could hear nothing. Of course they had not intended to shoot him, he reasoned, they only wished to know where he was goinng. Well—they knew!

He ran his hand down and hauled out the huge horse pistol. Its checkered butt fitted his hand and gave him a strange feeling of power. Rising, he began to climb, working his way upward through clumps of mesquite and palo-verde and over granite bowlders and malapai slides. He rested occasionally and peered back fearsomely, but hurried on lest the men might climb the other side and gain the top ahead of him.

Finally he reached the rim. He poked his head up warily. After a long wait he scrambled out on top of the knoll, and crept to the center. There he found the excavation the old prospector had made, the monument he had put up, and his notices in a can. No one had molested it. Evidently none had preceded him. The professor still carried his revolver, naked, in his hand. He crept with it to the brink and scanned the plain and the gray sand fringe of the knoll. There was nothing; even the burro had vanished in the brush dotted plain.

Off to the north he glimpsed a light that flashed for an instant and then was gone. That might be, he thought, the flash lamp of those who had followed him, striking across to inform Hugo Martin. One of the men might have remained and might even now be stealing up the side of the knoll.

So the professor lay above the escarpment and waited breathlessly through the long hours, expecting every moment to see a hat cautiously appear against the skyline at the rim of the knoll. A hundred times he imagined he heard them coming and his heart raced furiously. The roaring of the cataract, insect voices, the rustle of a lizard through the sage, the night breeze in the stunted trees — once a distant shot — all brought him up tense, nerveless.

A glow appeared in the east and the waning moon inched up over the ridge of mountains. In the pale moonlight shadows stood out in sharp relief. There came a distant rumble, which grew into the coughing of a laboring motor, coming down across the slopes from the north. The professor recognized the sound as that of Hugo Martin's high powered car. It roared up, circled the butte and stopped out in the plain. The stillness, then, was terrific; even the sound of the cataract seemed muffled and dead.

The professor suddenly became conscious of a great ringing in his ears. Anxiously he edged away from the brink.

"He's still up there." A voice came from the base of the knoll.

"Well, root him out, boys!" Hugo Martin's voice gave the command. "Let's get up our notices and tear out for the recorder's office."

The professor saw four men moving across the gravel to surround the butte. They did not attempt concealment.

"Hey, you, up there!" Hugo Martin raised his voice to the knoll. "Here's two thousand dollars for you."

Professor Hartley did not reply, although the words came up to him as plainly as if the speaker had been seated at his side.

Martin called again. "I'll give you two thousand dollars to sling your gun off over the edge and come down."

The professor's lip curled, but he did not reply.

"Well, you needn't act a fool about it." Martin's deep voice dropped to a conversational grumble. "You'd better take a good offer while you're able." He called to one of his men. "Who is it up there, anyhow?"

"Dunno. Some little runt. Looked like a cow-puncher, but rode like a darn dude. Follered 'im up the crick, but didn't try to catch up and look at 'im."

"Five thousand," Martin called up again. "Five thousand if you'll come down or—nothin'!"

Lying flat, the professor reached forward with his revolver until it waved out in space over the edge. Closing his eyes he pulled the trigger. The roar frightened him and the recoil almost tore the weapon from his fingers. The sound deafened him. He pulled his hand back in a panic; he was afraid some one below might shoot it off. He hugged the ground, limp with fright at what he had done. He wondered now that he had ever started on such a wild-goose chase.

"You damned idiot," a voice below was saying. "We'll fill you so full of holes you'll look like a sand screen."

Quaking, the professor opened the cylinder, laboriously extracted the empty shell and thrust in another from his belt. Then he crawled to the hole in the middle and let himself down until he could line the rim of the knoll against the sky.

A wide hat appeared against the skyline, bobbing, moving about as the man scanned the knoll top. Near by another figure came up, its arms reaching from rock to rock, pulling upward in the climb. The professor glanced behind. Another sombrero was bobbing there. He was being surrounded.

Sudden fear enveloped him. All the blood seemed to ebb from his heart in one dreadful wave. He waited for the blow that would end it all. A hundred fears raced through his mind. He could hear the crunch of heavy boots as the men stumbled among the stones at the sides of the knoll, and the murmur of voices as others, farther down the slope, talked together. His own legs were shaking. His head roared. Fear of being trapped, shot down from all sides, gripped him like a nightmare.

He drew in a deep breath of the desert morning air—he thought it would be his last. His gaze moved to the jagged line where black peaks speared the sky, and a spirit stirred within him. A range cow, far down the cañon, bawled to her calf; from afar came the eerie chattering of coyotes. Suddenly there came over him his old love for the West, the real West.

He glanced down at his feet—they were booted. The pale moon against the gray stones of the pit gave him a shadow of his cowboy hat. About his waist was a full belt of cartridges and in his hand a long barreled, frontier model, six-shooter, a weapon that had made many a little man bigger than a big one. How could any man so accoutered remain cowering in a hole?

A sudden, glorious impulse swept him up out of the pit. As he came he emitted a whoop. It was a raucous, rasping screech, like nothing a human could utter. At the same time he fired point blank at the men in front.

One crumpled behind the rim and the other dropped out of sight amid the rocks. The professor wheeled and fired in the opposite direction. The man who had been there was gone and the professor charged the edge and fired blindly over. He moved his aim and fired again.

There came a flash and a roar from behind and a bullet ricochetted from the stones at his side and another spattered gravel against his boots.

In a sudden frenzy the professor advanced toward the flash, sending a bullet crashing among the rocks. Again and again he fired, and shots came in return. His gun clicked on an empty shell. He fell clumsily toward the prospect hole where he let himself hastily down to reload.

Gone was all sense of fear. He was astonished at the ease and precision with which he removed shells from his belt and snapped them home in the chamber. His heart was pounding high and steadily; he felt unnaturally invigorated.

A figure appeared at the north rim. The

professor swung up his gun and fired. Scrambling out of the hole, he charged the man, grimly determined to keep the knoll clear—to hold this claim for the old prospector. The man at the rim fired twice as the professor charged. One of the professor's shots took him in the arm and he dropped his weapon, cursing. The professor ran to the edge and fired over at him.

A shot came from the flat, and a dozen more followed. The professor emptied his gun toward the firing. Falling upon his stomach he reloaded.

His firing hand was numb from successive shocks, his body ached in a dozen places. But there was a wild joy in his heart—he was holding them—all of them—at bay! Twice had he fought them down. Shots came intermittently from the flat below and spattered against the rocks or buried themselves in the gravel. He squirmed from brink to brink and answered shot for shot.

He thought of how Hugo Martin had shot his manuscript from his hand. He stood upright and challenged their shots.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he shrilled, each syllable a mirthless insult.

Each roar and recoil of his heavy weapon filled him with an unholy joy. He sent three men scuttling from the bare fringe at the base of the knoll, back to the brush of the flat. He was impatient when the claim jumpers were not shooting at him. He drew deep breaths of the desert air and lived anew.

A fleeting wish crossed his mind that his friends back East, or the boys at the prep school who used to call him "Granny," could only see him as he was now—in high heeled boots and cowboy hat defending a gold claim against jumpers. He wished his dead wife could look down upon this—his great moment. He wished —

The roaring of an automobile came to his ears. It reminded him of last night when Hugo Martin and his men had come. But now the sun was rising. Strange he hadn't noticed it sooner.

A motor car, bearing men whose rifles glinted in the sunlight, was lurching rapidly up the ribbon of sand along Gold Creek.

At Hugo Martin's car men were gathering. Hastily they piled in; two of them had to be lifted in. The exhaust roared, the great car wheeled about and went careening off into the hills,

With a grim smile the professor watched it go, for across at the far side of the knoll top lay Hugo Martin's ornamented revolver, mute evidence of his part in the affair.

Down in the creek bed the new car had stopped. The men were coming up over the breast of the bench on foot, their rifles in their hands. Leading them the professor recognized the old prospector.

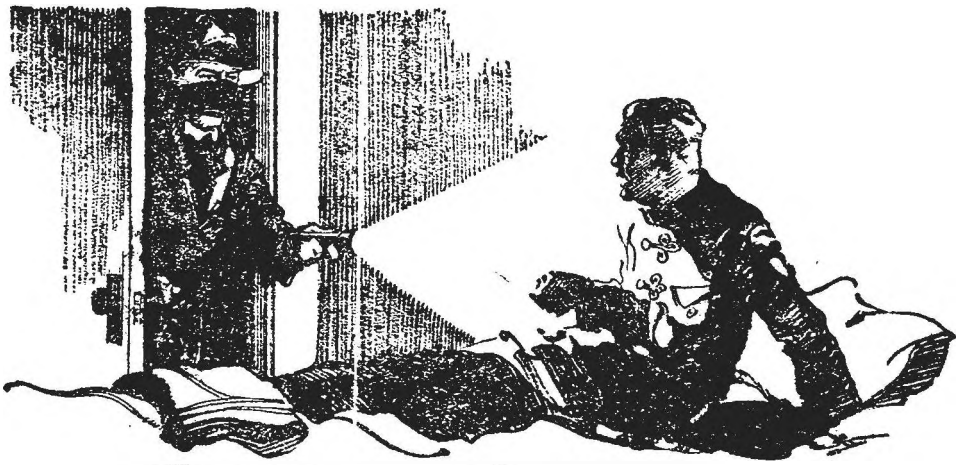
With a sigh of relief the professor sank down to the ground. He laid his heavy six-shooter in the glittering litter of empty shells at his side, rolled over to his back and fell asleep.

There the old prospector and his friends found him.

His body bore seven bullet injuries—three of them mortal wounds. There was a smile of utter contentment upon his lips.

The old prospector removed his hat reverently.

"Boys, I thought this feller was a dude," he said, huskily. "But I was mistook. He's a Westerner. A real Westerner!"



A Gentleman in Pajamas

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

Author of "The Battle Cry," "When Bearcat Went Dry," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUMMY-CHUCKER REAPPEARS.

LYING in his bed that night, P. B. Pettigrew was thinking. The even breath that came from his room indicated a sound and pleasant sleep, but that was art, not nature.

In his mind he was almost feverishly building, tearing down and rebuilding. As a cottage centers about its chimney the structure of his thought centered about the vagrant visitor who had been called in from the street. If he could manage a conversation alone with that vividly interesting miscreant, something ought to come of it.

He began to visualize a basis of agreement. One can deal fantastically with fantastics. One can shamelessly admit to an outlaw things which it would be unwise to unbosom in the presence of rectitude. Then, too, all that need be confessed was that one occupant of this house had a power which enabled him to exact blackmail, and that for freedom from that incubus the other and rightful occupant was willing to pay an alluring ransom.

Mulling these matters over until, at length, drowsiness came, the victim of the town's strangest robbery began to see shape emerge from the mists and coherence formulate out of incoherence, so that on the following morning he awakened almost to a sense of hope.

After breakfast, when Yates came with mail, Pettigrew missed Barrows, and so close had been their recent association that he felt as if he were standing in the sun and suddenly discovered himself to be shadowless.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 16.

The first blessed sense of relief which came with that realization was brief, and pessimism succeeded it. If Barrows was voluntarily leaving him unguarded it was doubtless in order to give him an opportunity for trapping himself, so silence and caution became meritorious.

"Where is Mr. Barrows, Yates?" he inquired with a cold wariness, and the man replied, "I believe, sir, at the present moment Mr. Barrows is on the roof."

"On the roof! What the devil should he be doing on the roof?"

"He has been there before, I believe, sir. Possibly he's inspecting the condition of the roofing."

"Possibly," assented Pettigrew. "At all events it's a bright suggestion. Did you report any defect in the roofing to Mr. Barrows?"

"I, sir? No, sir. Mr. Barrows seems to have an eye out for everything, sir."

"That's all, Yates. You may go."

Mr. Pettigrew did not even mention when Barrows strolled in some fifteen minutes later that he had noted his absence or made any inquiry concerning it, and Barrows himself seemed thoughtful. The morning was half spent when the burglar resident again suggested the mild diversion of sitting at the window and looking across the square, and again Pettigrew acceded with neither enthusiasm nor objection.

His mind was busy with its own concerns and the location of his chair became a matter of indifference. The panorama that enacted itself out there was that of every day, and offered no prospect of exciting interest. Fifth Avenue, Greenwich Village, and the tenements of Little Italy mingled their representation on the area which was once the potters' field, but presently the two men at the window noted that something was happening in the street beyond their limit of vision which appeared to be causing a mild commotion.

Pedestrians stopped and turned to look around. Fingers pointed and heads nodded sagely, and these glances were evidently not for something that was happening at a fixed point but for a moving objective. The glances followed whatever attraction held them, not rapidly as they might follow the excitement of a thief being pursued or a runaway milk wagon, but more as if a dignified procession was drawing near.

Then the watchers in the window divined the cause. A large and costly but simply finished car came into view progressing slowly. They could not see the monogram on the panels, and had they been able to do so it would have been a small and unostentatious one.

The whole seeming of the equipage was that of quiet, almost reticent elegance, and the livery of footman and chauffeur was severe. In any block of the avenue between Madison Square and the Plaza, an onlooker might count a dozen more flamboyantly splendid turnouts — yet New York's narrow sophistication knew this car. The newsboys recognized it as it passed. The traffic officers saluted it. The megaphone man on the rubber-neck wagon never failed to break off in whatever spiel engaged him on its passing, to instruct his listening provincials as to its identity.

There was no megaphone orator here just now, but had there been he would assuredly have spoken in stentorian tones as follows, to wit:

"Ladies and gentlemen: the dark olive green car with silver trimmings which is just approaching from the left merits your attention, and it is a fortunate coincidence which enables me to point it out to you. That limousine, ladies and gentlemen, is the car of one of the greatest financial magnates in the world, the most notable banker and the most distinguished art connoisseur in Christendom. There passes a man whose name is a household word to you all, yet whom you, perhaps, never hoped to see in the flesh and almost at arms' length! The colossus, ladies and gentlemen, reclining in the back seat, is the mighty John P. Morton himself!"

That speech never failed to bring a craning of necks and an awed excitement. Now its subject caused Washington Square to pause, marking time, and while it so marked time the great man's car drew up and parked before the door of P. B. Pettigrew.

"Morton seems to have gotten our letter," commented Barrows blandly, and Pettigrew clenched his teeth.

"I won't see the confounded highbinder," he snarled. "I won't give him the delight of rubbing it in on me."

"But he comes at your invitation," protested the younger man with the seeming of one who is aghast. "He pays you the compliment of an immediate reply in person. Other men would have been invited to cart their goods up to his house and—"

"He does *not* come at my invitation or by my wish," stormed Pettigrew as a footman opened the side door of the limousine and John Morton stepped briskly out. "If I followed my inclination I'd order Yates to throw him out on his head!"

The lips of Barrows twisted, despite his seemingly shocked condition, into a momentary grin.

"I was viewing in imagination," he explained, "the highly edifying spectacle of Yates throwing John P. Morton down your stairs. It hadn't occurred to me before to envision Yates as a heroic figure." Suddenly the smile faded and the face became stony.

"Don't see him if you don't want to," Barrows ripped out. "I dare say you couldn't be trusted to be decently polite. I'll see him myself, but I'm going to bring him into this room to look at your beloved Gobelin. Perhaps I'd better help you into your bedroom and close your door."

Barrows did not altogether relish the idea of leaving Pettigrew alone and unguarded while he talked with a man whom expediency prevented him from hurrying. It might be a long interview. It would certainly be as long as Morton chose to make it, and although Morton had the fame of an almost parsimonious economy in the expenditure of minutes, it was said that in the presence of art, time, for him, ceased to exist.

Still less, however, did Barrows fancy the idea of affording his prisoner an opportunity of insulting the man who, alone, could pay such prices as it was in his mind to ask. He had chosen what seemed the lesser horn of the dilemma, but with the sudden capriciousness of an infuriated imbecile, Pettigrew abruptly changed his ground.

"I won't be shut in my bedroom when distinguished visitors come," he snapped. "What do you think I am?"

"I think you're a fool who is tempting Providence—and sudden death. There's the door closing. What are you going to do?"

At that same moment Pettigrew's glance caught a detail of the view outside which seemed to have escaped the vigilant eye of his captor—an eye just then bent intimidatingly on himself. That detail was the sauntering figure of the disreputable human who had yesterday taken luncheon in this room—the dummy chucker—and it was sauntering toward the house.

"Help me into my room," snarled Pettigrew decisively, "and close the door. Tell the old pirate I'm too ill to see him. Tell him any fool thing you like—only don't let him see me or speak to me, or I'll order him out of my house."

With short steps and a shorter dignity the master of the house was hustled into his bedchamber, seated with covered and manacled legs, and left alone.

Outside on the sidewalk at a respectful distance small knots of pedestrians were pausing and regarding the chariot of greatness with ingenuous awe. From somewhere materialized a good natured policeman who smilingly suggested that they keep moving and, where necessary, emphasized his suggestion.

In the hall below, Prescott Barrows was greeting the visitor and conveying the regrets of the host himself for his inability to receive in person.

Around to the service entrance, impelled by recognition that the front door was otherwise preëmpted, drifted the dummy chucker, and there he engaged in a conversation which savored of altercation with a kitchenmaid whom he encountered at the threshold.

While this conversation was in progress Yates himself, puffed with the importance of one bearing tidings from the throne room, entered the kitchen and threw himself vehemently into the rearguard action.

"What, you again?" he inquired acidly. "Don't you know who's under this roof at the present time—and what 'll happen to suspicious characters found loitering here?"

"I recognized the liveries," answered the guest of yesterday imperturbably, "and I can't wait. I'm here by appointment with Mr. Pettigrew. He told me yesterday to come back to-day."

"By appointment with Mr. Pettigrew! I say, that's priceless. Rather! Mr. Pettigrew felt too indisposed to receive John P. Morton—and sent Mr. Barrows down instead—but I suppose he'll receive you! My word!"

The man in the black cotton shirt callously remained complacent under the peal of derisive laughter which applauded this crushing sally. He answered in an undisturbed voice.

"I believe you're the same menial who tried to stop me yesterday, aren't you? These fellow servants didn't hear the rebuke you got for your pains. Perhaps they don't know that I was received—entertained at luncheon and invited to return. Will you tell Mr. Pettigrew I'm here, or shall I go outside and telephone in to him?"

Yates considered for an uneasy moment. He did remember yesterday.

"That's the worst of giving charity to certain parties," he commented. "You take them in and feed them when they come begging, and they give theirselves the airs of equals. Wait outside and I'll carry your message—but I can tell you in advance what answer you'll get."

Under cover of which retort Yates retreated, as he flattered himself, with the honors of war, but five minutes later, in a crestfallen silence, he was conducting the young man who specialized in fits up the rear stairway and into the master's bedchamber.

Below stairs John P. Morton found much to engage him before he climbed with his escort to the second floor to inspect the Gobelin. There was porcelain which he coveted and rugs which he must possess. It was amazing that such things as these had eluded his scouts and searchers and fallen into the hands of a relatively poor collector. Now it seemed that mischance was to be corrected.

The man, whose moments were priceless in value lingered and handled and discussed. His piercing eyes under their shaggy ambushes of frequently scowling brow glistened like a child's in a toy shop before Christmas. Stabilizing of the market could wait! International loans must bide their time. John P. Morton had slipped his harness and bridle. He was grazing knee deep in clover.

Barrows' charmed him. Barrows could both talk and listen. Barrows, as Yates and Morton agreed, had a way with him.

On the second floor enthusiasms were renewed. Yes, the cartoon from which the Gobelin over the mantel was woven was undoubtedly by Lebrun himself, Morton agreed; and there were several Ming vases that were distinctly out of the ordinary.

The man who was playing host seemed entirely at his ease, yet if certain anxieties had intruded on his inner consciousness, it would not have been surprising.

His prisoner was being left to his own devices, and his own devices were never virginal in their innocence. It was one of those times when a commander might wish he could divide himself into two beings, and be simultaneously present on each of two critical fronts.

Yet the major salient was that on which Morton was buying, and the advantage of dealing with him was that such a deal meant liquidating a large portion of the Pettigrew estate. This was the grand slam of the dispersal game—still Pettigrew sat alone, possibly hatching evil eggs of conspiracy.

That, however, was not entirely true. Pettigrew did not sit alone. He sat with the dummy chucker and he was making the most of his time. He had a listener laudibly insulated against astonishment; a listener who could grasp a broad conception of extra legal affairs sweepingly and at a glance. Just as Morton could buy a whole collection, representing a fortune, in an hour, so could Pettigrew's present companion digest a whole Iliad of fantastic conditions without choking over this or that unusual morsel.

"I think I get you, Mr. Pettigrew," summarized the visitor at length, and he spoke low because just beyond the closed door he could hear a drone of voices led by the authoritative bass of John Morton.

"I gather that this bird has something on you which you judiciously prefer to leave

unspecified. I'm not nosy and all I need to be told is that this stranglehold is tight enough to cut off your free breath of life. In self-defense you naturally seek to find some other factor in the equation which can cancel him. You suggest my becoming that factor. Do I summarize accurately?"

"You do—both accurately and broad-mindedly. Of course, I shouldn't tell you even that much if my situation weren't desperate."

"Naturally. You aren't spilling this to me out of pure chattiness. Some people would say the situation is an impossible one. Me, I know that 'the world is so full of a number of things' that nothing crimps my credulity. However, cancelling human factors is farther than I've ever gone up to date. It's a chancy business at best—and it usually comes high."

"Nothing is high for me compared with what he's costing me," moaned the elder man. "The question is—can it be done?"

"Almost anything can be done. This looks like a comparatively simple matter—if we agree on terms."

So for a while they discussed terms.

"Now, I must take my own time, and I must have such access to this house that I can come and go without his knowledge," announced the new employee briskly.

Pettigrew's face fell in woebegone disappointment.

"Time is the essence of the contract," he pleaded. "Every day, in every way, he is bringing me nearer and nearer total ruin—I can't even pay you unless that is stopped before long."

"By time I don't mean weeks. I mean days; but as to the other point?"

"Access? Yes, that bewilders me, too. You see me chained here. The servants are his spies."

The man who had fits reflected for a moment.

"I happen to know," he said thoughtfully, "that there's a top floor room vacant in the house next door—and one roof covers both buildings."

Pettigrew looked up eagerly. "The roof!" he exclaimed. "I have an extra key to the roof-ladder door. You shall have that!" He paused, and then as if echoing the memory of a discovery, he added: "I believe Barrows sometimes goes up there—on the roof."

"He oughtn't to do it," mused the visitor. "He might—fall off."

But Pettigrew raised a suddenly startled hand.

"No, no!" he gasped. "He mustn't do that. They would find on him the key to my handcuffs—and a paper which even you mustn't see. I must have it back with the seal unbroken!"

The man in the black cotton shirt nodded his head.

"Then, if he happens to slide off the roof, it must only be after those things are in your possession? Is that correct?"

"Precisely. Open that lower bureau drawer and give me a bunch of keys that you'll find under a pile of underwear."

As he complied the visitor grinned.

"You aren't hiring me because you have absolute trust in my honesty," he reminded Pettigrew. "Doesn't it occur to you that with that key in my pocket, you might suffer certain small peculations?"

"I thought of nothing else for an hour last night," responded the elderly man dryly. "I reached the conclusion that whatever you acquire in that fashion, you are stealing from Barrows — not me. Moreover, you are stealing it from yourself."

"That," acknowledged the dummy chucker, "is even more to the point—but how come?"

"Because I purpose employing you on the fee and bonus system. You get twenty-five thousand dollars for actual services—contingent on success. If I find that, besides those actual services, you have safeguarded my interests into the bargain, you get also a handsome bonus. Moreover," supplemented the speaker dryly, "most of the valuables in this house are too well known to be easily disposed of."

"From time to time," said the man in the black shirt as he pocketed his key, "I shall contrive to have a word with you and keep you posted. If you hear an intruder in the dark watches of the night don't make too much fuss. Let nature take its course."

He yawned, then added: "And now I'll

run along and make sure of the lodgings next door before another tenant applies. By the way, I'll need some money, of course."

Pettigrew, whose purse had not been taken from him, surrendered several large bills by way of retainer.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN VILLAINS BARGAIN.

THE great man's car had gone its way from the curb. Barrows had presented himself with a check bearing such an array of digits as suited the signature and a list of treasures alienated forever from the Pettigrew mansion. He brought also a countenance wreathed in smiles.

He found Pettigrew slumped gloomily in his chair, and was not amazed that the man's eyes smoldered with an almost feverish hotness of gaze. There was reason for that, since his own work of the morning had broken the back of the Pettigrew collection and left it a thing picked over, a welter of artistic remnants.

But the victim of this predatory coup said nothing. He was calculating along other lines. He was not yet beggared, and the check which the other held was payable to him.

The febrile glow in his eyes came from the memory of an interview that had just taken place in the room now empty except for himself and his torturer. Under the searchlights of a vigilance that had been discouraging, and chained to his seat like a galley slave, he had none the less succeeded in hiring a strong-arm man, a modern knight avenger.

More cautious now, and with greater experience than on his evening of failure, he was again seeing in anticipation under dogs turned into top dogs, and was tasting in advance the fruits of reprisal. The reckoning was to be without quarter or pity.

Why should it be otherwise? A pirate had boarded and scuttled his ship—but the leaks had been stopped in the nick of time, and now, before long, the pirate was himself to walk the plank!

Moreover, his own hands would remain unsoiled. It was after all a rather pretty piece of irony, and though there would be wormwood in the cup—because the tide had not been stemmed before Morton won his triumph—still it would be a material victory, and the half loaf left him would be uncontested!

So, with the solace of a philosophy which he masked under the guise of bitter and sulking silence, Pettigrew spent the afternoon and evening outwardly morose, but inwardly exalted—and that night he slept almost sweetly.

It was while the two were breakfasting together in Pettigrew's bedroom the next morning, that Edith Page knocked on the door.

"Two detectives are downstairs in the hall, Mr. Barrows," she announced quietly. "They asked for you."

The hand with which the older man was lifting his coffee cup to his lips trembled so violently that the brown fluid spilled out and stained the cloth. His face paled, and he sat for a moment gasping. Wild thoughts possessed him with demoniacal torments.

Had Barrows discovered his conspiracy so soon, and had he decided to bring down the whole roof crashing in that joint ruin which he had so often threatened? Had this disaster fallen just as his own hope had been lifted toward the dawning of success?

Feeling the steady eyes of the girl on him he made an effort to rally his panic-stricken emotions, and looked down at the coffee stains which Yates was already efficiently clearing up.

"Yes, Miss Page," observed Barrows smoothly, "I telephoned to headquarters for these gentlemen. Will you explain that I'll be down as soon as I've finished my breakfast?" He smiled as with an afterthought and inquired considerately: "Are we overworking you, Miss Page? I fancied you looked a bit fagged this morning."

The girl flushed suddenly, and shook her head. She was tired because she had slept hardly at all for two nights and because when she should have been sleeping she was crying out her eyes with the miseries of heartbreak.

She had sent Eldoras away, and she wanted him back. She had seen the mirage of serenity and happiness dissolve, and there seemed nothing left. Now and now only she knew how much she loved him, and what it cost her to find that he had only the cheap, bright bubbles of a gambler's credulity to offer her.

" No, Mr. Barrows," she replied evenly, " the work isn't hard at all. I'll give your message to the detectives."

When she had gone Barrows sat silently sipping his coffee, and it was not until Yates had gone away with the spoiled tablecloth that Pettigrew threw up his head and barked with a terrified voice:

" Detectives? What for?"

Barrows regarded him with a cruel and ironical smile, making no haste to allay his burning anxiety.

" One might almost infer," he made malicious observation, " that you had a guilty conscience, Pro Bono. You are so confoundedly police shy."

" Why did you send for them?" persisted Pettigrew, leaning forward. The agony of fearing that, on the verge of victory, he was being utterly thwarted, was unbearable. His breath was thick and rasping.

" I shan't burden them with personal confessions—unless you render it needful by objecting to the day's program," answered Barrows with a silky softness of tone. " By the way, I haven't informed you as to the day's program, have I?"

The older man let his breath run out like the hiss of escaping steam, but it was a sigh of vast relief. What was a day's program more or less when each of them brought some fresh outrage—so long as the plan he was maturing for the breaking of his yoke was not interfered with?

" What pleasant form of larceny have you arranged for this morning?" he managed to inquire. " How can it require detectives?"

" To begin with," the other told him, with an edge of warning on his voice, " at the first flicker of insurgency that manifests itself in your behavior I shall hand this to the plainclothes gentlemen."

He drew from his breast pocket a large envelope sealed with red wax—an envelope which Pettigrew had no difficulty in recognizing.

" But in default of such necessity," he went on, " the detectives will have only to watch the valuables on the premises while the crowd is here—much as wedding presents are guarded at fashionable nuptials."

" What crowd?" quavered the now completely bewildered man in lilac pajamas and mandarin dressing gown. " In Heaven's name, what crowd are you expecting?"

Barrows smiled. " You might call them the camp followers," he made explanation. " Now that Morton has come and gone—now that the great purchaser has taken his pick of our plunder—I've arranged with Parker to unleash the lesser art hounds. The lion having gorged his fill, the hyenas and jackals are invited to pick over the bones."

Pettigrew groaned. " You mean that this house is to be overrun by bargain hunting looters?"

" That's the gist of the idea; and now if you'll pardon me five minutes, I'll have a word with the flat-feet. Then I'll be back and dress you for your party."

Barrows left the room while, sitting in his chair, Pettigrew vindicated his claim to a mastery of profanity, but he swore low and even monotonously, as if his heart were partly elsewhere.

In ten minutes Barrows was back, and, with eyes which put questions for which he found no words, Pettigrew noted that he carried in one hand a crutch and in the other a package of surgical adhesive tape. Having laid these things down, the younger man glanced contemplatively about the room, and when his gaze alighted on an ancient flint lock musket that hung on one wall, he stood on a chair and took it down. Drawing out the slender hickory ramrod, Barrows appraised its length and broke off one end. Then he replaced the relic on its supports.

" Now Pro Bono," he suggested amiably, " let's commence our toilet. The visitors will begin arriving in about an hour. It's not essential that you fatigue yourself by being present throughout the affair—but we will entertain them with a modest buffet luncheon, and then you should circulate

among your guests and express your warmth of confidence in the friend who is your *alter ego.*"

"Let the brute rub it in," mused the victim savagely. "Before long he will pay in full for his presumptuous audacity." Pettigrew's grumbling was almost perfunctory now because of that thought, while Barrows supplied him with a crisply fresh suit of lavender pajamas. He made no more vocal protest than does a child in the selection of its party clothes, as his tormentor, first locking the door, unfastened the handcuffs from his ankles and began binding against his bared left leg the ramrod from the old musket. This he lashed tightly in place so that it stiffened the knee with turn upon turn of adhesive tape.

"It might be mortifying to you, Pro Bono," elucidated Barrows as he worked deftly over this detail, "to circulate among the customers with the tinkle of chains on your feet. Out of consideration for your feelings, therefore, and also out of consideration for the necessity of having you move circumspectly, I have devised this plan of letting you walk with one free leg and one crutch. You can explain to the inquisitive that you are suffering from the pangs of gout or housemaid's knee, or whatever affliction best suits your whim."

In an elegance of negligee the elderly invalid was ready before the doorbell began its almost constant ringing. Guided and incited by Parker himself, the elect in the world of art collection began their wanderings over the house, and with them, simulating an interest foreign to their natures, mingled the two plainclothes men from headquarters.

Aided by the solicitous Barrows, Pettigrew himself made his way down the stairs and tolerated with bleak acidity the huns and vandals who had descended upon him; but soon he escaped and sought sanctuary behind his own bolted door.

From below, and even from the study, which he had shut off, came the shuffle of feet and that confusion of voices which spelled to him the legend of a temple being looted, and then somewhat to his dismay he heard a light and cautious rap on the door that gave off from his bathroom hall to the back stairs—a door rarely used and always bolted.

Rising suddenly and falling back into his chair because of the unaccustomed stiffness of his counterfeit splint, Pettigrew made a more deliberate attempt and hobbled clumsily to the door that had engaged his attention.

"Who is it?" he demanded curtly.

A low voice, which he recognized, questioned in turn:

"Are you alone?"

Pettigrew unfastened the bolt and opened to a crack, and when he had done so he stood hesitant, hardly recognizing in this spruce visitor so transformed by new clothes the dummy chucker who had chewed soap on the sidewalk.

The back stairs visitor glanced questioningly about, and when he had been reassured by a nod from the other, followed him into the bedroom.

"So it's you," mumbled Pettigrew brightly, "the dummy chucker."

"Not a dummy chucker any more," the dapper individual corrected him, "and since you've promoted me to greater dignity you might as well call me by some name. Andrew Diston will serve nicely—inasmuch as it's not my own."

"You got the room next door?"

"I got it and I came over the roof. That much is accomplished."

Pettigrew put out a hand and laid it against the wall. He breathed so deeply that the sound was almost like a sob of relief. His eyes glittered.

"So!" he exclaimed, moistening his lips and speaking eagerly. "So the beginning has been made. Now we can go forward."

The young man stood regarding himself in a mirror. He seemed pleased with the portrait which it gave back to his eyes, and he allowed himself that indulgence, uninterrupted, while Pettigrew's pulses pounded with the sense of urgency and the dread of interruption. Then Diston turned and slowly shook his head.

"On the contrary," he said amiably, "I've been giving your offer of employment mature thought—and I've come to say that I don't see my way clear to accepting it."

"Don't see your way clear—to accepting it?" The words came in faint and horrified undertones. Again Pettigrew moistened his lips, but the light in his ratlike eyes was now the fading fire of desperation. Suddenly a gusty fury leaped in him.

"You—you sneaking scoundrel!" he stormed. "You've already accepted. You stand clad from head to foot in clothes that are part of your wages. You are living in a room rented with my money. Your pockets are lined from my purse—all wages paid in advance."

"I have regarded these small perquisites," amended the young man mildly, "in the nature of a retainer paid for my time while I was considering your offer."

"And you repudiate your bargain?"

"If I do," asked Diston insolently, "do you know any means of enforcing it?"

Pettigrew tottered to his chair and sat heavily down. His face was seamed in lines of total despair, and when he looked up the fury had died out of it and it mirrored, instead, the pleading of extremity.

"What's made you weaken, Diston?" he whined. "Think what you could do with the money—"

"Not so much," came the brisk retort, "as I could do with more."

"You mean?"

"I mean that we might as well drop all ambiguity. What you want is to be rid of this man Barrows. Yesterday we talked in euphemisms. You know as well as I do that there's only one way to get rid of him. That's a method that goes by the common and ugly name of murder."

"But you said—it was easy."

"Sure. It's easy enough, but one doesn't do it—at any bargain counter price."

"Do you call twenty-five thousand a bargain counter price?"

"Do you call murder a bargain job at any price?"

"What—is your price, then?"

"Now we are talking turkey!" exclaimed the young man with satisfaction. "As I get it, this bird is picking you down close to the bone and means to pick you closer. If I intervene and incur the damage to my conscience which is necessarily involved in such a deal—you and I must split fifty-fifty what's saved out of the wreck. The whole of it, you understand? The quicker I work, the more will be left. I gather that at the present moment he's dispersing the assets like a drunken sailor—and a contingent fee puts me on my mettle."

"Yes, yes; but the checks are still made out to me. He seems to feel that it's not judicious to make me indorse them all over direct to him. There's still some time—"

"There's no time to argue with me, and if I get him, I get him to-night," interrupted Diston freezingly. "A quick turnover at fifty-fifty or quit. That's my proposition to you. Take it or leave it."

Pettigrew covered his face with his hands and clawed at his temples while the other stood staring down at him with hard eyes.

The pleasant vagabond who had sat cross-legged as he smoked and yarned two days ago had vanished and the man who stood in his place was as hard as flint, as evil as a vulture.

"Did you think," he inquired baldly, "I was considering this prospect as a matter of high-minded philanthropy?"

"No—I suppose not. I suppose I have no choice." The words came with painful slowness.

"Don't forget," the murder hireling reminded him pointedly, "that this man Barrows has a razor-keen mind. It's not any sucker you're asking me to handle. Failure wouldn't cost me a thing in the world—except the chair."

"I—accept the conditions," faltered Pettigrew, and suddenly the young man's face became gargoyle ugly and menacing.

"One thing more. Don't make any mistake about thinking you can welsh on me afterward, either," he warned. "I've been all along that road once. I know what it is to be double-crossed by pals. If I hadn't made a get-away I'd still be in the penitentiary, doing a stretch that two fellow crooks let me in for—while they went scot-free themselves. I don't fall into the same trap twice."

Suddenly Pettigrew looked up. Into his confused mind shot an idea that almost soothed his stricken stinginess with its light of irony. Wilder coincidence had been known! Suppose it were true! It would

be rather rich if, after all, this man were actually the Challon over whom Barrows pretended to waste such a deal of mawkish sympathy.

Improbable? Of course. Yet not impossible, and if by any chance it were true it constituted a remarkable situation; the man who had "stood for the collar" escaped from prison and earning back some of his own filched plunder, by disposing of a crooked pal! At all events the fantastic thought dulled the edge of chagrin which cut into Pettigrew with the need for rewriting the contract.

"What did you go up for?" he found himself inquiring, and the eyes of the other became agate hard.

"You have your Bluebeard closet, which you're not opening to me, mister," said Diston with a monitory shortness. "Suppose you don't fumble at the latch of mine."

"No, no; I beg your pardon," interposed Pettigrew hastily. "No questions asked, I assure you."

"Let me have all the money you have about here in cash," ordered Diston. "And to-night, when you hear things going on, I advise you to turn your eyes to the wall—and pull the quilt up over your ears."

"I want that envelope—with the seal unbroken," announced Pettigrew hastily, suddenly obsessed by the fear that he was only trading one blackmailer for another.

"You shall have your secret paper, never fear! Let me have the money now. I want to get out while the going's good."

The art connoisseurs had gone, and with them had gone the silently moving detectives. Dinner had been served, and in the study, where no longer hung the Gobelin, the two antagonistic men sat alone. Barrows lighted a cigar.

"On the night of my arrival, Pro Bono," he began reminiscently, "you confessed that my scheme seemed an impossible one, and I told you that you'd see it develop as it progressed. You *are* seeing it develop, aren't you? The Pettigrew assets are rapidly liquefying for diversion into a new channel."

Pettigrew groaned.

"I believe," went on Barrows as he regarded the upward spiralling of smoke from his cigar end, "the human conception of justice recognizes that besides compensatory damages there are also punitive damages to be considered. I am progressing with my levy of compensatory damages—but I must also remind you from time to time of the punitive."

Pettigrew snarled.

"You fancy," resumed Barrows, "that you're having your troubles, yet there were three of us—and one of us is up the river still."

The speaker looked up suddenly, for he almost fancied that his auditor had given off a bitter little cackle of laughter. Yet the features that met his lifted gaze were saturnine in their impotence of ill humor.

"It's not pleasant up there," went on Barrows, "for a chap who was only a kid when they caught him and caged him; who was only the dupe of keener and more predatory minds. Even if he were freed now it would be hard to compensate him for those years of youth he lost in a living tomb. Have you ever visited Sing Sing or Auburn, Pro Bono?"

"I have not," rasped out the other.

"You may yet," came the dry rejoinder. "However, in the meantime I shall sketch for you the life they lead behind the walls where the sentinels pace. Perhaps it will do you good, Pro Bono."

As the younger and more gifted conversationalist offered stark, thumb nail sketches of the horror of prisons, with an unrelieved vividness that limned them like glimpses of an inferno, he felt that his efforts were not being properly appreciated. His auditor remained unimpressed, as if his mind were wandering to other topics, which carried some force of grim and saturnine enjoyment.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AGONY OF AN ACCOMPLICE.

THE house was quiet. Through the open windows P. B. Pettigrew, as he lay in his bed, could hear the Metropolitan clock pealing the four strokes which designated the hour. He further recognized that the time proclaimed by this gargantuan

and inanimate town crier was one o'clock ante meridian.

The open door of the adjoining bedchamber framed darkness and quiet. After a satisfactory day's work Prescott Barrows, the burglar resident and thief extraordinary, seemed to be taking his rest with the undisturbed peace of a well fed infant. Pettigrew, for his part, found it no such simple matter to " wrap the draperies of his couch about him and lie down to pleasant dreams."

Some time between now and dawn Diston had promised to come, and Pettigrew lay there with the quivering nerves of one who waits on murder.

The dissonances of the town were dying into quiet. The outer life of the wakeful city seemed heavily awash, but slowly submerging into a sea of emptiness and silence. The occasional voice or footfall in the streets declared itself with that exaggerated sounding of little noises that are unconfused. The grind along the Elevated tracks on Sixth Avenue was no more than the pounding of distant surf.

Pettigrew found himself lying a-tremble, while he feigned slumber. He could never be certain when Barrows's sleep was real and when it was an ambush of silence, behind which he listened and seemed to watch out of closed eyes.

The worst of it was that he could be sure of nothing, and was buffeted about by gusts of terror and doubt. He dreaded the arrival of the assassin, and dreaded that he might fail to come. He winced from the prospect and shuddered at the possibility of its miscarriage.

He was counting over on his fingers, as he lay there, struggling against the impulse to toss feverishly, how many days and nights had passed since he had been aroused out of his sleep in that same bed to find his world suddenly turned topsy-turvy. Even that enumeration assumed the difficulty of abstruse mathematics, because all those days and nights had been stretched by mental anguish into generations.

Now the end of it was at hand, and the end frightened him most of all. Lying there in the dark it was as if it were he, and not the other man, who had to pass through the shadows of violence and death.

The striking of the blow that should break his bondage and convert his degradation into freedom refused to stand out as the successful termination of the story. It became, instead, a preface to a hundred other and untested chapters—all of them ominous.

Perhaps the worst thing of all was the suspense. Would it be in an hour or not for several hours? And how many hours could he lie here with hot, sleepless eyes before the tautening nerves of his brain snapped into madness?

These questions persistently returned, as often as they were thrust away.

Barrows himself appeared to sleep peacefully enough, as his deep and regular breathing attested. Certainly, lamented Pettigrew, if one were to be a felon it paid to link boldness and audacity of spirit with one's infamy.

The minutes dragged along interminable wastes of time. The soft but far-carrying strokes from the Metropolitan clock punctuated them at what seemed intervals of eternity. The quarter's single blow from the bronze hammer—the half's double stroke—the three-quarter's triple booming; these were the insomniac's only proof that he had not lain there in his quiet agony for the whole night.

Then at last he heard—yes, he doubted it at first, then doubted it no longer—the slight creak of an ancient timber under a careful foot on the back stairs. It appeared to come from overhead, and Pettigrew set his jaws to prevent the exclamation that seemed to struggle overpoweringly for outlet in sound.

It was a light, almost imperceptible noise, but to the strained and waiting ears it seemed to ring with the clamor of an alarm through all the walls of the building. He was sure that it must crash through the light armor of his enemy's sleep like musketry!

He was certain that it must startle Yates out of his bed and bring up the police from their beats outside. His disordered senses fancied that it broke and ripped the stillness like the fall of a tower.

Pettigrew was hardly sane, and he lay shuddering and waiting with a clammy chill

enveloping him from head to foot. For what seemed hours he followed the snail-like progress of the step down that rear stairway and his state of mind made it a protracted reign of terror.

Yet from the room adjoining his own, came uninterruptedly the regular and tranquil breathing that seemed to declare unconsciousness.

With a grotesque unreasonableness which infuriated him, Pettigrew found that a jingle of verses was running through his head —verses which he had not remembered for years, and which seemed now to rise out of forgetfulness to mock him:

"If you wake at midnight and hear a horse's feet,
Don't go drawing back the blind or looking in the street,
Them that ask no questions isn't told a lie;
Watch the wall, my darling, while the gentlemen go by!"

It seemed to him that horse's feet on that stairway could hardly be more clamorous, yet he was following that smuggler's advice. He was watching the wall!

Eventually the door on his bathroom hall opened softly. He had himself seen that the inner bolt was unfastened, against just such a contingency, and Barrows had not noticed!

Again Pettigrew struggled, stifling an impulse to scream, and braced himself against what seemed the inevitable waking of Barrows, for to his hypersensitiveness it was as if an iron gate had swung ringingly open. He was not sure, but he fancied his jailer slept with the automatic pistol under his pillow, and if he were wakened suddenly perhaps he would come up shooting. But in there all remained quiet.

Looking out through slitted lids, Pettigrew could see the little spotlight of an electric torch moving like a glow-worm across the sooty darkness of his room toward that adjoining chamber. The man who carried it was treading with the silence of a cat and the ready alertness of a stalking leopard.

That light disappeared. It had gone through the door. There were still little adumbrations of sound beyond, but that was all, and even they dwindled. Barrow's breathing seemed heavier now, and possibly a bit less regular—yet there was no outcry—no indication of waking.

Pettigrew became colder, and the moisture of his limbs grew icier. Had the thing already happened? Was his captor's sleep, instead of breaking, thickening and deepening into that which has no waking? If so how had it been done?

The little sounds that had seemed loud to him had been unbearable. Now the silence was equally unendurable—more so. It was the still declaration of death.

He ought to welcome that thought, yet as it came to him he seemed to plunge downward fathom after fathom into pits of blacker fear.

Then, after suspended eternities, he felt a light touch on his shoulder, and seemed to leap clear of his skin. In the light of the electric torch he was looking up at a figure standing by his bed and proffering him something.

The figure was masked and its collar was turned up. He could not have sworn to its identity. A finger was laid to the masked lips, and holding the light in one hand so that it showed on the things held in the other, the figure thrust them out.

Pettigrew clutched them. He recognized red seals—that looked like blood spots—on a large envelope, and the small key that would unfasten the metal fetters which confined his feet.

"Are those the things you want—sight unseen?" inquired a voice which he did recognize.

The voice was low, yet calmly free from the rasping quality of a whisper.

Pettigrew licked his drawn lips and nodded. There was his confession.

"All right," answered the other with a callous indifference to both ethics and grammar, "we're going, now—him and me."

"Is he?" Pettigrew broke off, gasping, and swallowed hard. "Is he?" he repeated and got no further.

"No—not yet," came the significant answer; "but he won't wake up for a while." There was a pause, and then the voice added, "For quite a while—I might add."

"What have you?" Pettigrew broke off

again. A complete sentence rounded out to its period, lay beyond the register of his present powers.

"Do you want to know?" inquired the other with a brutal bluntness. "So he doesn't trouble you again, do you want me to tell you what I'm going to do with him?"

Pettigrew fell into an ague of shuddering, with a chatter of teeth and a twitching through his limbs.

"No, no!" he exclaimed wildly. "But get him away. For God's sake, get him away!"

"Going, sir?" retorted Diston laconically. "We're shoving off right now."

Pettigrew thrust his recovered treasures under his pillow and plunged into the depths of his bed as if he hoped for sanctuary there from his thoughts. He pulled the covers over him, and lay quaking on the verge of madness.

The sounds now must have grown louder. They could hardly be otherwise, because once when he opened his eyes he had seen the figure of the murder hireling moving with unspeakable slowness and heaviness—carrying some tremendous and limply sagging burden in his arms. Such things can't be managed without a certain noisiness.

Then there was silence. How long that interval of dulled perceptions had lasted Pettigrew could not guess. He realized suddenly that he must not lie here inactive. He must loosen the irons from his feet with the key that he had regained. He must dispose of the papers that would damn him if they were found in this house when any inquiry began. These were opportunities for which he had paid a purgatorial price, and no one else could see to them for him.

He struggled with the handcuff locks and key, as with some tremendously baffling puzzle, because all coördination had gone out of his nerves and muscles—but at length it was done.

The house must remain dark and unsuspicious, yet these papers must be looked at and destroyed. Pettigrew stumbled out of his bed with chattering teeth and risked the little glow of his bedside lamp.

In the open fireplace of the study lingered a few live coals, paling into the gray of dead embers. The man tore the envelope and made hasty scrutiny of its contents. There was the document which had pilloried his freedom. There, too, was his own signature at the end!

He started with a stumbling, uncertain step into the other room to deposit the sheets on the coals, and on the way he was drawn by some morbid fascination into the now empty chamber where he switched on the bedside lamp.

The bed stood disordered, and Pettigrew let an instinctive moan of terror run between his lips.

A handkerchief lay on the floor, and from it Pettigrew caught the pungent odor of chloroform. He seized up the cambric and took it with him to throw it also on the fire, cursing the bungling clumsiness of a workman who had left such destructive evidence behind him.

So that was how it had been managed so far! And the rest? Pettigrew could guess that, too. The stark horror of it assailed him so violently that an impulse of indignation struck in on him, precisely as though all, save the detail, had not been of his own instigation. Diston had said Barrows should not go to the roof because "he might fall off."

Pettigrew's eyes stared wildly. If that were the answer, Diston would not come back to report. Of course Diston would have his getaway to think about, and if Barrows did "fall off"—the old man could not, even in this seclusion, bring himself to the abandonment of such euphemisms—if he did "fall off" a hue and cry might be expected from the streets below.

There would be a ringing of bells—door bells—ambulance bells—police patrol bells—all the hideously clanging voices in the world of the night and the city!

When that happened it behooved him to be in his bed—to have commanded himself and to wake out of sleep to hear the news. Once he had heard it, men would not be amazed if horror overcame him; but he must know nothing until he was told. He must present to the world a face of blank surprise.

How much time had already passed he had no idea—but certainly if a man had

fallen from the roof to the ground it must soon be discovered.

He carried his envelope and handkerchief into the study with a frantic haste. A frenzy possessed him at the slowness of their kindling. It was as if they had suddenly turned to asbestos, as if they had become, for his undoing, indestructible.

The envelope was charring slowly along its edges—as slowly as wet moss, he thought. He dropped to his knees on the hearth and blew on the coals with a breath that seemed too cold to kindle anything.

Finally an upleap of flame rewarded his efforts and with a moan of relief Pettigrew arose and shambled away. He ought to be in bed, with his lights out now, yet having gained that haven and drawn the covers close to his chin again, he could not bring himself to face entire darkness. It might be as well to let the lamp shine until he heard the first indication of an alarm. Since it cast its shaded glow hardly farther than a candle, it could scarcely be noticed from outside.

Then a new thought struck him with galvanic alarm and horror.

Suppose the man had "fallen" from any section of the roof except its front? He would land on some lower roof projection. He might not die at once. Even worse, he might not die at all. He might be mangled and hurt, yet capable of speaking, of denouncing, of accusing. The paralyzing inquisition of dread had its way in the torturing of P. B. Pettigrew through a seeming of ages, and still no sound of alarm or outcry came up from the street. That might be because of the hour. If this lasted much longer, he told himself in an icy, spiritual sweat, he would not be able to face any one who questioned without proclaiming his monstrous conscience.

His physical aspect would declare his guilt as if he had shouted it from the housetop. The housetop! The word itself was a fresh crucifixion.

The clock in the Metropolitan boomed again, and when the strokes ended Pettigrew once more became aware of a step on the stairway.

At least, then, the hireling was coming back with his report. The suspense would have some termination and almost any termination was better than this.

The timbers creaked and the knob of the hall door stirred. Pettigrew braced himself and strained his eyes. Now he no longer made an attempt to feign sleep. The footfall was in the narrow passage now, and then there was a shadow on the door. An electric button clicked just inside, and Pettigrew found himself looking into the face of *Prescott Barrows*.

There are things believable, and other things which a man, although he sees them, can accept only as proof that his reason has broken its hawsers and gone adrift on the Sargasso Sea of lunacy. Pettigrew knew now, notwithstanding every detail of that face and figure appeared clear and natural, that he was seeing—must be seeing—an apparition which had no vital existence in truth or fact.

That face, which looked into his own out of ironical, fiendishly amused eyes, could be looking only from beyond the grave or from the dreadful shadowland of hallucination.

Even had there been a fight up there, which had ended in the wrong death, how could this man, who had not long ago been drugged and lugged away like a heavy sack of insensible bulk, now stand clear-eyed and alert?

Then from the lips of the apparition came the calm inquiry:

"Are you surprised to see me, Pro Bono?"

Pettigrew sat cowering and shuddering in his bed. His jaw had dropped and hung so that his face was that of an idiot. Yet the sound of the voice appeared in some strange way to brace and strengthen him. Somehow he felt that the unanswerable was answered—and that he had regained a hold on reality.

Since no terror between birth and the grave is quite so unmanning as the fear of lunacy, Pettigrew answered to an indescribable sensation of reassurance.

"Where—where is—" He broke off.

Even that much effort at speech had taxed his powers to their frayed limits.

"Do you want to know?" inquired Barrows with a brutal irony:

Pettigrew realized, with a horrified mystification, that his persecutor was using with regard to Diston, almost syllable for syllable, the words that Diston had so short a time ago used in reference to him. "So long as he doesn't trouble you—or me—again, do you insist on knowing what I've done with him?"

There was a difference. Diston had made that speech, speaking in the future tense, and Barrows used the past. The future tense refers to things not yet achieved, but the past tense carries the announcement of accomplishment.

Pettigrew did not answer, and Barrows came on into the room, switching on more lights. He stood at the foot of the bed with arms folded and regarded him out of undeviating eyes, while Pettigrew crouched back with chattering teeth.

"So, that's that," commented Barrows; "and now you might as well get up and return to me the things that your Man Friday stole from my pockets."

Pettigrew tried to sit up straight. He strove to speak, and his voice was an uncertain quaver.

"Won't there be an outcry?" he demanded. "Won't they—won't they find him?"

"They won't find him," was the brief and dry response. "Get up!"

The man who had once again essayed murder and failed obeyed like one who had been long bedridden. Now a mixed emotion was buffeting him; the fear of admitting to his tormentor that he had burned the confession and the knowledge that in making that assertion he would be, in some part, declaring success.

As Barrows led the way into the study the other followed with shambling steps and sank into a chair by the table. The lights flashed on.

"Now for the restoration of stolen goods," Barrows prompted him; and, unable to simulate any echo of triumph, Pettigrew pointed bleakly to the open hearth where lay remnants of freshly burned paper.

For a space Barrows said nothing, but stood looking at the little scene of incineration. His face as Pettigrew stared at it was still inhuman in its incurious emptiness of emotion. It was incredible that a man whose life had just been assailed could wear such a stony calm.

There upon the last of the coals lay the burned paper which had been the crux of the whole remarkable affair. It had burned, as a paper sometimes will, to entire destruction, yet holding its shape and showing on the white ash film of its ghost residue the tracing of the ink where the signature had been. It looked intact, although a touch, even a breath, would have dissolved it into flying particles of white dust.

"That, at least," snarled the older man, seeking to speak with the assertiveness of satisfaction, "you won't get back."

Barrows made no direct response to the announcement. His words when he did speak appeared irrelevant.

"Before you destroyed it," he inquired, "did you take the precaution of studying the notary's seal?"

"The notary's seal?" echoed the other. "Why should I?"

"Because had you done so," came the bland response, "you would have seen that that was not the original paper—that it was merely a copy. The body of the paper was easy to reproduce. Your signature was a traced forgery—but the seal was a harder thing to fake."

"But why? Why? I don't understand."

"Possibly. Then I'll explain. I carried that copy to keep you guessing; to give you something to work for and try to steal back. It was the prize held constantly before your eyes, or the carrot before your nose, whichever you prefer. But I was hardly imbecile enough to trust the original on my person. The original is in a safety vault, and it is accompanied by my will which bequeaths it to the district attorney."

Pettigrew slumped back farther in his chair and on his face stole out fresh beads of sweat.

While he sat speechless with gray defeat on his face he started suddenly because again there was a creak on the back stair, but Barrows, lifting a thoughtful face, commented absently:

"There seems to be a good deal of traffic passing through this house to-night—for a locked mansion."

Then the rear door opened and Andrew Diston entered the room. He was no longer masked, and he seemed neither injured nor nervous.

Pettigrew he ignored completely, but, crossing to Barrows, he held out a pair of handcuffs, which in matter of fact fashion Barrows accepted.

"I carried those bracelets off in my pocket by oversight, chief," said the dummy chucker. "I thought you might want them."

"Thank you, Andy," said Barrows. "that will be all to-night. You can hit the hay now and get a bit of rest."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

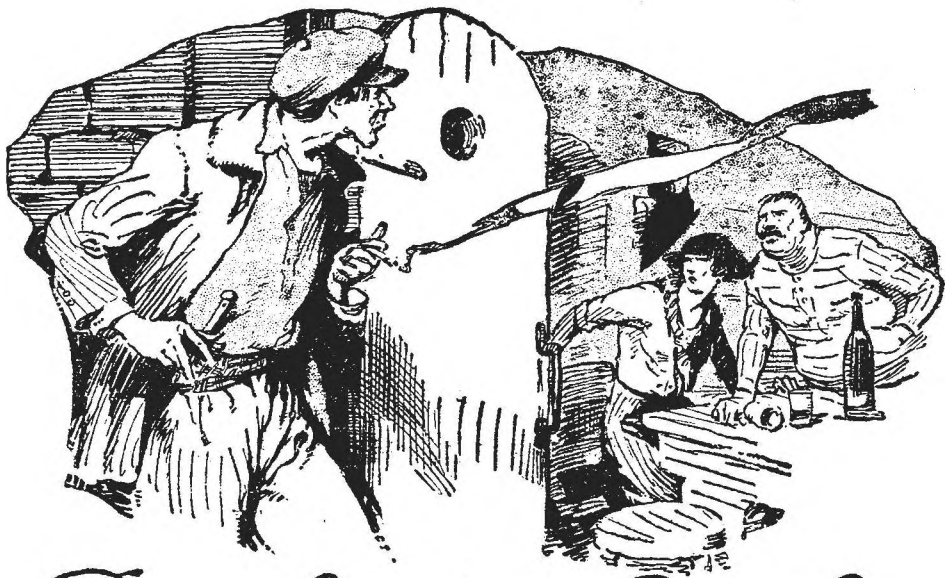
THE FLAPPER-MOTHER

I SAW her in a railroad train—
True "flapper" type was she.
No finer scion of the strain
Could any wish to see.
Her ears were hung with glaring gauds;
Her lips were penciled red;
Such hair-bob as the barber lauds
Had coifed her fluffy head.

Yet in her arms she held a child—
Her own, as none could doubt
Who saw the love all undefiled
That from her soul looked out
(Through *à la mode* mascara stain)
And seemed to voice a prayer
Ancient as Eve's o'er erring Cain;
The "mother look" was there!

So let them gloom as gloom they will
(Are some not glooming ever?);
True motherhood is with us still,
Though pessimists endeavor
To make us think its day is past
And fill us with despair.
One memory gives me pleasure vast—
The "mother look" was there.

Strickland Gillilan.



Brother to the Snake

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

THE Serpent slid quickly past a police agent at the corner of the wide Boulevard de Sebastopol, and turning into the sordid dry ditch at the base of houses apparently tottering toward each other in a fall of crumbling masonry which goes by the name of Rue Quincampoix, gave a sigh of relief as he found himself unnoticed.

Wending his way with the agile motions which had contributed to his nickname among the criminals of Paris, a name given to him principally on account of the swift slash of his knife darting out like a serpent's tongue, he reached the alley. There, pulling his cap down over his well oiled hair, he lit a cigarette, and kicking a mangy dog out of his way he stepped inside quickly, and pushed open the second door that he came to.

The man and woman sitting at the table looked up swiftly.

"*Tiens!* The Serpent!" exclaimed Le Grand Titi, shoving back his chair in an abrupt manner.

The woman said nothing, but her eyes narrowed as she put out her hands to grip the edge of the greasy table, which was lit by a single candle.

"Yes, the Serpent," replied the intruder. "Hello, Louise. Hello, Titi."

"All right," said Titi curtly, rising to his feet and drawing his broad leather belt tight with a jerk. "We'll go outside. You wait here, kid."

The Serpent blew a cloud of smoke toward the low, discolored ceiling.

"That does not suit me," he announced slowly. "Sit down. I mean you no harm."

"If it is to come back to you—" began Louise sullenly.

"Shut up, you," broke in Titi sharply. "When two gentlemen talk the woman keeps her trap closed."

She sat back in her chair with an air of obedience to fate.

"You have her well trained, comrade," remarked the Serpent.

"Thanks to you, I suppose," said Titi gruffly.

"Thanks to me, if you like. Well, you seem surprised to see me."

"Yes."

"I got six months off for good behavior. And yesterday I was free. Naturally, the first thing to do is look you up, look up my pal, Titi, who has been looking after my woman. I did not believe it when I was told. But it is true."

"It is true. What then?" Titi's heavy face stiffened.

"If it is to come back to you—" Louise repeated mechanically, as though some mental record revolved once more upon her talking machine.

"Will you shut up?" said Titi, roughly turning upon her. "*Bon sang!* Have I to teach you a lesson?"

"A boot is a good thing," suggested the Serpent carelessly as he looked about him. "You have not been doing well lately. I expected to find you better lodged, Titi."

"Business is bad. You can't move a step but a police agent gets on your trail. The deputies have been raising a row in the house—set of dirty pigs. How is a man to live if they do not let him?"

"At first," said the Serpent thoughtfully, apparently disregarding the question, "I thought of slitting both your throats with my knife, but in prison one has time to think things over. I am a man of sense, eh, Titi?"

"Truly," admitted the other dully. "A man of sense."

"And so I said to myself, what good would it do? So I made up my mind to—"

"I will not come back to you." The woman sprang to her feet. "Understand that! I am through with you, Serpent."

"Ah! Not so much talk, kid. Don't insult my pal," Titi snarled. "Shut up!"

His ready hand caught her a resounding slap on the cheek, and she fell back in her chair.

"That is the way to treat her," said the Serpent approvingly. "The more you beat her the better she'll like you. Well, my troubles are yours now, comrade. Good luck to you. As or her nonsense about coming back. Bah! Keep her. Keep her!"

"All right."

"You'll have your hands full. I have mine full enough of affairs now, Titi. First I have a fine job to pull off—a job of ten thousand francs, for which I may need the help of a pal; and second, I am going to find out who sold me up to the police, and I have a pretty good idea—"

"You have an idea?" interposed Titi, lighting a cigarette.

"At first I thought it might have been you, comrade."

"*Bon sang!* It wasn't me, Serpent. Give you my word—me sell a pal? No!"

"No!" continued the Serpent smoothly. "You might take my woman when I was out of the way—like a friend, eh—but you would not betray me to the police, Titi."

The other nodded uneasily.

"*Bon sang!* No!"

The Serpent shifted his evil smile to Louise, then resumed.

"When I get him, I shall know what to do, that is all. I'll cut his tongue out, and worse—yes, and worse, blast him!"

He was gratified to see the rigid lines of terror fade from the woman's face.

"Give me a glass!" he said abruptly. "Is this the way to treat a visitor?"

Louise filled a glass of wine and pushed it toward him.

"Thanks, kid!"

The Serpent bowed politely, raised the glass and swallowed the red wine at a gulp.

"Bah!" he said. "We should be drinking better wine than that, Titi. It is sour. Well, I'll be going."

"As you please," said Titi uneasily; "and since you bear no ill will—"

"Ill will?" demanded the Serpent as if astonished. "What an idea! You have done me a service, Titi. I'd like to do one for you in return. This is no way to live, pal. You ought to have some comfort in life—a nice apartment—an automobile—money to spend."

"From where?" asked Titi sullenly. "I tell you there is not a thing doing. The rat was pinched for merely squinting at a house. I tell you there's not a thing doing—"

"Since I left," said the Serpent in apparent good humor. "Ah, you missed the Serpent. *Eh bien*, he is back. Now we shall all be rich, but—"

He hesitated.

Le Grand Titi threw a glance full of meaning at the woman who was surreptitiously pulling at his sleeve.

"What's your hurry, pal?" he asked. "Sit down. Let's hear about it. There never was one like you, Serpent, for nosing out jobs. You remember the last one—the old man—"

"That was a joke." The Serpent laughed softly. "What a face he made when I tickled his ribs with my knife, but he coughed up. Pity it wasn't more. Only a thousand francs in small silver, the old skinflint."

"And then when the knife slipped—by accidentlike—and he let out a yell, and you pricked his tongue," continued Titi, his eyes brightening, "*Dieu!* What a dull life since you were put away! Those were the days, pal."

"We must bring them back again, old comrade," said the Serpent. "Listen, I know of—but I don't talk business before women," he added sharply.

"Get out, kid," commanded Titi. "Get out and stay out. The Serpent and me has something more to do than look at you. And let me see you smile, kid. There's fine clothes coming to you. Take that funeral face out and lose it, do you hear?"

Louise rose slowly and went to the door. At it she paused, and turned.

"I warn you," she said shrilly. "The Serpent means you no good. I know his tricks."

"Get out with you. *Bon sang!* When a chance comes along, you want to stand in my way. Get out of here, and hurry!"

A glass crashed against the door jamb, and ducking hastily, the woman with one despairing glance backward, went out.

"Name of Judas," said Titi, breathing heavily, "what can you make of them? She shouts her head off for money all the time—well, oftener than she ought to, and when a pal comes to show me the way to make some, she shouts harder than ever. I don't say she ain't all right most ways, but she don't like you, Serpent, I'm sorry to say."

"Never mind her," and the Serpent chuckled to himself. "They're all alike. I'm glad I'm quit of her hanging on my coat tails. You did me a good turn, comrade, now I'll do you one. Give me another glass of vinegar."

"What's the job?"

The Serpent rose and went to the door, closed it, then returned to his seat.

"I got out yesterday. Stir ain't no boudoir, pal, and I nearly went crazy with joy to feel the asphalt under my feet again. I kept walking round, sitting on benches for hours. I was passing through rue Daubenton when I sees an old gent tearing his hair. In front of his house was a truck unloading big cases, and the two drivers couldn't move one of them. So *monsieur* with the white whiskers hails me. 'Do you want to earn five francs?' says he. So I says 'Yes,' and puts my shoulder under the case. We carries the big box into the house, through a hall and into a storeroom at the back. I keeps my eyes open. Silverware, cases of jewels, gold, everything. Seems he was a collector. And when I was in the big room at the back I sees a little door, and when no one's looking I opens it. That door opens on an alley to the street. The key was in the door. Quick as a wink I locks it, pockets the key, collects my silver cartwheel, and walks out of the house as innocent as a baby. Now, I need a pal. It's a sure thing. Are you on, Titi? If you ain't, there is plenty others ready to jump at it."

"It's safe, you say?"

"Couldn't be safer."

"All right. I'm with you."

"That's the pal. Don't say a word to the kid. You know what she is."

"The kid is all right," retorted Titi fiercely. "I may give her a cuff or two for her health, but she's all right, do you understand,"

"Zut! I have nothing to do with her, pal, only the fewer in on this job the better. See? Now, if you're ready, come on. It's ten o'clock now. The old boy is going out to-night. I heard him tell his housekeeper he was going to a swell affair.

We'll go and have a glass of the real stuff to warm us up."

Titi nodded, rose, put on his cap and followed the Serpent obediently.

At the exit of the passage a dark figure rose between them and the dim light of the street. Her clutching fingers dragged across the sleeve of Titi's coat as he thrust her aside.

"Wait till I come back," he said.

"Yes, wait till he comes back," echoed the Serpent, and chuckled softly. "Come on, pal."

The two men—the Serpent lithe, lean, narrow shouldered; Titi of a more solid build, less agile, plunged into the maze of narrow alleys which still preserve the illusion of the middle ages, and made their way to the riverside. They had a drink in a wine shop, then hurrying along the quai in the shadow of the wall, swiftly crossed the river to the left bank, and ascended the slope of the rue Cardinal Lemoine into rue Monge. A block away the statue of a thief redeemed by his love of beauty, the poet Villon, saw them hasten past. They were now in a quarter of law students, struggling musicians, artists, professors and honest storekeepers.

The Serpent glided silently, without speaking, indicating the way only by a jerk of his head.

Once Titi caught him by the arm and pointed to a stout man in a fur coat sauntering in a solitary street of darkened houses, and prepared to loosen the long scarf from his neck.

"None of that," said the Serpent in a decisive whisper. "Leave the bourgeois alone. We have bigger game to-night."

And Titi obediently knotted the scarf again. With it he could have performed the trick of stealing up behind the fat man, whipping the scarf over his head and under his chin, then turning suddenly and garotting him by lifting him onto his bent back. But the Serpent was right—as usual. What was a watch and a purse to the pockets full of money which his pal had promised him as they went over the Pont Marie?

"Now, listen," said the Serpent, stopping suddenly, "there is the back alley. You see it is too narrow for a truck to go through, otherwise the case would have been delivered there easily, and there would be no story for to-morrow's papers. Halfway up is the door—the third door. We go in. We close the door. You wait in the storeroom while I go into the house and take a look round. Listen, now; if you hear anything in the alley, whistle twice. Is that plain?"

Titi cleared his throat. What a fellow this was for making plans that always worked!

"Yes, that is understood, pal."

All at once he felt disturbed. It was months since he had done a job. What if anything were to happen?

"Pah!" he said, and spat for luck. "Let's get a move on. It's cold."

"Oh, ho, you're in a hurry all at once," and the Serpent made a curious hissing through his teeth. "*Eh bien.* So much the better. Forward!"

The door yielded to the key which the Serpent had pocketed the day before, and the two men descended a couple of steps to the floor. The Serpent closed the door softly behind him, and gave Titi a slight push over to one side.

"Stand here. Don't move away. And two whistles!" he whispered into Titi's ear and slipped away with the surety of the night prowler.

Titi shrugged his shoulders. The Serpent had his little ways. He loved to do the job himself, with one assistant to be on guard, working in silence, often without a light, with socks over his shoes and rubber gloves over his cruel, thin fingers. He had never given himself away, and he would not have served a term in prison had not some one gone with tales to the police. And though Titi had never uttered a word on the subject, he had a shrewd notion of the informer's name and sex.

This was a queer joint he was in, reeking with ancient and mysterious smells. The darkness was thick about him, nor did it seem to become less heavy and oppressive as the minutes dragged on. The Apache turned his head from side to side, peering here and there, but he could distinguish no definite object or reassuring shape. From

one corner beside him came a strange occasional noise as of some object being dragged over the floor with infinite pains. A rat no doubt with a straw or fragment of food. For a storeroom the atmosphere was unnaturally warm, and especially after the cold of out of doors. Titi's eyes, weary with straining, began to droop.

"*Bon sang!*" he thought to himself. "This will never do. I shall be falling asleep. What is keeping the Serpent?"

He drew a cigarette from his pocket and closed his lips upon it.

Finished—the poverty, the sour wine, the scraps from the market, refuse from the hotels. To-morrow a good meal, a good bed, a good cigarette—new clothes—a new dress for the kid. Funny about the Serpent. A queer cold-blooded fellow that like—like the serpents he was named for. Another man had taken his girl, and he comes back, shakes his hand, congratulates him, and gives him a pocketful of money. And yet one time in his life he had seemed to be crazy about Louise. A dangerous fellow, the Serpent, when he was in a bad mood. Assuredly if he had not been out of the way, safely as he thought, he, Titi, would have steered clear of his girl. He must go easy with the kid, or maybe she would serve him the way she had served the Serpent. *Dame!* What was he thinking of—in this silence where perhaps thoughts were audible.

What was keeping the Serpent? Not a sound from beyond, out of that darkness which had swallowed up his pal.

The devil take that rat. Why had Providence given vermin like rats eyes to see in the dark? If only he could see a foot in front of him he would feel more at his ease. Supposing now the old man, armed and waiting, had surprised his pal.

Suddenly his drowsy brain leaped to its sentinel post. A door had clicked. The muscles of his back tautened, the drumming of his pulses seemed to deafen his powers of hearing. Some one was coming. Was it the Serpent or not? Titi let the cigarette fall from his dry lips and moistened them. There was a creak in the silence. For a moment he hesitated, then exhaled his breath in two faint hissings. An echo answered the signal, and out of the darkness some one approached and touched him.

"Titi?"

"Yes."

At the familiar touch Titi could have flung his arms about his pal.

"Well?" he asked in a whisper.

"A handful of jewels, unset, a pocketful of gold ornaments, and a wad of notes."

"*Bigre!* We are in luck."

"Heard anything?"

"A rat in the corner."

The pressure of the hand upon his arm reassured him. It increased and imperceptibly he obeyed the force which was moving him away from where he stood.

"Good! We'd best make our get-away. Wait till I find the door. It's so cursed dark."

Tito stood waiting. A good thing the Serpent had eyes like an animal.

He heard a click. They were safe. The door was open.

"Go ahead. Up two steps, pal," The Serpent gave him a push.

Titi obeyed eagerly, and put his foot over the sill.

"*Dieu!*" he said, astonished. "I can't see yet—it's warm outside."

A sudden thrust upon his shoulder sent him forward, and he fell sprawling on hands and knees. There was a click as of a door closing.

"Hi, Serpent!" he cried.

There was no reply. What had happened? It was still dark. That was strange. Outside in the night it should have been lighter surely. And what was that rustling near him, the strange smell?

"Serpent! Old pal!" he cried again.

His groping hands touched sand, pebbles, then a glassy surface. All at once he emitted a frightened gasp. His hands had fallen upon something cold and rough which moved, slipping beneath his fingers.

A flame of light flashed into being in the darkness, and behind it dimly the mocking, distorted face of the Serpent.

Titi's lips voiced some inaudible sounds. As the match expired he crashed his fist against the place where the face had been. It struck glass.

The spark of red moved, then went black.

An oblong of gray opened in the darkness as the Serpent stepped up into the alley and vanished as the door was closed. Titi was alone with that which moved insidiously, a strange, flexible mass which already had encircled his right leg, cold, merciless, the latest importation of Professor Ristori, curator of the reptile house of the Jardin des Plantes, close by, the zoo of Paris.

The Serpent glided back to the Rue de Venise by the way he had come, whistling softly to himself as if greatly pleased. What a joke to have showed Titi into the prison of the great snake which garrotted so neatly!

When he came to the dark way from which Titi had accompanied him a couple of hours before, he drew a long breath, then went in quickly.

The door opened to his kick. He entered sinuously, closed the door, and put his back against it.

The woman, sitting at the table, almost as if she had sat there in the attitude in which she had discovered her with her lover, slid her arms from the table and slowly put a hand up to her bare throat.

"If you say a word," said the Serpent slowly, "you know what will happen. You know. Answer me."

She shuddered convulsively.

"Answer me!" he repeated implacably.

"Yes!"

"Good! Then, we understand each other. Put on your hat and cloak. Come. I have no time to lose. Do you hear?"

She emitted a gasp as though struck by a heavy hand.

"Get up!"

She staggered to her feet uncertainly and looked at him with eyes full of terror.

A strange babbling came from her parted lips:

"Tit—Titi—Titi?"

"Ah, you are concerned about him, are you? Finished with him, my girl. You're through with him. You've had your fun—now you're coming with me—and when I say work, you'll work. When I say love, you'll love me—as you loved him. See?"

She moaned, with a whimpering noise.

The Serpent advanced and jerked her roughly upright. He thrust his flat, sallow face toward her white one, his black eyes ferocious with cold menace.

"Listen! No tricks! You won't get another chance to sell me to the police so long as I have an eye to watch you and an arm to beat you. Your hat—your coat. Quick. We have a train to catch."

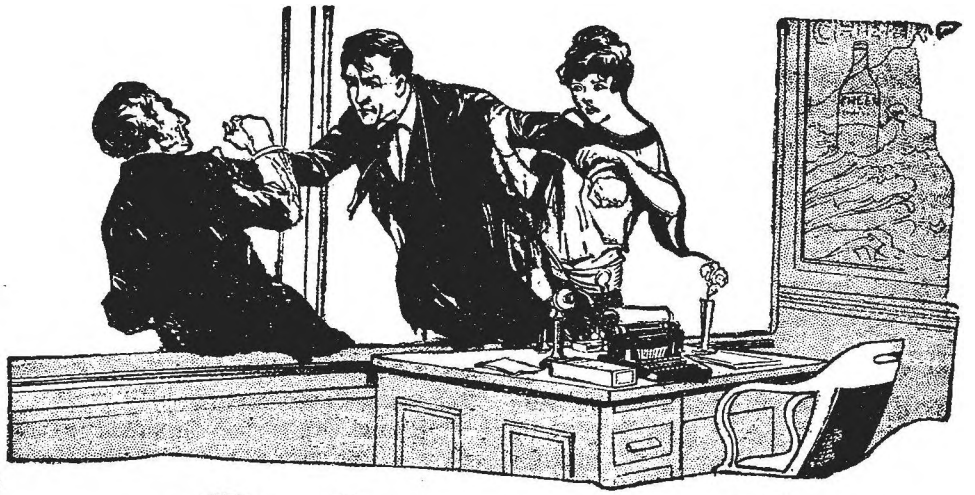
He shook her like a rat, then pushed her away.

Mutely, trembling in every limb, she put on her hat and cloak, looking at him with eyes which besought an answer to her still unsatisfied question.

"Don't worry about him. I'm your man now—your little man. See. He's done with you," said the Serpent softly, now that his object was gained. "I left him in good company—he's found another girl; he's "—he grinned at the humor of his imagination—"he's in the embrace of my sister the Snake."

With a rush he propelled Louise in front of him.

He had taught Titi a lesson. Now for the woman who had sold him to the police. She should pay a hundred times—a thousand times—for what she had done. And pleasantly reviewing in his mind the exquisite tortures which crush the human soul from its envelope of weak flesh, the Serpent continued to drive his companion in front of him toward the railroad station.



Cheero, Inc.

By JACK BECHDOLT

Author of "South of Fifty-Three," "The One Way Street," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ULTIMATUM FROM KATE.

THE next morning Trench was home. Kate coming to business, rather pale, rather tired, bewildered still with her terrible problem, entered the private office and found him sitting in his old place. When Trench saw her start of amazement he laughed delightedly.

"Fooled you, Kate! That's one I put over on you. Yep, I decided if you were getting away with anything I'd just drop down and catch you with the goods. Oh, I say—*Kate!*"

Trench saw that Kate was more upset by the shock than he first thought. She was white and visibly trembling. He was instantly on his feet, his hand on her arm, his face all concern for her.

"Here, this is too bad! Sorry—I was a fool to startle you that way! Sit down, Kate—it's all right now. I'm sorry I surprised you that way—only a joke. Why, Kate, you're white and tired. You worked too hard—and it's been warm, too. I told you not to work too hard. Do you want the squirrels paging you, like they did old man Farnsworth? Eh, Kate, my dear, you're crying. Kate!"

Kate wiped her eyes with an unsteady hand. "I'm a nut to act this way," she apologized with a damp smile. "Thinking about something else—when I came in. You—it sort of got my goat for a second. There, all right now. Well, what's the good word? Bring back any scandal?"

Trench still hovered with an anxious face. He brought her a glass of water; a cushion for her head.

"I tell you I'm all right," Kate reassured him. "Don't be so darn motherly! You make me feel like a fool. What brought you home, anyhow? Lose your roll on the ponies—or did you buy oil stock?"

"No," Trench answered her with an unusual sincerity. "I got homesick, Kate. I was lonely for you—"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 23

Kate made a little noise in her throat, half derisive, half triumphant over the compliment. "You're an old dear to say that!"

"Yes, and I mean it. I've been so close to business—and you—all this year I didn't realize before just how much—" Trench stopped himself. He looked guilty. "I beg your pardon. I know you don't care for that sort of thing, especially in business hours—and I promised myself to reform."

"Did you, John? Sit down over there, where you belong. That's better. Now—"

Kate leaned her elbows on the broad desk and stared at her employer. Her smile was a little crooked, but altogether charming. "Keep right on with what you're saying," she commanded. "Spill it! I—it sounds good to-day."

Trench's face flushed. His gray eyes began to shine with surprise and delight. "Why," he said uncertainly, "I—by George, I believe you're glad to see me!"

"I am. I'm—damned glad!"

"Kate, that's good of you—that's mighty good. I don't want to seem maudlin—or anything, but I did miss you. I missed you a lot worse than I ever thought I could miss any living human being. It kind of hurt me—like an aching tooth—only there isn't any kind of dentist for that sort of hurt. Used to keep me awake nights, I"—Trench pulled himself up again—"spent a couple weeks in New York," he reported in his usual business tone. "Saw old Oscar Hayden, of the Hayden Agency, and made a lot of plans for a national advertising campaign. Hayden thinks I've got a winner in Cheer-O. Talked to some of the wholesalers, the big firms, and got a line on the figure they'll ask to handle our stuff—"

"Tell me some more about dentists and aching teeth," Kate interrupted.

"Kate Singleton! What in the world has come over you? Are you feeling all right?"

"I'm feeling bully—since you got back," Kate crowed softly.

Trench was out of his chair again, amazed, incredulous. He stood beside her, one uncertain hand on the back of her chair. He was rather breathless with surprise and emotion.

"I wonder if I'm asleep," he whispered with a puzzled face. "This don't seem exactly natural."

"No, it doesn't, John—but it's awfully comforting," Kate admitted.

He began sternly: "Now see here! You've deliberately led me on to say what I know you don't want to hear. But you'll have to listen to me. I mean this. Kate, I'm in love with you—got it bad, all over, worse than measles or anything. I—while I was away I began to understand just how bad it was. I got a different slant on you, Kate—while I was gone. I began to see that I couldn't very well get along without you any longer. I'm mad about you! And you've got to give me an answer. Now. Kate, can you love me? Can you?"

She considered him deliberately, with eyes narrowed. He bent close to her and his face was more serious and, in some way, older than she had ever seen him.

"Will you marry me, Kate Singleton?" he whispered.

"Do you know," Kate whispered back shakily, "you never asked me that before!"

"Kate!"

He had his arms about her and she burrowed her face against his shoulder. She clung there, holding him fast while he tried, incoherently, to tell her how much he cared, to apologize for the past, to promise for the future. She held him tightly for that moment and she murmured as she clung: "Thank God for a man to cry on!"

Then, before Trench could kiss her, she had freed herself and in voice and manner she took command again.

"Before I answer you—before we say anything more, you go back and sit down where you belong. We've got to settle one question first."

Wondering, Trench obeyed her.

From his own side of the desk he faced her. "Well? I'm ready. Shoot!"

"I want you to lay all your cards on the table—face up," she said sternly.

Trench flushed. For a moment his eyes left hers. He was uneasy, and seeing that, Kate's heart sank.

"Ah—just which cards—"

"All your cards. You know what I mean. I want to know now, before we go a step

farther, just where you stand. Just how Cheer-O stands. John—I've got to know—John Trench, what kind of game are you playing with Carfax?"

"What's Carfax got to do with us?" Trench scowled. She saw before he spoke that he would try to evade.

"He's got this much to do—he's mixed up with Cheer-O. And I've got to know exactly what your plans are."

"Kate, I didn't ask you to marry Cheer-O. It's me we're talking about—"

"Yes, it's you. That's why I'm asking this. But if I married you, John, I'd marry your business. Yes, I would! Because a man's business is a part of him—and it's a big part of him. It's what he thinks about almost as much as his wife—and maybe a lot more. And if that business isn't on the level—well, John, I don't think the man is on the level either. Now, we understand each other."

"But I love you—not your business of being a private secretary. I don't ask you to show your cards!"

"No. Because if I'm your wife that 'd be all the business I'd have left—just being a good wife. Look here, John Trench, you're going to answer that question—if you mean what you told me just now."

All her old determination was in her direct, challenging gaze. Her brown eyes studied him as if they could lay bare all his secrets. Something had inspired Kate Singleton to a wisdom that was greater than she knew.

Trench showed a hint of his old sulkiness. He was a little ashamed and a little angry and inclined to be stubborn about it. He felt that he had been tricked in some way.

"You know what this busines is as well as I do."

"I don't know. I don't know what your plans are. I don't know whether this Cheer-O thing is—what Carfax thinks it is—a money making business—an *honest* business—or just a plain, slick, cheap—"

"Well?" Trench prompted sharply when she hesitated.

"Just a—swindle."

Trench sank deep into his chair. His hand began caressing his face, pulling cheeks and lips into strange contortions. He studied her through narrowed eyes.

"Look here. Somebody's been talking to you. Carfax?"

"Carfax?" Her scornful smile answered that. "And never mind that. Are you going to answer my question?"

"You're a funny one, Kate. A funny one! Your ideas are unique. But I love you. I do love you—and yes, I'll answer your question. I think enough of you for that. You can see my cards—and that proves I love you, I think."

A moment more he hesitated, then he unlocked the drawer of his desk and drew out some papers—papers that Kate recognized as his cost reports, his private reports. He tossed them across the table.

"If you look at those you'll see that Cheer-O does not pay a profit," he began sulkily. "I can just break even with the present process, barely break even. If Amos Wormser can't find a better way to make it, Cheer-O is a sure guarantee of bankruptcy."

What he said was absolute confirmation of Farnsworth's angry accusations. Kate's quick glance through the cost reports was further confirmation. An awful sense of desolation was in her heart, so that she felt terribly alone and afraid.

She wanted to scream that the reports were lies—that what he had said was a lie. She was shamed for him and she desired to hide her shame.

But Trench was going on: "Walter Carfax put thirty thousand dollars into the business as a loan. He took twice that much in stock and security. Since you must know all, you might as well understand that I started knowing I couldn't make Cheer-O at a profit. I started it because—well, because it looks to an outsider like a gold mine. I figured I'd sell my gold mine to Carfax.

"Carfax's notes fall due to-morrow. I can let him foreclose the stock—which he's crazy to do, figuring in that way he'll get a strangle hold on me. What he doesn't figure is that I keep a controlling interest; that I'm going to promptly shut down the business and hold him up—make him buy me out. And he'll do it. I know Carfax."

Kate nodded dully that she understood. She did understand, only too well. Farnsworth was right. Trench was crooked. He had deliberately planned a swindle. He proposed to go through with it.

Something that was fine and fresh and spontaneous in her love for Trench died with his words. Admiration was gone. And yet she loved him. She loved him fiercely, and with a great, understanding sympathy —because she knew Trench needed her.

Trench flashed his old time smile at her. He had the manner of a man who had done something unpleasant, but in the way of duty, and who was glad it was over. He said in his good natured, tolerant way:

" There—you know as much about Cheer-O as I do—all my deep, dark, dank secrets—every last one of 'em. Please, now may I leave my chair and come over and kiss you? You love me, don't you, Kate?"

Kate did not seem to hear him. She was thinking about John Farnsworth, who had spent the best part of his lifetime brooding over his son; who had dedicated himself to the task of making that son honest. She couldn't like Farnsworth. His antagonistic attitude, his wrong-headed obstinacy, his gloomy religious views, all those were utterly at outs with all she was and believed. Yet she couldn't help but admire him in his magnificent failure.

Kate also considered herself as honestly as possible. Not much of a girl, frivolous, selfish, overshrewd in the ways of the world. Rather a parasite, to be frank about it.

Responsibility appalled her. Who asked her to judge—or to interfere? What right had she to do it? Her old cautious, common sense urged her:

" Lay off—lay off! It's a family row—and not your family. You can't flag a mad bull with a powder puff. Besides, he loves you. Why worry?"

But she asked: " Can the thing be made to pay, possibly?"

Trench shook his head. " Oh, Wormser had some idea he might find a cheap process," he added; " but there's nothing to that. Now, can I—"

Kate drew a long breath and clenched her hands.

" So you've kidded yourself into thinking you love me?"

" Kidded myself! Oh, no. I do—you know it."

She shook her head slowly, smiling with plain unbelief.

" Oh, yes, I know! You *think* you think you do. You're all het up about it right now. But—"

Trench's eyes were flashing angrily.

" I do love you, and you know it," he repeated grimly. " Why all this silly chatter?"

Still she smiled, a little contemptuously. " Oh, you're good when you get going. They don't do it better anywhere—not even in the movies. You've got fire in your eye, and you make a wonderful close up when you do deep breathing exercises like that—"

Trench exclaimed angrily. Rising, he leaned across the desk.

" Stop that!" he said. " Stop it, you hear!"

Kate applauded as if she were at a play.

" You do it splendidly. None better. Great! But—"

" But what? I told you I loved you. I thought—well, you seemed to like it. Now you intimate plainly that I'm a liar. Well?"

" Yes, you told me so." Kate was getting rather breathless.

" Well!"

" Show me. That's what I mean—show me!" She was on her feet now, her face close to Trench's and her hand striking the desk. " You've got to prove to me that you mean what you say—prove it, beyond any question."

" I'll prove it!" Trench stepped quickly from his side of the desk.

She held him at arm's length with one hand, her unwinking gaze meeting his.

" Only one way you can do that," she murmured. " Only one way."

" Any way you say—any way! What is it? What do you want?"

" You say you love me—you *say* it well. Mind you, I give you credit for believing it right now. But every woman's from Missouri when it comes to love, John! They've got to be shown. You're a business man,

and I can't marry the man part of you without marrying the business half too. You've got to admit that John, because it's so. Well, I like the man half of you darn well. Yes, I admit it. Wait—don't crowd yet! But I don't like the business half of you—one—damned—bit. And there you are."

Trench stared mightily. There was a good deal of puzzlement in his stare, as if he suspected some occult meaning in this declaration.

"I mean just that," she went on, her smile a little crooked from the hurt in her heart. "If I take you, you'll have to come to me clean—come to me honest. And Cheer-O isn't either clean or honest. If you want me you'll have to divorce Cheer-O. She's not my kind of girl. Wind it up, the whole works, wind it up—and give Carfax back his money. I think that's all."

"By God, I knew you weren't feeling right!" Trench exclaimed after a long blank look. "You've overdone—it must be this hot weather—"

Kate shook her head vigorously.

"I'm all right—and you know it. Don't spar for wind like that. I gave you my proposition. What's your answer?"

"How can I answer such nonsense—such silly rot!"

"You'll have to answer that silly rot, just the same. If you want me—"

"Very well, then. Listen." She saw that Trench's face was grim. She knew he was deeply stirred. She felt that what he said now he meant and would live up to. She was badly frightened.

"I'll tell you one good reason I built up this business you've taken such a sudden hate to. You'll admit I've done some work on it; put a lot of time and thought into it? Well, the reason for that, at least the chief reason, was that I once had a splendid, wonderful girl as my secretary—a girl who became my pal. I was glad to work for that girl. I was glad to scheme my head off, because whatever it got me gave that girl a good time—little pleasures of all sorts. And when she was happy I was happy too. So, pretty soon, the whole foolish business got to mean just one thing to me—it stood for Kate Singleton's happiness. And all the time I was planning and working this thing up, I never heard one word of objection from that girl—not one word."

Kate cried a protest. "Oh! Unfair. She never knew—"

"She never asked. She never showed that she cared," Trench answered sternly. "Further, I don't think she did care. She—well, she didn't show such a damned nice solicitude about these little things."

Kate's face flushed. What he said was brutal in its truth, and unfair—but true. She had to admit it was true. And she saw in a flash that she would lose him because of what she had been.

"No," Trench went on, "she didn't care. So I went on until I was ready to clean up. I was ready to give the girl all I'd worked for and won. And now—now when I've gone on to the finish, she turns it down. It's not nice enough for her. It's not clean—not honest. I ask you, have you been honest with me? Have you been fair?"

Kate answered in a quiet little voice she scarcely knew as her own. She was pale again, but her chin was high and her eyes were brave.

"I'm trying to be fair now. Trying to be on the level. I—my dear, I had to do it. I can't help it—that's my ultimatum!" A moment she wavered, then: "Give up this—this trick business—or give up me."

"That's flat?"

"That's flat."

Trench, also pale, his mouth hard and his eyes cold, considered her with deadly gravity. "I'm afraid," he said at last—"I'm afraid that's rather—ridiculous. Sorry."

Kate bowed her head.

Trench hesitated just a little longer. Then he walked back to his chair, sat down and took up a great sheaf of mail that waited his reading.

"If you're ready, Miss Singleton," he said formally.

For more than two hours they sat at opposite sides of the desk. Kate's pencil covered page after page of her notebook. Her hand did not falter and her notes were perfect. But when she had finished, and gone back to her desk, she could not have said whether she had worked five seconds or

five days—or whether she had worked at all.

Trench gave no further sign of his emotions. During the day she saw him frequently. It was a day of great activity, with Amos Wormser hastily sent for in the midst of the long afternoon, and emerging after ten minutes with Trench red-faced and talking loudly to himself. Kate wrote many letters, arranged numerous conferences, supplied Trench with much needed information about the routine of his affairs. And all that time nobody could have guessed what had passed between them, nor what bitterness and hurt each hid from the other.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRENCH LEARNS THE TRUTH.

THE rest of the office force went home for the day at five o'clock. Kate, with an accumulation of work, remained at her desk, and she knew that Trench remained in his office.

It must have been half an hour after the exodus that the door from the public corridor opened and Kate looked up with a puzzled frown. The visitor was John Farnsworth.

Kate had worked through that terrible day with a sort of stupid faithfulness—a meticulous attention to details that was like an anæsthetic to her hurts. Whenever a relentless memory gave its first, premonitory twinge she flew at the task with a sort of frantic energy that only sought forgetfulness. Farnsworth's advent was the most unwelcome thing that could have happened. Of all living people she least wanted to see him. Her first impulse was to run from him.

The impulse, of course, was absurd. She couldn't run away, even if she wanted to. Rational people do not act that way, she told herself sternly while she lifted inquiring eyebrows at the late visitor.

"I wanted a few words with you, Miss Singleton," Farnsworth said monotonously. "I was not sure of finding you any place but here."

"I'm afraid that I—well, what is it?"

She came close to the little rail that separated the visitor's bench and Lester Harper's desk from the more sacred working ground of the room. Farnsworth eyed her coldly. Kate had a strange little dignity that was very lovely in this quiet evening hour. Her eyes were dark, and something of their old sparkle had gone, but in its place there was a finer glow, a light more steadfast and honest. She was pale, too, and her head dropped just a little, hinting that she was very tired.

The windows were open to welcome the warm summer breeze, salted by the wide stretches of the Sound, and this breeze stirred her fine spun hair, so that it caught a lovely aura of rich light. But all this beauty left Farnsworth unmoved.

"About what we discussed last night," Farnsworth murmured in his dull way. "About that unfortunate discovery of Randall's. I think you understand my position—what I have tried to do—what I intend, by some means, to do just as surely as I stand here?"

"Yes, I understand. But what can I—"

"Yes, I'm coming to that." Farnsworth hesitated. He studied her face a moment, trying to satisfy himself in some conclusion he had reached. "I'd like to speak very plainly," he said. "Perhaps I may not be very—tactful—"

A little ghost of Kate's old flippancy prompted her. "Sure. I know, something unpleasant. Well, shoot. I'm used to it!"

"Yes, something unpleasant," Farnsworth nodded. "I don't say it just to hurt you."

"Probably for my own good! They always told me that when it was something nasty," Kate murmured.

"Perhaps it is for your own good. I—I rather thought of it that way, Miss Singleton. I wish you'd consider it that way. About my—about John Trench, then. I told you the conclusion I reached. The boy's a fool—perhaps a dupe. He's brilliant and careless—and dishonest because he's weak."

Farnsworth's eye widened at a discovery. "You agree! You know?"

Kate nodded mutely and they exchanged a long glance.

"It is weakness," Farnsworth went on. "If the taint is on him he is not beyond hope. I—this is very painful—his companionship has been—"

"Yes, I know," she agreed. "His companionship has been rotten—meaning me!"

Farnsworth inclined his head.

"Yes, yes, I've been a bad influence. I know. I know all about that now. I led him astray—any *man* would say that." Kate was momentarily bitter.

Then she added: "Perhaps, after all, a man would be right. I did help him spend his money. Probably he thought I didn't care much how he got it. Maybe my example drove him to grab whatever he thought he could get away with. I—I'm not trying to escape my share of blame, Farnsworth. Not now. After all, it doesn't matter much about me, does it? Go ahead, get it off your chest."

Farnsworth cast aside his hesitation with a toss of his white head.

"I'm glad you're reasonable. Very glad. Now, I want to talk business with you—plain business. I have some means, Miss Singleton. My wife's fortune was not entirely exhausted—and now it is mine. I'm glad to have it if it will help me in any way to—to do what I mean to do. I want you to consider my proposition from your own interests and deal honestly with me. I'm willing to meet any reasonable figure you name—you catch my meaning, I think?"

Kate was suddenly conscious he had ceased to speak. She looked up with an apologetic start and smile.

"I beg your pardon. I was thinking—I'm afraid I didn't quite get that."

"I was making you an offer," Farnsworth repeated. "I'm willing you should name your own figure within reason. I want you to leave Trench's employ."

"You mean you are offering me another position? I must be awfully stupid to-night!"

"Not a position, exactly. Consider it compensation for—for whatever loss you would be at. I want you to leave John Trench. Now. To-night. This minute. That's clear?"

"All clear, so far."

"You will go away—without any word, you understand. There must be a promise of that. No letters, of course. Just leave. That's the only way. And how much will that cost me?"

"How much!" Kate began to stare with an awakened interest. A little color was coming back into her cheeks.

"Yes. How much?" Farnsworth took a billfold from his pocket. "You see, I came prepared," he murmured. "Come now, let's be businesslike. What's your figure?"

"You want to *pay* me for leaving Trench?"

"That's it. Now be fair to yourself. I'm not exactly poor. I'm not trying to bargain. But this has got to happen. You understand why."

"And you expect to buy me off?"

"At your own price—"

Farnsworth had the opportunity to say no more. Kate Singleton was fighting mad—too angry to think or care any longer what she said or did. The limit of her strength was passed. Her self-control was gone. This last insult, added to the trying chain of worries, responsibilities, and sacrifice, upset all poise and reason. Her slight figure stiffened and her outflung hand struck Farnsworth squarely in the mouth. She spoke and her voice rose and wavered hysterically while words clamored and tumbled for utterance.

"You rotten thing! You crooked, twisted, misborn thing. You—you, Farnsworth. And I—I thought I was pretty low. I thought I had sunk. I was shamed—and hated myself! But I never sank that low, Farnsworth. I never tried to buy man or woman. I never tried to bargain in decency. You thief—and sneak. You righteous faced devil—*devil—devil—*"

For some minutes John Trench, in his own room, had been on his feet, pacing, scowling, hesitating. Trench was suffering and the suffering was acute. A dozen times he had been on the verge of doing something—and evidently it was something that was to cost him dearly in humiliated pride.

A dozen times he had postponed action, only to pay for his delays with the restlessness he could not conquer. Before Kate began to speak he had reached a final resolution that led him to the door into the gen-

eral office and opened it. Thus he saw Kate and Farnsworth and hesitated in surprise. He heard what Kate said.

Trench crossed the room so quietly and quickly that neither Farnsworth nor Kate, absorbed in their own passion, saw or heard him. He vaulted the low rail beside Kate and had his hand wound tightly in Farnsworth's collar actually before they were fully aware of him.

Farnsworth reeled back in Trench's grasp and spun around so that he faced his son. He raised his hands to free the choking hold on his collar and Trench caught them in a fast grip.

The two men stood eye to eye. Both breathed hard. So they stood, saying nothing while Kate watched and tried vainly to make her lips articulate a warning.

Trench, who was easily superior in physical strength, loosed Farnsworth's hands with a quick gesture that brought his own closed fist ready to strike his victim.

Then it was Kate screamed and caught his arm.

She began to speak hoarsely, clinging all the time to Trench's arm to save Farnsworth that blow.

"No," she was crying passionately. "No, no! You shan't do that. You shan't! Let him free, you hear? Let him free!"

Trench gave her a surprised, sidelong glance. He muttered something savage in warning and tried to jerk his arm from her clasp.

Then he turned his attention to Farnsworth. His savage grip of the older man's collar threatened to choke off his wind.

"You jailbird," Trench growled. "I kicked you out of here. I told you to stay away. You dare come back, you sneaking crook—you convict—"

"Stop—stop that, John Trench. I say you shall stop it."

With all her strength—and that no little strength aided by hysteria—Kate tugged at the lifted arm and turned it aside.

"You shan't—you shall not!" She was sobbing with deep, rasping breaths.

"Shan't I?" Trench freed her grip with a savage gesture and his hand rose to strike.

"John!" Her scream of terror would not be denied. "John, your own flesh and blood. You must not hit him—your own flesh and blood. That man. Shame, shame and shame! Let him go—your own kin—let him go!"

Her cry made itself felt through all the red heat of Trench's anger. He released Farnsworth suddenly and turned dazedly toward her.

"What are you saying?"

"He—Farnsworth is—he is—ask him, John. Ask him!"

Trench passed his fingers across his eyes—the old, familiar gesture of restraint, bewilderment, doubt.

"Well," he panted at Farnsworth. "Suppose you answer."

"It's true," said Farnsworth, bitterly quiet. "I am of your own flesh and blood. The woman is right—"

Trench still frowned angrily. "I think you are a damned liar!" he whispered.

Farnsworth only shook his head.

"No, it is true. I am your father. Your father, John."

"Come here—with me." Trench, very white and grim, turned about, pushed open the wicket gate, and Farnsworth followed him across the office. Trench opened the door of his own room and the elder man passed in. Kate, watching spellbound, caught Trench's eye.

"Are you both insane—or am I?" he said.

She could only shake her head at him, and with her hands motioned him on to Farnsworth.

For a very long time Kate sat at her desk, that familiar, accustomed seat. Her hands were idle, a strange thing for her busy hands. Continually she watched Trench's door. There was a poignant pathos in her dumb vigil before that door. Accustomed to make and direct all situations, playing Destiny so often in the small affairs of life, for once she had made something that had passed beyond her control. She could only await the outcome.

The warm evening glow was fading when the sound of the opening door brought her to her feet, her hand pressed to her white lips and her eyes big with fright. Trench looked out briefly.

"Please go home, Kate."

He spoke with a queer, hushed consideration for her, with something of his old kindness and something new and strangely dignified in his manner. "Please go home, now. To-morrow morning—there will be a lot to do then. Good-night, Kate."

She rose and obeyed him without a question.

CHAPTER XVII.

AMOS HAS AN IDEA.

AMOS WORMSER was spending a most distressing evening in the society of a lady. Amos had become enmeshed in a net so fine no human eye could see its strands, yet strong enough to hold twice the man that he was. The spectacled vampire who held him in her spell must have inherited her genius from the original Circe, mother of all vampires.

Just now she sat close to Amos on a couch in a comfortable and very proper boarding house parlor made sacred to her and her "company" for this evening. Her shoulder touched his and her voice sounded close by his ear, but in his mind Amos was far away, far away in the realm of chemical research. Only dimly did he comprehend his situation, and his old, cautious instinct, the instinct of the hunted male, failed to make its warning heard in the far place where his mind dwelt.

At times Amos's lips moved with his thoughts, but what he said had no bearing on Primula Feltman's sprightly conversation. Lucky for Primula that she asked little response from him!

"You're all worn out—just tired to death with your business," Primula declared with deep compassion. "There, just rest your head on these cushions, that's right. Relax, Amos. Just rest and listen. I'll read to you—the *sweetest* thing!"

He had been dumbly grateful for this kindness, not that he comprehended it as a kindness, but because it left him free to wander in those realms where his mind had turned.

Since his talk with Trench, Amos had tried mightily to find the secret of making Cheer-O in commercial quantities. It should not have been such a hard thing to do—but it was. It was one of those simple but desperately elusive little problems of chemistry that have driven many besides Amos to gray hair or lack of any hair at all.

Almost all his waking hours Amos had worked on the problem, excepting only a half dozen evenings devoted to Primula whose will overrode his best laid plans of evasion. For many days he had been, seemingly, on the verge of discovering what he sought.

That very day, in the midst of his work, Trench's abrupt summons had taken him from the laboratory. The elusive thing had been almost in his grasp. What Trench told him, brutally frank, had driven it into the Beyond.

Then Primula's note had come, reminding him he was pledged to an evening in her refined company. And Primula had enforced the note with a telephone message that put him into his best suit of black and brought him, sighing with vexations, to her side.

Only by a word did the secret elude him. A word—one of those intangible things that get tucked away somewhere in dusty brain cells. A word he must find—and tomorrow would be too late.

Frowning and squirming, he tried to ignore Primula's murmurous reading and fix his attention on his quest. Step by step he retraced his new process until again he stood before the door that would not open.

Primula read on, raptly, and now and again a word strayed from the lines she read and stirred his consciousness, fitting itself into his thoughts.

"That splendid vision could be well expressed,
The fearful awe imprudent Psyche knew
Would seize with rapture every wondering breast,
When Love's all potent charms divinely stood confessed
All imperceptible to human touch,
His wings display celestial essence light;
The clear effulgence—"

Amos stirred uneasily. *Essence*—that was attended to. Extraction was comparatively simple and cheap. But this essence—all-potent was the word for it, too po-

tent. The foreign matter—chance for by-products in that—but how to purify it cheaply?

"A youth he seems in manhood's freshest years.
Round his fair neck, as clinging with delight
Each golden curl resplendently appears,
Or shades his darker brow, which grace majestic wears—"

The fair reader paused to sigh. She stole an arch look at Amos. Her visitor sat enrapt. The picture of the Love-God seemed to leave him not unmoved. His lips were forming words and his eyes beheld visions.

With a heightening color, elated beyond expression at the power of her reading, Primula read on.

"Or o'er his guileless front his ringlets bright
Their rays of sunny luster seem to throw.
That front than polished ivory more white!
His blooming cheeks with deeper blushes glow
Than roses scattered o'er a bed of snow;
While on his lips, distill'd in balmy dews,
(Those lips divine that even in silence know
The heart to touch) persuasion to—"

And there the reading stopped. It stopped short and the volume dropped from Primula's hands. Something had happened to Amos Wormser!

The chemist was sitting bolt upright. His eyes were wide distended with a wild, joyous light. His mouth opened and his big, overgrown voice, booming as strangely as a great organ chord from a harmonica, uttered one triumphant word in a shout that shook the room.

"*Distilled!*"

The lost was found; the unknown stood revealed; there was light upon the darkness, dawn had followed night, sunshine the storm, victory overrode defeat. A word had supplied the missing thought.

In the curious mental processes of Amos Wormser the missing piece of his chemical picture puzzle had fitted in.

Coherence was come out of chaos and he was mad with joy.

"Amos—my dear Amos!" Primula was plucking timidly at his sleeve.

"You're not well," she babbled. "Amos! Answer me! Amos—"

Amos turned blank eyes upon her, but in them came a dawn of recognition. Again he cried his strange talisman:

"Distilled. That's it! Fifty per cent off the cost—seventy-five per cent—by-products. That's the answer, you hear? Distillation! Primula—my darling!"

Primula Feltman was swept into his arms with a passion worthy of a cave man. His fervor swept her glasses off. He planted a kiss on her lips—and two—and three.

Oh, where was caution now? Where the protective instinct of the hunted male? What of that freedom he cherished!

The fatal step was taken. He was snared. The vampire had him for all time.

Briefly he realized these things, but he was too happy in his discovery to care.

"I've got it," he boomed. "Got it—the secret of Cheer-O. You Primula, you inspired me!"

Then, as suddenly as his outburst, Amos was on his feet.

"Got to work," he roared. "Got to work fast. To-morrow—to-morrow—"

He bolted from the room and from the house.

Another woman might have felt resentment. Primula was content with the knowledge she had won.

"We'll be married in September," she decided, smiling.

Kate was seldom late to work. That next morning was one of the few times. A night of suspense, worry eating at her heart like a deadly acid, left its scars. Almost mad with dread she expected no sleep, but sleep came at last, a stupor of exhaustion and no habit, no matter how faithful, could rouse her at the accustomed hour. She arrived about ten o'clock.

Lester and Primula and the new cashier were buzzing with gossip. Farnsworth had come in, in Trench's company. Something terrible must have happened, judging by their look. Did Kate know?

Kate put them off with unaccustomed rudeness. She suggested tartly that they go back to their desks and their work—even hinted that they mind their own affairs. The welcome interruption of a visitor helped her disperse the round eyed trio.

The visitor was Walter Carfax. Kate welcomed him.

"What is it?" Carfax demanded of her. "Trench sent for me in a rush. Got any notion what he's up to?"

She could only shake her head.

"Well, look here, Kate, it's something about this stock of mine, that's a cinch." Carfax was looking worried. "John Trench shan't put anything over on me," he added grimly. "If you've got any hunch at all—well, I'd be glad to be warned."

"No. I don't know. Not a thing more than you do," she insisted. "But I'll announce you right away."

She left Carfax fuming. She dreaded to open Trench's door, and yet she was impatient to see him—to see both men; frantic to know how matters stood between them.

She knocked lightly and followed up the knock by pushing the door wide.

Trench and Farnsworth had their chairs side by side and were deep in discussion of the data scattered before them on Trench's desk. Both looked up at her entrance.

Farnsworth's face was as of old, pallid, stern, the thin lips deeply bracketed, the black eyes emotionless beneath the heavy brows. He eyed her without a sign, the same old dislike plainly written in his stiffening manner.

And Trench seemed to have taken on a little of his father's dignity. He had suffered a shock, of course, but the emergency had given him a new strength to bear it quietly. He looked a little less brisk than usual: tired rings beneath his eyes. The eyes themselves were slightly bloodshot, and there were fine wrinkles noticeable around them. But all these things were trifles. They did not explain Trench. For there was something different about Trench, a very visible effect of the shocking discovery of the night. As his glance met Kate's his lips twisted into a brief smile. Then she knew!

For Trench had lost his smile. That slow, wide, boyish grin that bared his white teeth at her every morning—that had gone. It had been a very essential part of John Trench—that smile—an expression that did not stop with the lips, but seemed to radiate across his face and beyond until his entire attitude smiled, "good morning."

And the smile was gone. John Trench was no longer a boy. Kate could have cried her eyes out to win back that smile.

There were a thousand questions she wanted to ask. It was her right to ask them, or so it seemed. Had she not made these things happen? Had she not suffered tortures the long night waiting for this moment! But all she had to say was, "Mr. Carfax is waiting outside."

And, wish as she would, she could say no more while business waited.

Carfax had not been with Trench ten minutes before she was sent for again. As she opened the door she heard Carfax's voice, and it was indignant and angry.

"I don't say you *can't* do it. Of course you can. But it's a trick, Trench, and you don't fool me one minute. A dirty, yellow trick—damn ungrateful, too!"

Trench answered something and Carfax burst out again. "I don't want it back! I'm offering you to extend the note any length of time you say—sell me the stock then. What's your figure—I'll meet it! But no, by God, I know what you're doing. You're freezing me out. That's it. I'm the sucker that stands by you when you're starting, now you're done with me as soon as you begin to make money. Gratitude—a yellow dog would show more!"

"Carfax, listen to me," Trench commanded the visitor's attention. All of them ignored Kate. "I offer you my cost reports to prove it. The business does not pay—it never paid—it never will pay. I'm closing it out. I tell you on my word of honor, that is true. And it's taking my entire bank balance to meet your notes—you might appreciate that, I think—"

"Rot!" Carfax sneered openly.

"It's not rot. The proof is here. Don't you think if there was money in this I'd let you in? I'm not so yellow as that. I am grateful—good Heaven, I'm proving it, trying to pay you your money—"

"I know! You've got a new process up your sleeve!"

"New process!" Trench smiled bitterly. "I tell you Cheer-O is a flivver, and today ends it. Now, take your money. Miss Singleton—"

"Just a word, then." Carfax's blue eyes were bright with rage and disappointed greed. "I've got to take the money, of course. But for God's sake don't ask me to swallow your childish story. Why, this man Farnsworth, you sent to me—"

"This man Farnsworth," Trench said slowly, "is my father, Carfax. Unlike his son, he is a man of strictest integrity. Whatever he told you about me is true—and don't you make the mistake of thinking it isn't for one short second!"

There was no chance to mistake Trench's meaning now, or his sincerity. Carfax's mouth hung open and he stared at John Farnsworth. The more he stared the more at loss he was for words, leaning forward, arms on the chair rests, pudgy hands folded before him, his cold blue eyes childlike with astonishment. What could he say?

It was Farnsworth who spoke. There was something triumphant in Farnsworth's pallid face. His eyes gleamed harshly.

"When I warned you, Carfax, you as much as called me liar. Doubting the word of honest men seems to be your business principle. But you shan't doubt me again! You have heard my son, and you hear me tell you—Cheer-O is a fraud—and *we* have ended it."

There was a momentary tremble in Farnsworth's voice, a tremble and a brief glance toward his son that betrayed a happy pride.

"But," Carfax protested, "I—I believed—"

Kate would not stay silent now. She had a duty to do.

"Let me tell you something, Carfax," she began. Trench uttered a hasty exclamation and tried to wave her to silence. But she went on, ignoring him, "I was the liar in that case. I told you Trench was plotting to scare you out of this business—and that was—a—lie. You may blame me for all of that—John Trench is honest."

Carfax looked at her sharply for a moment. His glance was impersonal, searching, cruel. "I see," he nodded.

"Kate!" Trench whispered. "Kate—we—nothing would have been said about that. We were agreed—Kate, why did you say that!"

"Do you think I'll let you corner all the honesty in this crowd!" she answered fiercely.

Carfax began to speak with intentional slowness, so that each word had time to make its full effect upon them.

"All this is very illuminating—very. I'm to believe, then, that you, all of you, lied. Excepting only Farnsworth. And now there seems to be an epidemic of truth telling. Of course I cannot doubt such sincerity. But the reform is sudden. Sudden. We-e-ell, you've decided what you want to do. Let's settle things."

Trench handed Kate a memorandum slip. "Please have this check drawn to Mr. Carfax's order, at once, and bring it to me," he directed.

She glanced at the paper and at his face. So keen was the joy in her heart when she saw the message on that scrap of paper that it took her breath like a knife wound. She wanted to shout, to throw herself into Trench's arms and sob her relief. She wanted to laugh and cry at one and the same time. Waiting was over. It was all right. All right. Trench was honest. The proof was before her eyes. He had met the test—honest—on the level—square. The fight was won. This was victory. Whose victory?

Farnsworth was watching his son, watching with an unholy pride that seemed to burst him. Actually there was color in his white cheeks. Oh, the terrible pride of the man!

Farnsworth's pride told her whose victory this was.

She remembered soberly. "You flivvered, Kate. Played your best cards, and your score is *blah*. But you ought to be glad that Farnsworth beat. John Trench is all right—that's the big thing. Yes, I guess you are glad—and thankful."

Farnsworth had a right to be proud. He had earned this moment. It cost him dearly enough.

But she was disappointed, nevertheless, and a little jealous. It was his joy, not

hers. He made this moment, and his was the right to savor it to the last drop of happiness.

She felt somehow humbled by her own failure to make a man of John Trench.

Carfax accepted the check from Trench without a word. In return he handed to Trench a sheaf of stock certificates, and necessary receipts were signed and notes canceled. They were all very quiet and businesslike about it.

When it was done the banker said slowly: "Well, you've had your way about this. I won't say what I think of it. I'm not dead sure that I know what to think, but—" Abruptly he concluded: "Good morning, gentlemen."

There was no need of his saying what he thought of them. His manner proclaimed it.

He turned to leave. Kate stepped toward the door ahead of him, anxious for a word with him before their final parting. She dreaded the interview, but felt honor bound to go through with it.

An uproar in the outer office halted them both.

Kate was rudely jostled in the doorway by a short, disreputable figure that had burst through the outer room and was going at top speed. Amos Wormser looked like the aftermath of disaster. His hat was jammed rakishly over one ear. His collar was unfastened and the half tied cravat fluttered in the breeze of his mad gait. His face was red and his eyes wild. So intent was he on reaching his goal that after crashing into Kate he, ordinarily most polite and timid of men, never stopped to apologize.

"Trench," he roared in his overgrown voice, "Trench, I got it, y' hear! I got it! Listen t' me, Trench—"

Trench rose from his chair at this apparition. He caught Wormser by the collar in one swift pounce and shook him.

"Shut up and get out of here!" he said sharply.

Wormser scarcely blinked at this interruption. He kept repeating in his horrific voice:

"I got it—got it at last! Yow-ee! Here's your formula. Here's your original name-blown-in-every-bottle Cheer-O, fresh from Neptune's own laboratory, stringing with the ozone of salt sea breezes and overflowing with profits. *Profits*—get that? Profits 's what I said. Profits 's the word. Lis'n, Trench, lis'n. 'S all here, down here in black and white. Look, Trench—look what I got."

The irrepressible little man spilled onto Trench's desk a sheaf of mutilated papers. "Mine," he proclaimed grandly—"all mine—my notes. There y' are, all down in black and white. Profits—by-products—low cost—"

Trench's hand, pressed tight against Wormser's mouth, at last brought comparative quiet.

Trench was white with anger. He lifted Wormser bodily and dumped him into a big chair. Then he shook his fist before the chemist's rapidly blinking eyes.

"I told you to shut up. Now, you hold that fool bellow, or you'll never as much as whisper again," he said sternly. "One word, and I'll tear your tongue out. Wait till you're asked to talk in here."

"B-but," said Wormser faintly—"but, Trench, lis'n. I've found the formula. I—"

Trench's terrible gestures caused him to shrink into the smallest possible compass, a huddled, bewildered, terrified wreck of a once decorous chemist.

"Now," said Trench to the others, "we can go on. I apologize for this raving fool."

They were all staring at Wormser. Farnsworth had half risen; Carfax stood smiling coldly, his small blue eyes like ice; Kate hesitated, breathless and white of face. Carfax was first to speak.

"Wonderfully staged," he said. "Wonderfully! Just like a play. Timed to a second. And now, I suppose—"

Trench advanced a hasty step toward him, a murderous anger in his eyes. "Carfax," he said tremulously, "I won't listen to any more of that. I've told you the truth—and dealt honestly. There is no formula for Cheer-O—never will be. The thing was a fraud from first to last. It is ended now. This man here is out of his

head, trying to do something that can't be done. He's mad as hell—"

"Trench! Trench, lis'n," Wormser groaned.

But Trench's look reduced him to silence. "He's raving," Trench repeated. "As for me, I tell you I'm done. And by God, Carfax, you will believe that!"

He stood close to Carfax now, and they looked squarely at one another. One would have thought them ready to fly at each other's throats.

Carfax shrugged suddenly. "Have it your own way," he murmured. "At least I'm through."

He brushed his hands together lightly, a significant gesture that seemed to suggest he considered them soiled by their association. He moved past Kate with an eye that ignored her and out of the door. She followed hastily, after one last, bewildered glance at the silent trio about Trench's desk.

Kate followed Carfax into the public corridor. Consciousness of her debt to Carfax made her do that. It was a bitter thing to confess before Carfax that she had lied to him. She was sick with humiliation every step she took beside him.

They stopped, and she looked timidly at Carfax. His glance was absolutely impersonal.

Kate touched his sleeve lightly, pleading.

"I spilled the beans, didn't I?" She tried to smile, but did it badly. "I'm a little liar—a nasty little liar, too! I—suppose I was made that way But there is one thing, Carfax—I want you to believe in Trench. He told you nothing but the truth."

"Umpf." Carfax moved impatiently.

"You've got to believe, you hear me? He's all right. He is! Some day you'll know that."

Carfax only stared imperturbably. His eyes were like pale blue marbles. His smile was bland—and insulting in its significance.

Her hand dropped from his sleeve, but she went on steadily.

"And another thing that concerns you and me. I did like you—and still do. I'll never forget that. I'm—very—proud of it. When I kissed you—I wasn't lying, then, Carfax. I meant that kiss. You were pretty darn good to me—and I *was* and am grateful. Will you believe that much about me—that I was proud to be your friend? Proud you—cared—for me, a little?"

Carfax considered her a moment longer. She didn't expect much mercy from him. She knew that the man's vulnerable spot was money. And his pride in his own shrewdness had been rubbed raw. He said, deliberately, "I never believed a woman but once—I never will again, so help me God." Then he lifted his hat formally and went on his way.

Kate went back to her desk, conscious of the stares of her little office force. Wormser remained in Trench's room, and she could hear dim echoes of his booming voice. She tried to sit still and fasten her attention on the morning mail. Her hands and eyes obeyed her will, but her brain would not. After half an hour she discovered she had been looking steadily at one letter and did not yet know what it said.

She couldn't work. That was asking too much of her. And there was no longer any need for her work. Cheer-O had ended. Trench said so, and Trench would wind up the business very quickly.

Now that the strain of waiting was past, she knew she was tired; too tired, really, to care a great deal even about the good news. She realized, too, that to see Trench might be awkward. Eventually their ways must separate. Farnsworth hated her—and she hated him, or would if ever again she could regain the capacity to feel emotion. It might be hard for Trench to explain that. It would be hard for Trench to explain anything, rather humiliating for him.

She found herself on her feet, settling the day's mail in a neat little pile, replacing a pen that had rolled from its rack, putting the paper clips primly beside the ink stand, the letter baskets in a careful row.

She was tired!

If only she could go somewhere, a thousand miles away, where there were no typewriters, no telephones, no business of any

kind, nothing but a bed—and a long, long sleep.

She took her hat and wrap and nodded a careless good-by to her office companions who were used to seeing her come and go on Trench's affairs. At the door she hesitated just a moment longer. Her glance swept the familiar room, touching all the accustomed things with a brief affection.

"Good-by," her lips whispered. "Good-by, Cheer-O—and John Trench. Kate, my dear, here's where we do a fade out!"

She was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"CHOOSE!"

AMOS WORMSER was drunk. He was drunk on excitement, which sometimes is more potent than the strongest drink of ante-prohibition days. Huddled in his chair, a forlorn, dilapidated figure to whom nobody would hearken, he began to weep noisily.

There was no ignoring him.

Trench shook him harshly by the shoulder and told him to be a man. Amos continued to blubber. He kept repeating, "I f-found it. Got the formula—g-got it all figured out and no-no-nobody will listen to me. Nobody in the wh-wh-whole world 'll listen to me. And I tell you it's true! I f-found how to make it. Damn you all, da-da-damn you—"

"Stop it," Trench shouted. "I'm going to listen now. Tell your story. Here, give me those notes."

There was no other way to quiet Amos. He saw that. He resigned himself to listen. Amos would have to say his say. Trench sat quiet, his mind busy with a thousand bitter speculations while Amos ran on.

A phrase from the chemist brought him up sharply. He did listen now, intent on following Amos's confused reasoning. Astonished, appalled at what he had done, he realized too late that Amos was not mad—that Amos had solved the problem.

Painstakingly Trench collected the notes, and with Farnsworth to help him put Amos through a strict cross-examination. At the end of an hour he was exclaiming blankly, "It's there. The process. All of it. And I—see what I've done? I've killed off Cheer-O. I let Carfax go!"

Trench's face began to twitch. He walked quickly to the window and stared out, his back to the two men. Even Wormser ceased to explain, awed by his emotion.

Farnsworth spoke suddenly. "John, would Carfax's money have been enough. Could you keep going on that?"

Trench nodded, speechless.

Farnsworth came closer to his son. His manner was uncertain, almost timid.

"John, would you let me help?"

"What d'you mean?" Trench muttered dully.

"I—your mother left me. I have almost that amount at my order. The rest I—could get, if—"

"You what!"

Farnsworth repeated.

Trench wheeled on him and their hands met. He was beyond words, and his emotion passed on to Farnsworth. Somewhere in Farnsworth's heart the ice began to thaw. His spare frame shook mightily, and the stiff muscles of his set face twitched. Their hands clung, but they said nothing.

Only Amos Wormser spoke. But he spoke enough for them all. "Zowee!" he roared, and the outbreak passed unrebuked.

Trench began to babble. "Where's Kate? Kate Singleton! Got to have her! Got to tell her! Kate! Where's that damn buzzer gone? Send for Kate!"

The buzzer brought them all to his door, Primula, Lester Harper, the cashier. They came expecting murder in that room. They came, all of them but Kate.

Each in turn explained falteringly that Kate had stepped out of the office. Disappointment was written all over John Trench.

"Send her in the minute she gets back," he ordered sternly.

But lunch time passed and she was not back. Returned from a hurried meal with his father, Trench learned Kate had not yet appeared. Every quarter hour he sent for news of her. He could talk and think of little else now. Kate must know the news.

Then Primula brought him her note, delivered by a messenger boy:

DEAR TRENCH:

It's easier to write than to say good-by. And I'm too dog-tired to explain much. I haven't got the pep to sell bootleg to an Indian. Maybe I did overwork a little. I seem to hear the eager voices of the squirrels calling my name.

You won't need my services in winding up, will you? Miss Feltman can look after things.

One thing I'm proud of. Old Cheer-O went down with her flag flying, like the good ship she was. And I'm rather proud of the captain who scuttled her, rather than surrender. You know what I mean!

Good luck to you—always.

KATE.

Good luck to Farnsworth, too. It wasn't altogether his fault he didn't like me. I don't always approve of myself.

Trench handed the note to his father without comment. The news deprived him of speech. He slouched down in his chair, buryinng his face in his hands

But Farnsworth read it and smiled. For once the smile was real. There was pure delight in it. He drew a deep breath of relief and happiness. He almost chuckled.

His son recovered poise quickly. He was on his feet and calling through the door for Primula.

"Miss Feltman, get Miss Singleton's hotel. Tell her we must see her here at once. At once! Vitally important. If she's not there, find where she is. Get her, you understand? Trace her down!"

Farnsworth said, when Trench had closed the door again, "Is that quite — necessary?"

"Necessary! What do you mean—"

"I mean is this young woman so important? Can't we go ahead with Cheer-O without her further assistance?"

"With Cheer-O! What's that got to do with it? To hell with Cheer-O! How about the girl?"

"Well, what about the girl?" Farnsworth was almost good humored in his triumph.

His son echoed him, beginning to stare wildly. "What about the girl? Why—why everything. That's all. Just *everything!* Look here, you don't seem to quite understand who — and what — this Kate Singleton is!"

"I think I understand. Yes — permit me, please!"

Farnsworth's hand rested a moment on his son's arm. "John, I'm glad this came up. Glad this happened—as it did. Now is your chance to drop this Kate Singleton; drop her out of your life. You agree with me that's the best thing to do?"

"I *what!*" A flame of astonished anger lit Trench's wide eyes.

Farnsworth persisted, more earnestly, more rapidly. "You must consider. Consider the past—the future, the change you have made, the new road you are taking. You had best travel that road alone, John. Avoid the past. Avoid temptation. Especially avoid this young woman, this light, frivolous young woman who—whose influence has been— Ah, surely, you see that now?"

"I see this," Trench muttered warningly. "You've gone just about far enough. Just about. Now you listen—"

"I'll not listen!" The older man's harsh voice swelled. "You shall listen to me. This woman—this painted, light, will-o'-the-wisp — what has she done for you? Be honest! Put aside foolish sentiment and be honest. What has she done? Led you into loose ways. Dragged you down. Brought you to the very brink of theft. Theft and disgrace!

"I say she has gone far enough with you —and more than far enough. I tell you the happiest miracle God has granted is this—this note of hers, this defeat of the worst thing in your life. She's out now. Leave her out. Bar and lock the door, you hear; bar and lock the door! Leave her there—outside, outside your life forever—or all my work goes for nothing."

Trench heard him out. When Farnsworth had finished he rose to tell him with bitter definition, "You're insane."

"You'll do as I tell you," Farnsworth retorted, bristling.

His son shook his head.

"You shall! What about all my work—all I've gone through? All I've suffered? Prayers, hopes, pain, sorrow—the everlast-

ing waiting and trying. You think I planned and did all that just to see the evil thing that dragged you down come back in triumph? I say you shall put her out. I'm your father—"

Trench gripped his father's shoulder. "Enough of that," he said sternly. He held him close, speaking with a rapidity and a tremulous anger that underscored every word.

"Time we had a showdown—and more than time. You are my father. What of it? Yes, I say what of it! Just how much do you think I owe you because you are my father? Just how much? A dutiful respect? Granted. Attention to your advice? Perhaps. Obedience? *Just so long as you deserve it.* If you're looking for those things from me, you'll get them when you earn them!

"You're my father," said Trench. "I can't help that. I had nothing to do with picking you. Now I'm going to tell you what else you are. You talk about what you've done! You crow how you've reformed me! Listen, you're going to hear some straight truth that you won't like. You, bloated with pride, justified by your poor cracked notion of right and wrong, playing a little Nero over one poor girl—putting yourself on the throne of Almighty God and judging in His place! You're a tragic joke, that's what you are—a joke that would be funny if it wasn't so damnably sad. That's you."

There came a momentary pause in the acid flow of Trench's contempt. Before the elder man could speak he was launched again. "Now, listen to something you need to know. You did not change my way of going. You had nothing to do with it—and the way you went at it you never could have changed my mind. A woman did that—Kate Singleton! Yes, that girl. She showed me where I stood. She showed me where I was going—and where to get off. And when it came to a showdown between us—when I knew she loved me and I knew I was going to lose her just the same, or else do what *she* said—I did what she told me to do. I went straight. I jumped through the hoop.

"Why? Because I love her, and she's a million times too fine for you or me to ever catch up with, even if we try all the rest of our years. But you didn't put over anything—not one thing. Nothing you said, or could have said, got under my hide for a second. And because you went at it wrong, if you must know. Your idea is to club a man into being a saint. Well, it can't be done. And now, maybe it occurs to you that you, being my father and claiming an interest in my welfare, owe something to this girl you've driven out of here?"

Trench had one more thing to say. He added it with impressive deliberation.

"Take your choice, now. You've heard the truth, choose! If you want the affection, the respect, the acknowledgment you seem to expect—if you're going to team up with me, father and son—get busy and earn it. And start to earn it by acknowledging you were wrong and you wronged that girl, who's infinitely more decent, more loyal, and more splendid than either of us can ever be. How about it?"

Neither man said a word more. They stared. Pride matched pride. Will locked with will.

There was no generosity there. No love lost. Nothing but anger between them and inflexible cross purposes.

An unlovely moment for both, with all each hoped to gain wavering in the balance.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WILL YOU?"

KATE SINGLETON, in shimmering silk pyjamas of a soft, brownish green that set off the gold of her hair, returned to consciousness of another day in the midst of an ocean of white sheets. She sat up slowly, yawning and blinking. Her hand went to her head, which ached a little, and she rubbed her dull eyes. She sighed as memory returned — memory of the night before, and cross legged sat lost in pictures of what had happened.

She had met Carfax and Carfax had told her a great many things. On the whole his news was good news, and it should have made her happy. But she was not happy,

only a little less miserable than she had been these past ten days.

Meeting with Carfax had been curious. Bored to death with herself and her existence, she had stepped into a motion picture theater early in the evening. At the conclusion of the show, when the lights flashed on, and she was collecting her hat and wrap, the man who sat next her rose to let her pass, and that man was Walter Carfax.

Carfax pronounced her name as if he liked it. Their hands met as if they had never parted in anger.

"Come in to wait for a train," Carfax explained. "Leaving? Let me walk with you."

Outside he continued to remark what a coincidence this was.

"Imagine it! Just waiting for my train —and here you were sitting right beside me. And you? You were—"

"Just waiting for bedtime," Kate acknowledged.

"Not living here? In Tacoma!"

"Why not? Is that unusual—"

"Well, no. I was just thinking about—h-m. Take a position here?"

"I may, when I've had a good rest. I was dog tired, Carfax. If Cheer-O hadn't blown up that morning I'd have staged a little explosion of my own. Poor old Cheer-O—"

"I've got some news for you, Kate. Wait, here's a taxi. I know a good place—where you can dance if you want. Will you come?"

She accepted gratefully. It was odd, but perfectly natural to be with Carfax again. Not only natural, but, as she began to realize, very comforting. Carfax never bothered her much with questions. He had a most pleasant way of taking her for granted.

When he settled her at a table, Carfax said casually, "By the way, Cheer-O didn't blow up. Haven't you heard? Wormser found the process, after all. There is a fortune in it—regular gold mine! And I'll say this for Trench, he was on the level. He came around to me and offered to let me back in. Pretty damn decent! He's got enough money to swing it without me, now; but he did the decent thing."

Carfax went on, giving her the details of the newly organized business; telling her even of the ignominious retreat of Randall, the blackmailer. Kate listened greedily, all the time eager to ask after Trench himself, and afraid to. Then her host added abruptly, "I—suppose—I owe you an apology, Kate. I was nasty the other morning. I—just my natural cussedness, I guess. Kate, will you forgive me. Please?"

"Carfax," she answered promptly, "I forgave you that before you said it! Yes, I mean it. When it comes to forgiving we stand just about fifty-fifty. Let's forget it, eh?"

Carfax saw her old, kind smile rather mistily for that moment. His timid hand reached across the table to touch hers gently.

"You're pretty white," he gave his tribute warmly. "A pretty, damn white girl!" Then he added, though it cost him an effort: "By the way, did you know John Trench is moving heaven and earth to find you? Did you know that?"

"To find—me!"

She couldn't conceal the leap of her heart —the pulse that hammered in her ears. She couldn't hide, altogether, what the news meant.

Carfax nodded a confirmation.

"I hear he even hired private detectives. Not my affair, of course, except he mentioned it to me—and seemed pretty upset about it. So I'll just pass on the news—"

"But he mustn't find me," Kate was whispering earnestly. "There are reasons —good reasons. You—you wouldn't tell him!"

Carfax shook his head reassuringly. "Not if I was sure you didn't want him to know."

"I don't. Honestly, I mean it. He mustn't know. I'll go somewhere farther on. I'll—" Kate was in a breathless panic, trying to convince Carfax of her earnestness. Something told her he did not believe what she was saying.

But he promised obedience. "Stay right here," he assured her. "You're safe as the mint, right where you are. I'll not say a word. Not a word. Why the devil should I? I'm jealous of Trench, anyway! I'm

going to keep your secret so I can have you all to myself, eh, Kate?"

Her answer was to spring to her feet with the old, radiant smile that combined delight and mischief in such admirable proportion.

"Carfax, let's dance," she cried. "I'm starved for dancing. Think of it, ten days I've been loafing here—ten days. My dear, it seems like ten thousand years. And I'm so tickled about your news—and so tickled to have you back, just to look at you again. And just tickled pink because we're friends again and—and everything—"

With Carfax to guide her she gave herself to the giddy currents of jazz rhythm. She danced until late in the morning, fast and hard, and between dances she talked fast and hard, anxious to keep Carfax smiling; to pay him back a little for all the news he brought her. When they parted in the cool dusk, before her hotel door, she kissed Carfax once more—the third and last time she was to shower him with her impetuous generosity.

Carfax left her hastily, silent and much moved, and she knew he would always love her.

What she did not know was that Carfax hurried to a telephone booth. There he called a number in Seattle, thirty miles or so distant.

While he waited the connection, moving the hook impatiently, Carfax seemed in the midst of a hot debate. Once—and twice he abandoned the telephone to its hook, then recovered it again and waited.

Finally he got his party. He spoke one brief sentence into the mouthpiece and hung up the telephone.

Carfax sighed prodigously when he came from the phone booth. It might have been the sigh of a man tired of his fat; or the sigh of a man bothered by the nuisance of calling long distance numbers—or it might have been some more serious reason. Anyway, he sighed and sighed again as he moved away slowly. He was a good sport, this Walter Carfax, for all his money and his fat.

But Kate's memories were of the evening up to and including her kiss. She touched the warm lips that caressed Carfax's cheek curiously.

Why don't you, Kate? He'd give you the yacht and all the cars and houses and just about every little thing a girl could ask for. *Mrs. Walter Carfax.* That does sound like a mouthful, eh, Kate? Imagine in the stores!

Her voice mimicked the salesgirl and herself in an imaginary dialogue: "Charge or cash, madam?" "Oh, really! Why charge, *of course.* Yes, Mrs. Walter Carfax—stupid salespersons in this place, don't you think, my deah?"

He's a good sport, Kate. He'd spoil you, of course, but, oh, boy, it's great to be spoiled a little! Clothes, yachts, cars and a party every day—and yet you don't want him. Funny! Always figured on a man like Carfax some day. And now you've got him—and don't want him. It's a darn, queer world when you stop to think about it—the way things turn out. But who wants to think about it? Not you with a record that makes your flesh crawl—

Thinking about this darn, queer world certainly was the last thing she could afford to do if she would maintain her brisk new purpose.

So she was out of bed with a jump, and at the window of the hotel room, bending and swaying through the morning's calisthenics. Then the bath and dressing and the daily attention to her face. By that time her plans were made.

"California for mine," she smiled into the mirror. "San Francisco, or Los Angeles. Safer there and plenty to do. Make reservations to-day for the first sailing. Sea breezes will do me good—or maybe I'd better take the train. You don't see any help from trains. Why the deuce can't I forget Cheer-O?"

For a moment her lower lip trembled and her brown eyes winked rapidly to keep back tears. For a moment she suffered the return of that desperate loneliness, that bitter, never quiet longing to see John Trench again—to hear his voice—to watch his old, slow smile—if ever he smiled now! For a moment her slender body was in the relentless grip of an emotion too big for her.

She shook her head angrily; stamped her foot.

"Stop it, you little fool, stop it! Keep

your head up. Play the game, Kate, we've got to play the game. A rotten little loser you are. Yes, rotten! You can't go back. You can't. Want to spoil all Trench's chances now—now when he's on his feet again? You will *not!* That's better, grin and show your ugly teeth. All you get for snivelling's a bunch of crape and charity—and we're not asking charity yet not from anybody, my dear!"

More work for the powder rag. More work for the mirror. Then her chin was high in the air and the old briskness returned. She went out of that lonely room humming the gay little melody of a new jazz, a vision in bronze silk and brownish-green chiffon, the old, generous allotment of bronze silk ankles on view; the same pert, challenging way with her hat, lips smiling and brown eyes bright. She was a vision—a vision good for summer days and sore hearts, and so she stepped from the elevator to meet two men face to face—John Trench and John Farnsworth.

Not for nothing had she given Walter Carfax that third kiss.

It was Trench who took possession of her with a smiling "Good morning" that deceived the world. Farnsworth moved at her other hand and they went without any talk to a far, quiet corner of the hotel lounge.

They seated themselves, chairs pulled close together. There was a short silence. Kate could not have spoken to save her life, or the life of the man she loved who sat so close to her. Trench appeared to be waiting. It was Farnsworth who began.

Farnsworth had changed. Ten days had done with him the work of ten years. The man had suffered shockingly. His hair seemed more startlingly white, his face more lined and seamed and the black eyes had lost luster. Most noticeable of all, he lacked the arrogance of carriage, the old, tense self-control. He raised a thin, corded hand and the hand trembled slightly.

When he spoke, Farnsworth's voice was much the same, only a little less controlled, quavering unexpectedly. But as he talked he turned his eye often upon his son, an anxious, almost haggard look as if he strove to please John Trench.

"Miss Singleton," Farnsworth said eagerly, "I'm here to confess my mistake in you. I want to ask you, if you can to forgive the injustice I did you. I want to say I am guilty—and ashamed—"

"No, no, please!" Kate murmured unsteadily, her hand on his arm. "Please say no more!"

Farnsworth went on: "I am ashamed, and humble. My only excuse is that I was blind with pride—and prejudice against you. And now I know I have to thank you—to thank you for making of my son what I failed to do, an honest man. I failed and you succeeded. John has told me. I know what you did, the generous sacrifice you made—to turn him—to convince him and win him. And your sacrifice—your generosity, was not wasted. That did what I failed to do. Will you forgive me?"

So far Kate heard him without interruption. She was dazed—not quite capable of realizing what he said at once. But now it reached her.

"Farnsworth, I—there's some mistake here. I didn't do anything. It was you—you who—"

Farnsworth shook his head slowly.

"It was you," Trench said earnestly. "You, Kate. When you gave me your ultimatum—when you told me what to do with Cheer-O that morning. I was pretty sore for a while, Kate—pretty cut up about it. But that was only pride—and I saw that it was only pride. And, Kate, pride doesn't count for one plugged cent with me, not alongside what you think. And I did make the change before my—my father came. I was ready to tell you that very afternoon. You see? You do see!"

"O-oh!" The cry was half sob, half laugh, altogether happiness. "Then I didn't flivver?"

"Of course you didn't. Kate—"

But Kate had turned to Farnsworth. Her arm was about the elder man's shoulder and her cheek rubbed his—a warm, caressing cheek. She was whispering rapidly: "Farnsworth, I'm sorry it was me. You deserved it. Yes, you did! I—I do wish it had been you—and you're a regular fellow to tell me. A man! I've admired that much of you always—your courage. And

there's nothing to forgive. Nothing. We—we both tried to do something. Between us we did it—rather, John did it for himself. What do we care *how* it was done, it's done, that's what counts. Eh, Farnsworth?"

She started up, laughing tearfully. "I don't think I can ever hate you again, Farnsworth, not in the next two million years or so!"

Farnsworth's eyes were moist. His eyes that had known no tears for such a bitter long time were wet now.

"There's one thing more," he whispered eagerly, taking Kate's hand in his. "My son—John Trench—loves you. May I ask that you will honor him—and honor me by accepting that love—"

"And how about me?" Trench broke in anxiously. "Let me say that. Kate—Kate, my dear, splendid Kate, will you—"

Kate answered with her old promptness and fervor. "Will I?" she crowed. "I will. I will. I will!"

Fast in Trench's arms she proved she meant what she said.

THE END.

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I LOOKED ON LIFE

I LOOKED on life, and found it to consist
Mostly of things we might have had, but missed.

I looked on death, and saw that it was made
Of laws we never knew, but disobeyed.

I looked on youth, and saw them building walls
Between it and the path where duty calls.

I looked on age, and saw its cheeks were wet
With tears of pain, impotence, and regret.

I looked on wealth, greater than human greed,
And watched it crush the owner and his seed.

I looked on poverty, and found it based
On idleness, and ignorance, and waste.

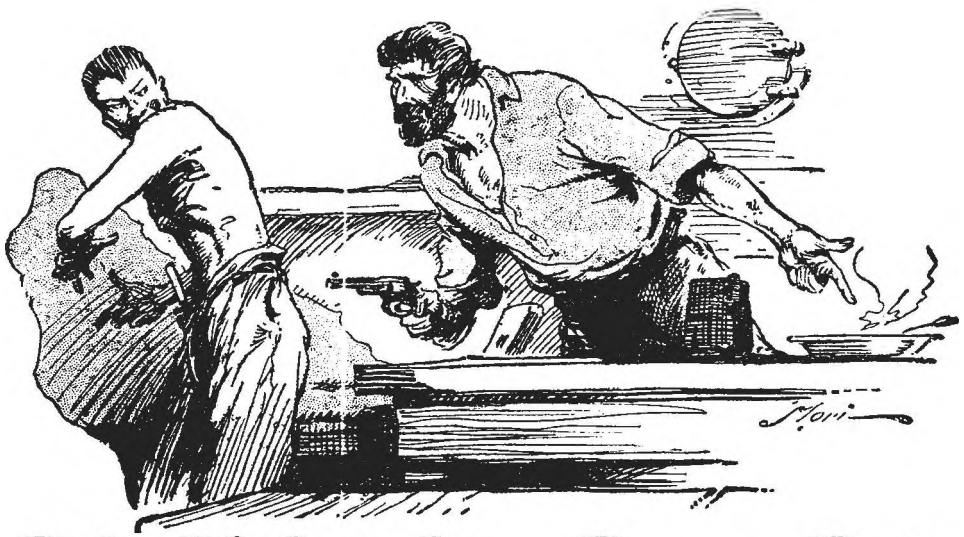
I looked on fame, and saw that it was crowned
With poppies which were blown from bloody ground.

I looked on war, and saw its turgid tide
Of ancient cruelties, and racial pride.

I looked on love, but could not separate
The tangled threads of lust, self-love, and hate.

I looked on God, who looked on me, and smiled:
I saw myself, impatient, and a child.

Charles Henry Mackintosh.



The Heathen Sea Cook

By LIEUTENANT C. DONALD FEAK

A BRILLIANT, blazing sun beat down. The oily sea rolled and reflected sharp sheets of glimmering fire, like some huge, uneasy diamond. The water was a deep blue; a blue that mirrored the speckless vault overhead. Small, gentle waves lapped and swished against the side of a dirty, white whaleboat. Their curling crests, as they broke, whispered of cool, wet water to the man lurched heavily against the backboard; spoke of rippling streams, clear gurgling brooks, waving fronds.

His tongue was swollen, his lips dry and cracked, and a pair of fever reddened eyes stared through red rimmed lids at the bottom of the boat and a stain of dark, almost black fluid. The rippling sound of the collapsing waves was torment to him. The whaleboat rocked easily, as if serenely content to travel on forever over these smooth seas.

Brackish, dirty water sloshed over the bottom boards of the craft, making the misery of the half conscious man more acute by their incessant whisperings to a thirst maddened brain.

Doubled over the forward thwart lay the body of a Kanaka sailor, his hands dangling in the water below. The body swayed and lurched with the calm, unworried rolling of the boat.

The man in the stern was white—white below the chocolate-brown coat of tan. He was barefooted and around his waist swung the tattered remnants of what had once been his trousers, now barely more than a breech cloth—such as the dead native in the bow wore.

His shirt was torn to tatters, suggesting a fight, for the chest that showed through the rents was scratched. From the neck swung an ivory pendant, old, yellow with age, a cloven hoof. His eyes were placed far apart and they glared out from under huge, bushy eyebrows, suggesting deep foliage over dark caves. From time to time his tongue, swollen from lack of water,

thrust itself against his row of uneven, tobacco stained teeth as if seeking to lick those thick, heavy lips.

Overhead a bosun bird, long winged and fork tailed, swooped and dived gracefully, his pinions barely moving in the gentle trade winds. He disappeared in the distance, screeching raucously. Astern of the boat, moved a triangular fin, steady, untiring, clinging to the boat ahead like an avenging Nemesis. Some unknown ocean current swept the boat ahead, threading its way along unseen channels that swerved through the myriad of islands of the South Seas barely beyond sight of land.

The white man dropped his hand over the side, then suddenly jerked it back, laughing thickly. A swift, razorlike slash and the shark had attacked and sunk below, only to reappear astern at his allotted distance, the embodiment of perseverance.

A succession of sounds emanated from the man's throat; they seemed to jam in his gullet. Only his face revealed it as a laugh of derision. He clutched his ivory neck ornament tightly and sounded his insane cry again, the words barely intelligible: "Ha! Fooled you again, you black devil!"

The steady lap-lap of the collapsing seas, the occasional cries of the bosun bird, the fevered splashing of an albacore near by, the rattle of the lanyard bound oarlock against the warped side of the boat were the only sounds that came out of this terrible bowl of heat. The blazing sun rose through a sea of speckless blue. Like a reflecting prism the sky seemed to throw back the terrible heat. The boat was a lonesome speck on a sea of flashing brilliancy. The horizon line showed clean and distinct.

Slowly over the rim of the earth came the topmasts of a schooner. She moved slowly with the trade winds, her white sails seemingly formed of alabaster and placed on a painted sea. A rippling wash of white clung to her stubby cutwater.

Under the shade of the deck awning the master of the Dolphin lolled in an easy chair. He was drowsy, lulled almost to sleep by the pleasant peacefulness of the scene, and the fanning of the warm wind. At his feet, secured against a sudden roll, was his sextant. He was patiently waiting for the sun to change in azimuth for his second line of position.

Forward he could hear the swish of waters; the twisting of his log aft held him for a moment and his attention shifted to his cook and devoted servant, Talea, industriously scrubbing a suit of his pyjamas in a deck bucket just forward of the mainmast. He smiled when he thought of Talea's unselfish love of his Captain Jim, as the brown, good natured cook called him. For many years he had served Captain James Blackwood, always holding that old sea dog before him as an example, worshiping him as a dog does his master, without question; swearing an unworded fealty to the cause of Captain Jim.

The schooner was bound for Apia from Tahiti. The Kanaka seamen forward were patching an old sail and chattering like children at the continuous sallies of one of their number.

As the sun slowly changed in azimuth the skipper rose to his feet and picked up the sextant, preparatory to shooting it.

He was a medium sized man, his shock of hair, shot with gray, showed beneath his cap. A pair of deep blue eyes that twinkled; a face that was tanned a deep brown. A sturdy pair of toil worn hands.

Blackwood braced himself and slowly brought the reflected image of the sun down to the horizon. The red ball wavered and came to rest on the lone whaleboat tossing gently on the distant, clear blue line.

Instantly Blackwood picked up his glasses and scanned the floating speck. "Tim," he called to his mate, "come here and take a look. Thought I brought the sun smack down on a boat out there. Take a look; maybe I'm seeing things." He handed the glasses to the mate.

Tim stared a moment, then announced: "Yep, it's a boat; there's something in the stern that looks mighty like a man. Shall we look her over?"

"Yes, alter course and stand toward her. We might as well investigate. Probably some ship's boat lost in a storm."

The Dolphin came about and headed for the speck against the spotless blue of the sea. When the schooner was within a hundred yards, the native crew manned the boat

at the schooner's davits and swept away, with the mate yelling "Washee!" at the men from the stern sheets.

When the Dolphin's boat bumped the whaleboat the figure in the stern gently keeled over and slid in a heap to the bottom.

Blackwood, from the stern of the schooner, motioned for them to hurry back. He had seen the collapse of the man and laid it to the joy of a rescue instead of merely losing balance, as it really was.

When the boat returned Blackwood assisted in getting the man down into his cabin. His sandy beard concealed much of his face. The mate reported him as alive and began dropping small drops of water between the parched lips.

Blackwood returned to his sight of the sun and the task of getting the Dolphin back on her course. The whaleboat he tied up astern after the crew had brought the body of the native forward, while the bosun prepared a shroud.

That pair of eyes, red rimmed and burning, bothered him. He felt certain in some way, somewhere he had run afoul of them before, although he could recall no specific instance. He dismissed the matter from his mind and they buried the canvas shrouded form over the bulwark after a short prayer.

Blackwood paced the deck over the cabin; through the open hatch he could hear the mate giving the rescued man water. When Tim returned to the deck he went directly to Blackwood's side.

"He's alive, captain, that's about all, though. I'll give him water at intervals and then gradually change over to some broth that Talea offered to make for him. He'll pull through; too tough to kill that kind so easy. Did you see that Kanaka?"

"Surely, we just buried him. Why, wasn't he like any other native?"

The mate looked queerly at Blackwood a moment before answering. "Yes, he was; only he had a knife thrust under his left arm."

Blackwood glanced at the mate—a question on his lips, and in his eyes.

"Exactly! Damn funny place for a man to stab himself. Even a Kanaka," the mate said, as if defying Blackwood to deny it. "I won't say anything until he wakes up. Maybe there is an explanation, and then again"—his voice took on a curious tone—"maybe there ain't!"

The day passed slowly, with the mate occasionally awaking the man below to force water and food between his teeth. When night came, just before the sun sank into the sea of blazing fire, the man began muttering.

By eight bells he was raving deliriously and by midnight he was shouting bawdy songs at the top of his lungs. The voice irritated Blackwood; brought back many unpleasant things, and he rolled over and over in an attempt to fall asleep. All through the night the coarse, rumbling voice talked on, broken at intervals by a complete quiet.

The next day dawned. The sun rose majestically out of the sea, painting the standing rigging of the Dolphin silver and gold. The sails gleamed clearly white; the deck, newly washed, gave back a clean, fresh odor to Captain Blackwood in the stern. A direct contrast to the night of filthy songs and curses and broken rest.

He had taken a sudden dislike to this man he had rescued. Perhaps it was caused by the thought of the dead Kanaka; perhaps by the insistently blaring voice that grated on his nerves.

He was curious to learn the man's story; curious to know what had happened to force him into a deserted boat in these little sailed seas, a prey to the whims of treacherous currents and a pitiless sun.

He could hear him moving below. Tim went down into the cabin, after calling a cheery good morning to Blackwood.

The skipper heard him ask the man how he was, and then came the answer through the open skylight. The voice possesed all the attributes of a fog horn: "I'm all right. Where the hell's the booze on this beastly packet? What is it, a floatin' mission? Where's the skipper? A hell of a host, leavin' a man to die o' thirst!"

The mate's answer came back swift and sharp. "Listen here, mister, we pulled you out of a rotten old whaleboat and saved your miserable, ungrateful life. If you want a drink, say so, but don't get sarcastic, see? The skipper's on deck where he belongs."

Thereupon the tough voice softened into something placatory.

Blackwood walked forward. That voice awoke vague memories, unpleasant thoughts, and strive as he might, he could not place it.

In the skipper's cabin the rescued man sat on the edge of the bunk, and punctuated his remarks with a dirty forefinger; lent them vigor and force with frequent curses. "—And set me adrift after lootin' the ship; me an' a Kanaka they didn't like. Damn 'em! They robbed me of ten thousand dollars' worth o' pearls. Little beauties they were, too. The water lasted ten days. After that I don't remember much, except that the Kanaka caught an albacore with his knife lashed to an oar; we drank his blood. The Kanaka fought like a devil to pervent me from gettin' some, but I convinced him he was wrong, an' then he acted pretty the rest o' the time. My mind slipped a cog from then on. The day after the water gave out, the Kanaka slipped his knife into his ribs; guess he thought he'd better die that way than o' thirst. I tried to put myself over the side an' let my body soak in some o' the water, but some damn shark stuck too close. The Kanaka would have jumped overboard, but he hated shark meat like poison. He cried like a baby when the water gave out. My name's Thomas. Cap'n Bill Thomas, skipper o' the schooner Frigate Bird. What's the skipper o' this packet's name?"

The flabby lips broke into a broad grin, disclosing an uneven row of teeth, a grin that had first formed when he spoke of how the native sailor had died, a grin that almost completed the belief of the mate's that Thomas had murdered the man in cold blood.

The mate answered his question coldly. "Captain James Blackwood. He sighted you himself and altered his course."

Thomas dropped to the deck and clutched at the bunk curtains for support.

"What? Blackwood? Old Flyaway Jimmy Blackwood, of Lord Howe Island? Ho, ho! What luck! Call him down here. Many's the time we cooked up a scheme to fatten our pockets! Cap'n Thomas and Flyaway Jimmy Blackwood in cahoots again. That's rich! Hey' Jimmy," he yelled up the hatch, "lay below, damn it! This ain't no way to treat an old shipmate!"

Captain Jimmy stepped into the cabin; when he saw the face again and heard the last words, he almost staggered. "Thomas! What brings you here? I thought you were dead!"

"Maybe you wish I was, Jimmy. Your face says so. So I ain't welcome any more on my old pardner's ship? Since when have you grown so damn good, so high an' mighty you blush when you see me? Flyaway Jimmy blushing! Won't the old gang beller when they hear that!" He chuckled hugely at his own joke. "Old Flyaway who let the Kanaka lady on the dockhead crying her eyes out."

Blackwood flung himself forward. "Shut up, Thomas, or I'll kill you, here and now!"

Thomas's face turned a sickly gray; then he forced a laugh, saying, "Come on, Jimmy, I was only joking. What's the lay? No black ivory under hatches, is they? Can't you let an old shipmate in on it?"

"There's no blacks under hatches. I'm going honest, if you want to know. I'm through with the old life."

Blackwood dropped limply into a chair. He ran his fingers through his hair slowly, a stunned look of apprehension in his eyes.

"Straight?" Thomas gasped, unable to believe his ears. "You goin' straight? Just because you pinched a few pearls from a private bed? Don't kid me, Jimmy. Come on, knock the neck off'n a bottle o' booze; I'm dyin' for a drink. Let's pledge to a future, brimmin' over with coin."

Thomas instantly saw himself in an enviable position. He had Blackwood under his thumb. If the other had resented his remarks about the Kanaka girl he must be open to attack from that quarter. He smiled at the thought, and resolved to keep his eyes and ears open for information that he would need soon.

Blackwood was speaking, automatically, and without feeling. "Under the bunk—Thomas—take it." His eyes were closed and his head dropped lower, as if his strong spirit was bowing in defeat.

Thomas reached in and drew out a bottle and rapped it sharply against the bunk, unable to wait for a cork puller. He glanced once at Blackwood and grinned again. "Here's how, Jimmy, down the hatch!"

He tipped the bottle and drank deeply; again and again he poured the fiery liquid down his throat. When the bottle was half empty, he set it down near him and dropped into a chair, wiping his lips on his coat sleeve.

Blackwood sat unmoving, silent, except for his chest that heaved with his breathing, he sat as if dead. Thomas sent shifty glances about the cabin. The mate had gone, so he leaned forward, and said in a thick whisper: "Jimmy, I got something soft, all tucked away pretty. Something that 'll put us on Easy Street for the rest of our lives. Blast me, there's thousands in it! Put the old hooker about and head for the Marshall Islands."

Blackwood heard him; heard him through what seemed to be endless stretches of distance. He made no move of interest.

Thomas's voice was beguilingly enticing. "I'll show you the finest little unworked pearl bed in the South Seas. It belongs to an old black chief there; but that won't worry us. It didn't in the old days, did it, Jimmy? Sink me, but we're in luck!"

He lifted the bottle to his lips, drank and then swabbed again at his heavy mouth. "I have only a few more years, Jimmy, before the heart gets me. The doc says it's goin' fast, an' I'm damned if I don't run the devil a close race."

Blackwood sat through the story like a man of stone; then his words came slowly, as if he was groping in some far-away realm for them: "No, those days are over, Thomas. I'm going straight, now. I've paid back all I've taken. I've made many new friends — decent ones — and I have managed to scrape together enough to buy this schooner. No, I won't go on any expedition with you. Do your own poaching. If you want a billet, I know an owner in Apia that 'll fix you up, providing you play straight."

"Billet!" Thomas guffawed loudly. "What the hell do *I* want with a billet? I want what that black chief has in his pearl bed; pretty little stones that—that 'll buy what I want and keep me in good liquor for the next two years. After that, I expect to cash in. What's the matter with you? Ain't a pillar of the church, are you?"

Blackwood looked up quickly, a hunted, desperate look in his eyes.

"Ho-ho! That's good. Old Flyaway, the slipperiest customer that ever tapped a bushman on the coco for his black hide, goin' to church!"

Thomas saw his advantage clearly; here was a bird worth the plucking. Blackwood's evident dislike for the subject gave him his leverage. A little force, judiciously applied, was Thomas's long suit. Blackmail was merely another way of getting what he wanted without the labor of stealing it. Who knew, maybe Blackwood had a stake put away that would do just as well? He began to feel him out, and incidentally to learn something else that might make his position stronger.

"Nice little craft here, Jimmy; what's she worth?" His eyes roved around the cabin; they came to rest on a photograph hung over Blackwood's bunk. Maybe— His question was forgotten.

"Who's the girl, Jimmy?" he asked.

Blackwood answered without looking up. "My wife. She'll meet me in Apia."

Thomas quickly hid a gleam of intense joy. His wife! He felt a sudden feeling of good natured fellowship.

"Pretty gal, Jim; kinda young to pick up with an old walrus like you, ain't she?"

"Maybe she is, Thomas; but that doesn't concern you. She is the missionary's daughter at Suva. Talk about anything you like, but don't mention her again. She is out of this."

Thomas wanted to laugh, but he refrained. She was in it; very much so. She would be the slungshot that would bring her precious husband to terms. He began to feel the effects of the whisky he had drunk.

"All right, Jim, don't harp on it. How about that little trip to the Marshall Islands and a hatful of pearls? It's a regular colony of sick shell and a bed of gold. Don't be a fool; the Dolphin can show a

clean pair of heels to anything the old chief can muster, and that French cruiser is in Sydney for repairs. This is our chance of a lifetime!"

Blackwood glanced up wearily. "No! For the last time, no! I said I was through with that life, and I am. I have a wife, and she doesn't know of the past, and she won't, either."

Thomas leaned suddenly toward him, his voice sounding strangely ominous in the tropical heat of the cabin.

"She won't, not if you come with me, Jimmy Blackwood. I need you and your schooner. I need it bad!"

Blackwood rose to his feet, eyes flashing.

"Sit down!" Thomas spoke swiftly. "Sit down an' listen. I have you where I want you." He waved Blackwood's own pistol freely. "Sit down, Jimmy; don't tempt me. You say your wife don't know; for instance, about the gal in Tahiti on the dockhead. Sit down, don't get excited. I know it's a damn lie, but that doesn't hurt it any. Lots of people will believe it, an' I can find a hundred that have heard it so often they'll swear to it. That's the boy, Jimmy, easy does it. You can't play the smug, honest sea captain with me. Billet! Who the hell wants a billet when he has a round turn on a fortune? You an' your damn sugar tongued religion can't gyp me out o' this moneny. I got ten thousand dollars' worth out already; that's what started the rumpus when they set me adrift. Think it over now an' let me know. If you can't take me there, then I guess you must have a nice little stake stowed away somewhere that 'll last me until I pass out. Think it over, Jimmy."

He staggered over to the bunk and threw himself on the bedding, his short fat legs sprawled out.

Blackwood left the cabin, stumbling aimlessly up to the deck. Like a man in a dream, with leaden feet, struggling through a nightmare, he made his way aft.

His blurred eyes and numbed brain did not see a brown shape duck behind the mainmast. It was Talea, the cook. The brown skinned Polynesian was troubled. Captain Jim's customary smile was missing. He sensed that all was not well.

Talea regarded the back of Captain Jim thoughtfully. Many years of service had taught him to read his master like a book. Talea was brown, the color of mahogany. Heathen, perhaps, savage, yet in spite of it all, he loved Captain Jim with a love that was past understanding. Nothing seemed too exacting if it was done for Captain Jim. Childlike, faithful, he was the very personification of unselfish devotion.

Captain Jim had admired a finely graduated sextant a fellow ship captain owned. Next day Talea made him a present of that self same sextant. It was returned with profuse apologies by Blackwood. Talea had not yet reached the eighth commandment in the missionary school. "Thou shalt not steal," was new to him; likewise, a mere jumble of words.

Blackwood clung to the taffrail, a bitter cold in his heart. This was the end. The life he had reclaimed would fall to pitiful ruins at the touch of that drunken beast below. Most of what he would tell was untrue. But they were lies that he had not taken the trouble to deny in his young, hot-headed youth. Now they returned to him like Frankenstein's monster. Some of them were true. Thomas's reference to the days when they recruited black labor, not always legally nor willingly, for instance.

Jimmy Blackwood had disappeared from his old haunts one day and his associates knew him no more. He had quietly cast off the old life and began anew. Even the vilest ulcer will heal if the flesh and life is clean. Success had followed his determination to live down the past, and he prospered. He had paid many of his debts, made new friends. He would always stake a man to a fresh start. Beach combers, broken men, had come to him for succor. When a white man is down in the South Seas, he is down; even the dirty, ragged natives look down on him. These men Blackwood had helped. No one was turned away. Then he had met the missionary's daughter in Suva. The marriage followed soon after, for Blackwood had a new reputation, and it had preceded him.

Soon they would reach Apia and Victoria. He knew that Thomas would carry out his contemptible plan; it was all in the breed.

He knew that Thomas would tell his tale as only Thomas could. He was not lacking in adjectives and imagination that would color it a blazing red. Victoria would ask him if it were true. Could he deny it? Much of it he could, and would But the rest—the part that was true— He shook his head in torment. He was caught between two fires. If he bribed Thomas, the man would be back when the money was spent. If he went to the pearl beds and succeeded in escaping the vigilance of the patrol that was always near, regardless of Thomas's information that it wasn't, he would have blotted his record—would have given Thomas a new hold on him, and the riddle would still be unsolved. Nothing would sate the appetite of this leech that had fastened itself to its victim. It was bitter—galling.

For a moment he nurtured the desire that Thomas might die with his heart trouble. Then, when he thought of the interminable wait, the uncertainty of it, he cast it out, cursing himself for a fool.

He railed inwardly at his lack of courage to kill this human vulture. He consoled himself with the thought that it would be better that he depend on his clean record than have a long life of soiled years with murder to cap it off with. Still, the thought held him. It was a solution to his immediate troubles.

A tugging at his elbow drew his attention. It was Talea, his big luminous eyes filled with intense sympathy. Talea spoke softly, trustingly:

"Captain Jim, him damn liar, eh? Talea savvy. Him want plenty cumshaw. Cumshaw no good; better feed him mao."

He looked at Blackwood with the big eyes of a dog, radiating love and loyalty—a dog that knows but one master. There was no one quite so perfect as Captain Jim, to Talea.

"A shark wouldn't touch him, Talea; I think I shall kill him before we arrive. I think I shall choke him to death with my two hands. The whole world would be better off without him."

"No, Captain Jim—it not good to kill. Him missionaries say plenty 'hell and high water' to kill. Talea make prayers; he die quick. It not good for Captain Jim to kill. Talea, him kill damn liar, eh, Captain Jim?"

Blackwood swung on him. "No, Talea, I forbid you to touch that man! It is *my* medicine, Talea. I didn't shirk before, and I shan't now."

Talea regarded Captain Jim wonderingly, as if he had suddenly been slapped across the cheek. Blackwood immediately began to lay low any of Talea's rubber commandments by enumerating, separately and individually, all the things he must not do. Otherwise, Talea would find a loophole, and then, serene in the thought that he was disobeying no one, would kill Thomas and feel innocent of any wrongdoing.

"Talea, you must not throw him overboard, choke him, stab him, poison him, hit him, or shoot him. None of these things must you do, Talea—understand?"

Talea nodded slowly, fixing this new table of commandments in his head.

Blackwood, believing he had effectually put a stop to Talea's methods, watched him go forward, shaking his head.

He turned away, sick at heart. Talea's simple faith, half Christian, half heathen, permitted him to pray an enemy to death. Before Christianity had entered into Talea's scheme of things he merely slipped a knife into his foe and left the praying to the women and the old men. Since then he had developed a table of commandments of his own. They were a mixed affair, which no one understood but Talea. He interpreted them to fit his own immediate needs.

Many natives had prayed Thomas to death; prayed because he was too wary to give them the chance to do anything else.

When Blackwood went below, he found Thomas asleep. His dirty boots, borrowed from Blackwood, were on the bunk. An empty whisky bottle rolled with every lurch of the schooner. For an instant Blackwood regarded the cunning face, and felt an almost incontrollable impulse to take the throat in his hands. In the grip of this emotion he walked slowly toward the bunk, his fingers opening and closing convulsively. Then he recovered a semblance of calmness and dropped into a chair, covering his head with his arms.

Two days of this, and Blackwood, on the morning of the third, collapsed on deck. The mate carried him below in the grip of one of his periodical attacks of fever.

It was Talea who nursed him. Talea who held his hand that he might not hurt himself in his delirium. Talea who told the crew to go to hell and get their own meals. And it was he who listened to the babblings of his Captain Jim. Who read the whole filthy mess and who began a solution.

When Blackwood had quieted, Talea slipped forward into his galley. From under his bunk he drew his gods. He placed them on the bunk and began to pray the white man to death. It mattered not that his gods were a telephone receiver, long since cast off, a colored marble, a set of false teeth, and a glass eye. All these things were magic; such magic that he could command the respect of every brown skinned heathen in the forecastle. He prayed mostly to the teeth, that they might bite Thomas. At the conclusion of the ceremony he put his gods away and went aft to watch the white man writhe and die in agony.

For two hours he kept a close eye on Thomas, and at the end of that period he decided that Thomas was immune.

Blackwood was quiet and resting well, so Talea crept to the lee of the mainmast and pondered it all over. He had heard Thomas express a wish that Captain Jim might die. Then he would have the schooner. Talea had nodded slowly, as if the words were hard to accept. As if such a man as Captain Jim could die. Surely the missionaries who said the white man's God was good would not take Captain Jim away. Such things could not be. They were to frighten old men and women.

It was a logical brain that Talea possessed. He went straight to the core of the trouble. The white man had said that Captain Jim would die. If the white man's God demanded a life, why not the stranger, instead of Captain Jim? Why had Talea become a Christian, if it wasn't to have a few advantages, and ask a favor occasionally? Was there no benefit in being a Christian? Talea had asked little. Once he had prayed for a set of gold teeth that he might give Captain Jim, but he had not got them. Maybe it was best not to ask, after all.

Talea fingered the edge of his knife thoughtfully. It was sharp. It would drink deep of the white pig's blood. But no, that was not good. Captain Jim said it was not.

Talea had carefully inquired of the missionaries if there was any way of killing one's enemies without the wrath of the Lord descending. He had a carefully itemized list. The knife, choking, poison, all, the missionary had said, was taboo.

Talea, too, had his problem. Perhaps he solved it with his curious childlike simplicity. Perhaps he confounded his heathen beliefs with the little Christianity he had absorbed. Perhaps the fusion of the two allowed a greater elastic limit. At any rate, he disappeared forward, smiling contentedly. Not one of Captain Jim's "don'ts" had been violated. Not even a crack appeared in the missionary's commandments.

Just before dark Talea appeared at the foot of the mainmast. Thomas was speaking to the mate in the stern. His eyes caught Talea struggling with a shark. He saw the shark swinging from the shrouds, saw Talea approach and suddenly throw something into the clamping jaws and then back away.

The shark lay still for a moment. Then it began to struggle—to lash about—then it became quiet.

"What's that heathen doin' to that shark? I never saw one of 'em die so quick in my life! It's a gray nurse, too!"

The mate answered laconically: "Oh, that's Talea trying out some of his native poison, I guess. Terrible stuff that—I saw a Hawaiian in the Solomons fix his best enemy up with it, and he died clawing the deck. It is usually put into the victim's food. They say it tastes bitter; as bitter as gall and wormwood. Then outside of a sharp pain in the heart and that rotten bitter taste, it is all over but the sailmaker's job. There is no antidote. Thirty seconds does the job. Thinking of jumping off?"

"About two years from now, but not that way, thanks!" Thomas repressed a shudder.

Talea had begun his traverse between the commandments of Christianity, heathen gods, and Captain Jim. He cut the shark down and kicked it with his foot into the scuppers. Then, just before dinner, he approached Thomas standing aft against the rail. Talea spoke softly.

"You ask Captain Jim cumshaw, Talea bring 'em." He drew forth a chamois skin bag. "See, plenty pearls, here is, you go 'way?" Talea held the bag close to him, out of Thomas's reach.

"Open 'em, you heathen—open 'em!" Thomas breathed hoarsely, his eyes fixed on the bag.

Talea, without a word, poured a stream of creamy silver gems into his brown palm. The pearls glowed and shone with life. They nestled in his palm like a tiny mound of opalescent frost. To Thomas they represented all that he had lost by his mutinous crew, and a few thousands besides. His beady eyes glittered. His tongue seemed to clog in his throat. "Ho! Pretty baubles, right here on the Dolphin, eh? Crackin' a private bed on the sly, eh? Foxy devil, old Flyaway; always was."

Thomas feasted his eyes. The tiny pile of perfect gems conjured visions. Then, suddenly, he swept the jewels into his palm, before the astonished Talea could prevent him. He backed away, his hand on his hip. Thomas chuckled, and eyed the pearls closer. Talea dropped his hand to his knife, but stopped, as Captain Jim's warning flashed into his brain. "You go? You go now, take whaleboat?" His voice was soft. Too soft. Thomas caught the note of warning, and looked up quickly. "Go? No, you brown devil, I won't go." He caressed the pearls greedily, keeping a sharp eye on Talea.

"Better you go." Talea's voice again held a note of warning. Thomas answered with a tremendous blow of his fist. It caught Talea flush on the ear, and he fell to the deck. When he rose it was slowly, and painfully. One side of his head was beginning to puff. The weight of the hamlike fist was like the blow of a steam hammer.

Talea felt the loss of the pearls keenly. He had been saving them for the expected arrival of little Captain Jim. He made his way forward to the galley, a strange fire in his eyes, hatred tugging at his heart.

While he was preparing the evening meal his face regained its usual calmness—inscrutable and even. Before he called Thomas to dinner that night he stooped and drew the medicine chest from under the bunk. After a moment's scrutiny he brought out a bottle, which he hid away in his loin cloth. Then he rose to his feet and moved swiftly to the table.

His face wrinkled into a smile, revengeful and vindictive. The bottle appeared magically. Tiny white grains dropped into a dish. A cunning smile played for an instant over his face. When Thomas came down to dinner alone, only Talea was there, standing behind him, his arms folded.

The cabin oil light swung slowly to and fro. Thomas vouchsafed no reference to the episode of the afternoon. The mate would come down when Thomas relieved him for dinner. After eying Talea a second, Thomas smiled and dropped into his chair. The meal began with Thomas noisily sipping his soup. Talea watched the spoon on its first journey with staring eyes. A tenseness only broken by the rattle of spoon on dish seemed to grow perceptibly. Talea's eyes were glued on the soup spoon as it moved from dish to mouth.

Thomas felt his eyes upon him. He stopped, a horrible suspicion in his mind. He saw Talea's eyes fixed on his plate, a smile of derision on his face. Immediately a bitter, galling taste filled his mouth. Poison! No antidote! His spoon slipped from his nerveless fingers. He lunged to his feet. His voice was hoarse with fear.

"Taste this, you brown— Taste this, I say!" He flung his chair against the bulkhead, pointing to the soup on the table. Talea, unmoved, watched through narrowing eyes. Thomas, now torn by a terrible fear, slowly dropped his hand to his hip. Talea edged nearer the door. Thomas's voice cracked sharply, deeply tinged with terror.

"Taste this, damn you." The words seemed to rattle like castanets. "Or I'll drill you!" He jerked out his pistol. Talea let out one horrified, terror-stricken shriek of fear and dashed for the scuttle.

Thomas attempted to raise his pistol. The veins on his forehead stood out like whipcords. His breath came in gasps. The taste in his mouth became more bitter. He visualized the form of a shark. The mate's words came to him. Poisoned! His face turned purple. A sharp pain shot through his heart, and he clapped his hand to his chest. "You devil!" he gasped weakly. "You've poisoned me! I'll—I'll—"

The pistol clattered to the deck. He seemed to rise on his toes, his head thrown back. His eyes rolled wildly. He struggled to retain his feet—then slowly he crumpled and fell. His heart hesitated—thumped wildly—then stopped, clutched in the gripping fingers of stark terror and fear. His body sprawled queerly across the deck.

The lookout had sighted Apia. Blackwood lay in the cabin, calling weakly for Talea. Talea, smiling, sympathetic, came instantly.

"Talea, tell Thomas to come here. Tell the mate to put the vessel about for the Marshall group; then bring me a bottle of whisky." Blackwood's voice spoke of defeat—surrender.

"Him go, Captain Jim, him go 'way last night in whaleboat. Talea t'ink damn good t'ing." The cook smiled imperturbably, entirely composed. "I t'ink he never come back."

Blackwood rose on his elbow. "He's gone? Talea, you say he's gone?" Blackwood gasped incredulously. When Talea nodded his head violently Blackwood fell back into the bunk, confused. Talea spoke softly:

"Captain Jim, I t'ink maybe be better you get up, eh?"

When Captain Jim went on deck to pilot the schooner into port, Talea slipped below. In the medicine chest he replaced the small bottle. He was grinning. Then he thrust his finger into the bottle, and tasted the contents, then spat it out. A single lurid, unchristianlike damn was all he said.

It was bitter; as bitter as gall and wormwood; it stung his tongue. It was quinine. On his bunk in the galley rested his gods. A telephone receiver, a colored marble, a set of false teeth and a glass eye. Last came an old yellow ivory pendant—a cloven hoof. Talea smiled a slow, gentle smile—a smile serene, content. From his lips sounded the missionary's hymn in a chanting monotone:

"In de sweet by an' by, we will meet on dat beautiful shore."

While his head bowed in abject obeisance to the cloven hoof.

The simple faith of the heathen solves many perplexing problems.

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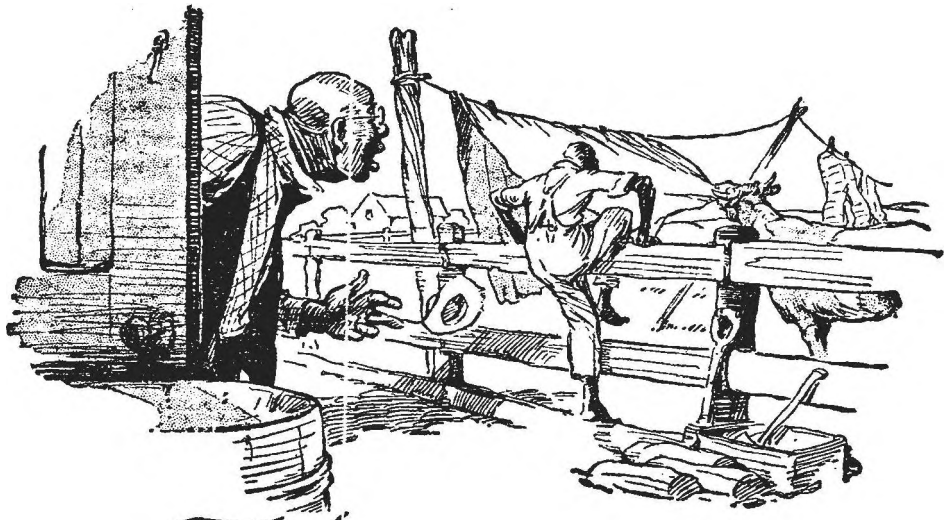
IN FAIRYLAND

I DUSTED my nose with a butterfly's wing
And wrapped in a cobweb starred with dew,
Stole 'neath these drowsy flowers to bring
This little song of my love to you!

I'll trace each line with a feather fine
Dipped in the perfumed silver mist
Of dew that drips from the columbine
'Tis a century since we've kissed!

And standing on tiptoe I fling small arms
To the unregarding stars.
What can they know, as they come and go,
Of this shining love of ours?

Ruth Plumly Thompson.



Uncowed

By EDGAR VALENTINE SMITH

IN the gathering dusk Brothuh Jehu Threadgill passed an appraising eye over the figure of his companion. Since the venture upon which he was about to embark might call for more or less finesse to insure its desired culmination, Brothuh Threadgill was fittingly thoughtful.

"If I offers to sell you to him straight out," he mused, "he'll be mo'n ap' to scrudinize you too clost. But if I jus' astes fo' a thuty day loan—an' him wantin' a milk cow so crazy bad—maybe he won't be so keerful."

He turned to his companion again.

"'Vangeline," he murmured, "we's arrove to de p'int where frien'ship ceastes. Git up!"

Hearkening to the master's voice, 'Vangeline got up and they continued their journey. Darkness had descended and a light rain was falling when they reached their objective, the combined restaurant and pawnshop of Mistuh Omen Shaggs in the suburb of Plateau. Here it was that Brothuh Threadgill called a halt.

"Who-o-oa—Back! Stan' still, cow!"

In answer to his hail, Mistuh Shaggs appeared in the doorway of the shop. In the darkness of the poorly lighted, suburban street he could distinguish two figures; one that of a man and the other something that appeared to be a milch cow. The ensuing conversation strengthened this surmise.

Brothuh Threadgill spoke first.

"You is Mistuh Shaggs—Mistuh Omen Shaggs—de money-loandin' pornbroker?"

"I'm is," was the answer. "Who is you?"

"Name of Threadgill—Jehu Threadgill. You loans money?"

"Sometimes I does—an' sometimes I doesn't."

"When does you does?"

"'At depen's on de suckumstances—an' de secu'ity."

"I's got bofe."

"What's de suckumstances in yo' putickluh case?"

"I's broke, an'—"

"'At's sufficient. An' de secu'ity?"

Brothuh Threadgill waved a proprietory hand in the direction of his companion.

"'Vangeline," he said simply.

Perhaps the one thing in which Mistuh Omen Shaggs took greatest pride was the fact that he was city born and city bred. Country life had never known him —not even for one fleeting moment. It was, indeed, his boast that he had never been outside the city of Mobile—and its suburbs—in his life. Being thus uncontaminated by country influences, his ignorance of cattle in general, and of cows in particular, was vast and all encompassing. True, he recognized on sight certain contours as being distinctly bovine; and he was acquainted with that rumor to the effect that milk comes from cows. It is even permissible to surmise from this that he may have reasoned that all cows gave milk. But further than this, he was woefully ignorant upon the subject of livestock.

Nor was this the only respect in which he occupied a distinct disadvantage at the moment; for, he did not know Brothuh Threadgill, even by reputation. But the latter had not only acquainted himself with the limitations of Mistuh Shaggs's knowledge along certain lines—among these being the subject of cattle—but he had picked up, during the week just passed, various bits of information, which, he reasoned, wisely used, should react to his personal gain. Prominent among these was the fact that Mistuh Shaggs very earnestly desired the coöperation of one milch cow as an adjunct to the restaurant end of his activities. In the rear of Omen's place of business there was a lot large enough to give a cow sufficient room to ramble, of which fact, too, Brothuh Threadgill was well aware.

Considering all of these things it can be seen that Brothuh Threadgill's request for a loan was unusually well timed. Omen's heart had almost leaped into his throat as soon as he had caught the drift of the other's conversation. For here was a chance to secure the services of a cow without having to buy it! He succeeded in repressing his personal longing, though, in deference to what he considered good business judgment.

"Drive her up clos'ter," he ordered as casually as he could.

Brothuh Threadgill gave the necessary command, and 'Vangeline's gentle, pensive face appeared outlined in the shaft of light that streamed from the shop window. Mistuh Shaggs almost surrendered without parley. He remembered having heard somewhere that cows sometimes hook people, but 'Vangeline's expression nailed this at once as a vicious slander. It was a friendly—even an affectionate—face which met Omen Shaggs's gaze. Large, soulful brown eyes looked tranquilly—one might even have said appealingly—into his; eyes that spoke of a disposition not easily stirred to unfriendly manifestations.

But it was one of Omen's principles never to show too great a readiness to do business.

"She don't look to me," he commented haphazardly, "as bein' ve'y vallyble secu'ity."

"Not vallyble?" Brothuh Threadgill snorted. "A man wid yo' knowledge o' livestocks sayin' 'Vangeline don't look vallyble! Brothuh Shaggs, you s'prises me!"

This subtly conceived compliment to a knowledge that he knew he did not possess tickled Mistuh Shaggs's vanity. Brothuh Threadgill, sensing as much, followed up his advantage.

"I'll gua'ntee pussnally 'at dey ain't a mo' vallyble specimunt—fo' de breed—nowheres."

"What breed?"

"Ginyouwine Himbro-Persian!"

Mistuh Shaggs had no more idea as to what a "Himbro-Persian" might be than had Brothuh Threadgill himself. The appellation, though, was distinctly high sounding; it fairly breathed of aristocratic lineage.

But Omen still hesitated.

"Look like she got mighty long hawns," he observed critically. "'At would make her bad 'bout hookin'."

"'Vangeline wouldn't hook nothin'!" was Brothuh Threadgill's vehement assurance. And, as Mistuh Shaggs seemed still to be doubtful, an idea occured to him. "You makes out a paper," he asked, "when you loans money?"

"Cose. Duplikicks. 'At's business. De borryer gits one an' I keeps de other."

"Den, I'll gua'ntee," Brothuh Threadgill put in earnestly, "in 'at paper to be 'sponsible fo' all hookin' damages what 'Vangeline commit."

"Hm-m-m!" Mistuh Shaggs was thoughtful. "How much milk I goin' to git f'um her?"

"Three gallons a day," Brothuh Threadgill responded instantly, "if a drop!"

"Bet she eats a lot o' cow vittles to offset 'at!"

"Don't eat nothin'—hahdly." Brothuh Threadgill was getting anxious. "You can feed her on fifty cents a day. Why, if 'at is what is hol'in' you back, I'll gua'ntee in 'at paper, futhermo', 'at I'll stan' fo' all over fifty cents wu'th a day 'at she eats."

"But fifty cents a day is—"

"An' three gallons o' milk a day," Brothuh Threadgill interrupted, "is wu'th two dollars an' fawty cents o' anybody's cash money. Jus' figger it up fo' yo'se'f!"

Omen figured it. The result of his computation was highly gratifying, since he apparently stood to realize a net profit of something like a dollar and ninety cents for every day that 'Vangeline gave three gallons of milk. That was good enough. Presently he capitulated. After some haggling he agreed to a loan of twenty dollars for thirty days, 'Vangeline as security.

Pursuant to instructions Brothuh Threadgill drove his charge into the lot in the rear of the office and returned presently for his money. Omen drew up a document, in scrambled legal phraseology, along the lines that had been suggested which was signed in duplicate by each of them. Then Brothuh Threadgill, taking his copy and the money, departed chuckling happily.

II.

It was the next morning that Mistuh Shaggs awoke—in a double sense.

"Fus' thing I does," he yawned as he dressed himself languidly, "is to summons 'at long laigged fractotum o' mine an' issue de proper instructions."

Facing the doorway, he bawled:

"Izrul!"

From the vicinity of the kitchen there came an answering:

"Yassuh!"

"A-proach!"

A moment later Izrul Toddy, the overgrown youth who assisted in the restaurant as cook, waiter and active head of the dish-washing department, appeared in the doorway.

"Boy," Mistuh Shaggs observed facetiously, "fo' my mawnin's repas' I desires milk fresh f'um de 'riginal so'ce. Take 'at bucket"—indicating a tin pail which hung against the wall—"an' return wid it full o' de foamin' fluid."

"Where I gits it?" Izrul asked.

"F'um 'Vangeline."

Izrul, having been granted a leave of absence from the restaurant on the previous evening, was ignorant of his employer's plunge in live stock.

"Does which?" he asked, staring.

"I orders you to milk 'Vangeline."

"Who is her?"

"She's de three gallon milk givin' cow which Brothuh Threadgill porned to me las' night."

Izrul took the pail and departed.

Mistuh Shaggs, having completed his toilet, betook himself to the dining room. As he sat down at his favorite table, visions of innumerable glasses of matutinal milk, pure and uncontaminated, floated before his mind. But, with the sudden reappearance of Izrul Toddy, grinning in the doorway, the visions vanished. There was something about Izrul's grin which awoke in his employer the beginnings of a vague alarm.

"Well?" the latter asked curtly.

Izrul stifled a giggle.

"Is you done milked all 'em three gallons a'ready?" Mistuh Shaggs demanded.

"N-nawsuh!"

"How come you ain't? Orders is orders wid me, boy!"

"Y-yassuh, but—"

"Don't come buttin' in here! Thinks you is a goat?"

"Nawsuh! But I thinks 'Vangeline is—" Izrul hesitated and sniggered.

"Is what?"

"Is ain't. Ain't 'at kin' of a cow."

"Wh-what you means?"

"Come look and see!"

Rising hurriedly, Mistuh Shaggs followed

the youthful Izrul to the rear lot, where 'Vangeline had spent the night. Apparently it was the same animal that had so favorably impressed him the previous evening. There was the same kindly face; the identical brown eyes now gazed, almost appealingly, it seemed, into his. The next thing that attracted his attention was a spot on the back of 'Vangeline's neck from which the hair seemed to have been removed.

" How come 'at?" he asked.

" 'At's f'um de yoke!" Izrul giggled.

" F'um which?"

Unlike his employer, Izrul was country bred, reared upon a piny woods farm.

" 'At galded place," he explained, " comes f'um wearin' a yoke. Ol 'Vangeline ain't nothin', Mistuh Shaggs, but a ol' wo' out work ox."

" *Ox?*"

" Yassuh!"

" An' I cain't get no milk?"

Izrul snickered again. " Not less'n he changes his seck a whole heap."

It was with this that there came to Omen Shaggs his second awakening of the morning.

It did not need Izrul Toddy's " Mistuh Shaggs, you is been stung," to arouse him. In the full light of day he awoke, of his own accord now, to the staggering realization that he had been " skun " most artistically. Limited though his knowledge of cows was, even he could recognize the fact that 'Vangeline was not of the milk giving species.

Three minutes after he had come out of his daze he was on a cross town car, bound for the opposite side of the city, in search of the address which Jehu Threadgill had given him.

He had little trouble in finding this—or, for that matter, in locating the owner of the address. It was in a neatly appointed clothes pressing shop, of which Brothuh Threadgill was plainly the proprietor, that Omen came across the latter.

He stormed into the place spouting volcanic fury.

" 'At—'at cow!" he exploded.

" Cow?" Brothuh Threadgill repeated patiently. " Which cow?"

" De one you porned me fo' twenty dollars las' night."

" Can't say 'at I rickollecks pornin' you no cow, Mistuh Shaggs."

" 'At's just it—you didn't! You—"

" Den, wherefo' all de excitement? Ca'm yo'se'f."

" But I'm tellin' you he ain't no milk givin' cow! He ain't nothin' but—but a male ox."

" An', at dat, you ain't tellin' me nothin' new—nothin' new at all, Mistuh Shaggs."

Omen almost strangled upon the rush of words which attempted to disgorge themselves from his throat.

Finally he managed to gurgle:

" Wh-what you means?"

" Jus' dis, Mistuh Shaggs: befo' I connected myse'f wid de pant pressin' business —'count o' it bein' mo' ahtistic 'an my former occupation—I driv ol' 'Vangeline to my chahcoal cart fo' mo'n three years. You reckin I ain't foun' out in all 'at time he don't give no milk?"

" But, you disrepresented—"

" Jus' one minute, Mistuh Shaggs!" Jehu held up a protesting hand. " Jus' one minute! In which respecks is I disrepresented anything?"

" Fus' place, you said his name was 'Vangeline."

" So 'tis. I chrischened him 'at las' night."

" But—'at's a female name!"

" Well, 'tain't no law 'gainst givin' a male cow a female name, is dey?"

" An' you gua'anteed 'at he would give three gallons o' milk a day."

" Not so fas', Mistuh Shaggs—not quite so fas'! Kin'ly recall de puhcise wordin' o' my remarks. Ain't I said 'at he would give three gallons—*if* a drop? Is he give a drop since you had him?"

Being perfectly honest himself, Omen had to admit that this was just what Brothuh Threadgill had said.

" But," he urged feebly, " fo' value received you is got twenty dollars o' my money. An' what is I got?"

" Well, fo' one thing," was the placid reminder, " you is got a lil mo' expe'ience 'an you had 'is time yistiddy."

So far as definite results were concerned,

this ended the interview. As he turned to leave the shop, Omen heard Brothuh Threadgill's voice: "We lives an' learns, Mistuh Shaggs—we lives an' learns."

III.

On the return trip Shaggs sized up the situation. From Jehu's general demeanor, rather than from anything that he had said, Omen had gathered that the other had no intention of redeeming his pledge at the end of the thirty days for which the loan had been made. There was a chance, he reflected, that during this period he might be able to hire 'Vangeline out as a beast of burden. And, at the end of the month, he could be disposed of for butchering.

He stopped off at the baggage hauling and transfer establishment of Rambo Hawkins for enlightenment as to the possible chances of success with the first named course of action.

"'At ox was so wo' out," Rambo informed him cheerfully when he had heard the story, "'at he wasn't fitten fo' haulin' no mo'. Threadgill couldn't sell him, so he puck you out."

"Well, he may be a crook," Omen admitted miserably, "but you has to give him credit fo' dis much."

"What?"

"When it comes to pickin', he sho' is one mo' gran' lil picker!"

This left only one possible source of retrieving his loss: the butcher. He sought out the meat market of his friend, Ananias Barlow. The latter, although he listened sympathetically, also proved to be a Job's comforter.

"I woul'n't slaughter 'at ven'able ol' beas'," he stated emphatically, "if he was gave to me free gratus. What ain't bone is skin, an' what ain't skin is muskel. You could pahboil him fo' a week, an' eben den de meat would scrumple up de tushes of a hongry he-yalligator."

Omen's hope that there might be some way of recovering at least a portion of his money had been pitiably short lived. He knew that it would be useless to inquire as to further markets for 'Vangeline upon the hoof. And, should he, in a misguided moment, decide to do the slaughtering and marketing himself, he realized that the story of how he came into possession of the ancient animal would already have been spread broadcast, with the certainty that the meat would go begging. Then, too, if it were of the quality that Ananias Barlow had so eloquently described, he would not dare serve it in his restaurant.

Look at it from any angle he would, the case seemed hopeless. Boiled down to its essentials, the fact stood out that Jehu Threadgill now owned in fee simple twenty big round dollars that had recently been the property of Omen Shaggs, while the latter was left for an indefinite period as custodian of approximately seven hundred pounds of positively valueless ex-work ox. It is not to be wondered at, then, that when he arrived at his place of business, he was in a considerably peeved frame of mind. Nor, was this condition improved by the conversation which young Izrul Toddy inaugurated immediately upon his arrival.

"You 'member 'at new quilt yo' wife finished up las' week, Mistuh Shaggs?" Izrul asked, grinning.

"Don't com' botherin' me 'bout no quilt now, boy!" Omen commanded brusquely.

"Nawsuh, I ain't. Well, suh, it was hangin' on de back fence, an'—"

"Shut up!"

"Yassuh, I is. De quilt was hangin'—"

"Ain't I tol' you to hush? I's got mo' weightier things 'an quilts in my thoughts now."

"Yassuh! But, 'Vangeline got de quilt in his stummick—mos' of it."

Izrul's statement, though, had been exaggerated, as Mistuh Shaggs found when he rushed to the rear door of the restaurant. There was more than half the quilt—a good two-thirds of it—still intact. Beginning with the lower left-hand corner, though, a large slice of it had disappeared. As Omen rushed from the building for a closer view of what had been but yesterday the fairest example of his wife's handiwork, 'Vangeline welcomed him with a plaintive, half subdued, "M-m-moo-uh!"

At this, Mistuh Shaggs almost lost control of himself. He came within an ace, to be exact, of liquidating his security upon the

spot. But, happily, second thought sobered him.

" You may not be wu'th nothin'," he moaned, " but I ain't goin' to kill you—yit."

Izrul, in his feeble way, offered consolation.

"' At's jus' de way wid some o' dem kin'," he commented.

" Which kin'?" Mistuh Shaggs snorted.

" De range kin'."

" What you means—range kin'?"

" Cattles what's raised loose on de range. Dey's a heap of 'em over in wes' Alabama where I comes f'um. An' 'Vangeline is one of 'em—I can tell 'em. Sometimes some of 'em gits sump'm wrong wid dey appetike on de insides an' eats lots o' things dey oughtn'ta. Usetah be we couldn't leave no quilts ner nothin' hangin' out on 'count dem piny woods cows. Dey sho' is cu'ious."

Mistuh Shaggs's thoughts, though, were not, at the moment, concerned with the peculiarities of appetite as exhibited by certain individuals of the bovine persuasion. He returned, steeped in gloom, to his office, where he charged off to Profit & Loss the sum of twenty dollars. In doing so he definitely abandoned all hope of ever getting back the money he had loaned on 'Vangeline. At the same time, though, in the book of his memory—on the " grudge " page—he entered the name of one J. Threadgill, crediting that gentleman with one complete double cross; the same to be returned—manyfold—at the first favorable opportunity.

Naturally, his thoughts now dwelt more or less upon this. Once or twice it seemed to him that some sort of plan for evening up the score was about to present itself. He could almost grasp it, only to find it slipping, tantalizingly out of reach. Then it would come again: an idea, begging, praying, shrieking for admission at the very threshold of his brain.

In the hope that it might prove stimulating he took out his copy of the agreement with Brothuh Threadgill and began studying it carefully. But, of itself, it seemed to offer nothing. As he was engaged in this, Izrul appeared once more in the doorway.

" 'At's de clo'es eatin'es' ol' ox," he volunteered, " 'at I ever is seed!"

" What's de beas' done now?" Omen groaned.

" He jus' rech 'at long neck o' hisn 'crosst de fence an' commence eatin' one o' Miz Flemminses underwears what was hangin' on a lim'."

Mistuh Shaggs got to the door just in time to see the lacy fringe of Mrs. Flemmins's " underwear " protruding from between 'Vangeline's lips. For a moment he stood undecided, as does one who is caught between conflicting emotions—or ideas. His glance shifted from the ox to his wife's semi-masticated quilt, and back again to the animal and the still visible portion of Mrs. Flemmins's ex-lingerie. Then he acted. From the rafters of the back porch he took down a long cane fishing pole. Then he turned to Izrul.

" Ain't to-morrow Chuesday?" he asked.

" Yassuh."

" Open 'at lot gate."

As Izrul turned to obey, Omen strode, with uplifted cane, toward the offending 'Vangeline.

" Ox," he muttered grimly, " de time has came fo' you to lef' out f'um here. You un-milk-givin', quilt eatin' ol' beas'!"

'Vangeline saw—and evidently comprehended. He started, at a languid walk toward the open gate, with Omen following close at his heels. As the venerable creature stepped without the inclosure to untrammeled freedom, Mistuh Shaggs delivered a parting injunction:

" Now ramble, ox! Dawg-gone you, ramble!"

And 'Vangeline rambled.

IV.

Something had happened. As a matter of fact, the same thing, with only a slight variation in the matter of details, had been happening for the past two days. At last Sheriff Hodges had become a-wearied. He replaced the receiver of his telephone upon its hook and turned to a clerk.

" Get George Mixton in here," he said as he scribbled another entry upon an already well filled sheet of paper.

Presently George Mixton, Mobile's colored deputy sheriff, stood in the doorway.

"Here, George!" The sheriff extended the paper. "Go out to Plateau and Pritchard and Magazine Point and see about this. Don't bother me with it if you can help. Use your judgment and see if you can settle it without recourse to law."

"Yassuh, cap'n."

One of the most acceptable acts of the sheriff's régime had been his appointment of George Mixton as the one colored deputy sheriff of the county. Though the latter was a regularly commissioned officer, with full power to make arrests when the occasion demanded it, his was more often the rôle of conciliator. In this he had been distinctly successful, since the colored people, generally, preferred the home-made—but invariably equable—justice that he dispensed to the more costly proceedings of the courts.

As he settled himself in the outbound Magazine Point car, the deputy scanned the list which the sheriff had given him. Catching its import he whistled softly to himself.

Very methodically he visited every person whose name appeared on the paper, and listened to the tale which each unfolded. Invariably his comment was:

"Come wid me."

The last person upon whom he called was Mistuh Omen Shaggs, of Plateau. He listened with more than usual interest to the latter's story, and asked several questions. Then he herded his entire following into a cross town car.

Thirty minutes later, Brothuh Jehu Threadgill, looking up from the pair of trousers he was pressing, discerned what he at first took to be a dark hued human avalanche descending upon him. Then he began to recognize a few of the faces, among these being that of Deputy Sheriff George Mixton.

The deputy promptly outlined the reason for the wholesale visit of which Brothuh Threadgill was the honoree. The latter listened impassively, without making any comment.

But with all of his common sense there was more than a hint of the dramatic in George Mixton's make-up. He consulted the list he carried.

"Rev'unt Brins'on," he announced, "we fus' listen to you."

Rev. Folio Brinston, popular pastor of the Golden Stair Missionary Baptist Church of Plateau, stepped pompously forth to recite his woe.

"'T was my bes' Prince Albuht coat 'at I lef' hangin' on de fence to sun!" he complained aggrievedly.

"What happen to it?" the deputy asked.

"De — er — ahr - hum! — de swingeller po'tion of it was devoured cum-pletely by 'at ramblin' ol' ox!"

"An' de damages?"

"Not less'n ten dollars. It was almos' a bran' new secon'-han' coat."

A notation of this was made and George Mixton referred to his list again.

"Mistuh Enos Goodbrad!" he called.

One of the elderly Mistuh Goodbrad's peculiarities was that he insisted upon wearing the same weight underwear the year round.

"'At same gam'niv'rous beas'," he testified ponderously, "is done masticated de on'y change o' red flannen underwear I owns. It was wu'th a dollar."

A note was made of this.

Mistuh Beauregard Lazenby, Mobile's colored Beau Brummell, was next.

"Two silk shirts!" he announced indignantly.

"Was dey badly damaged?" Deputy Mixton asked.

"*Damaged?* Dey was et con-clusively up!"

For more than half an hour George Mixton was kept busy, listing claims. It seemed that every one present had made an involuntary contribution of some item of wearing apparel to 'Vangeline's omnivorous appetite.

"De total 'mount," the deputy began, "come to puhcisely—"

He was interrupted just here. The street car which had just passed had disgorged a figure—a female figure of gigantic proportions—which was swooping down upon the assemblage. Those who were fortunate enough to see her coming cheerfully made way for Mrs. Dovey Jackson. Others caved with the impact.

"Show 'im to me!" she panted as she

forced her way to the inner circle. "Jus' le' me git my han's on 'im!"

No one present knew better than did George Mixton how misleading the name "Dovey" was as applied to Mrs. Jackson.

"Whom is it you seeks, sistuh?" he asked placatingly.

"I don't know whom his name is," Mrs. Jackson breathed, "'scusin' de fack 'at he's said to be de owner o' dat obstrepulous ox, an' I was tol' I would fin' him here. Whar' is he at?"

"Jus' a moment, sistuh!" Deputy Mixton urged. "Jus' a moment! Us is all here, tryin' to git together peaceful—"

"I don't want us *all* to git together peaceful!" Sis Dovey snorted. "All I wants is fo' me to git together *puss'nal* wid de owner o' dat brute!"

"Is de ox damaged you, too?"

"*Is he?* If you calls eatin' eve'y smidgins bit o' my pink crêpe machine naglizhays offen de wash line, he *sho*' is! An' dey cos' me three dollars per each! Two of 'em!"

Some one coughed suggestively. There was a noisy shuffling of substantial feet. The claimants were plainly becoming restless. They seemed, of one accord, to be congregating in the van of the redoubtable Mrs. Dovey Jackson. And that Amazonian lady was patently upon the verge of an eruption. No one present could have failed to observe the tumultuous heaving of her ample bosom—an infallible sign that she was fairly itching to commit mayhem upon some one.

George Mixton clueared his throat before speaking.

"Fawty-nine dollars an' fo' bits—eben," he announced. He gazed first at Brothuh Threadgill and then at Omen Shaggs. "An' de 'sponsibility 'pears to res' betwix one of you two gen'lemens."

With a graceful wave of his hand Brothuh Threadgill surrendered precedence to Mistuh Shaggs. The latter stepped forward promptly. For one who faced the immediate payment of approximately fifty dollars, or, failing this, the wrath of Sis Dovey Jackson, Omen appeared strangely unruffled—even serene.

"De ox was porned to me in de dark," he stated, "wid de understandin' 'at it was a milk cow, an'—"

"'At was yo' lookout!" Brothuh Threadgill interrupted blandly. "De question now is: Who owes de damages? An' since de ox was in yo' keer an' keepin', 'cawding to de law, you is 'sponsible fo' his rampagin' ticktacks." He paused for a moment and smiled happily. "Ain't I done tol' you wunst 'at we lives an' learns?"

"You is—an' we does," Omen answered. He was smiling, too, ever so softly. "An' I learnt—fo' one thing—'at 'Vangeline et clo'es an' etcetery. Den, I remembered 'at de nex' day was Chuesday when all de cullud washladies hangs out de clo'es to dry after washin'. So I turnt 'Vangeline loose to ramble—an' he rambled. But, befo' I learnt dem things, I learnt sump'm else."

He stopped for a moment and drew a document from his pocket.

"Listen: 'It is fu'thermo' agreed an' stipolated by an' between de said Omen Shaggs an' de afo'said Jehu Threadgill 'at all over de 'mount o' fifty cents per day 'at de afo'mentioned 'Vangeline animule shall consume in eatin' shall be bo'ne by de herewithinbefo' mentioned Jehu Threadgill.'"

He folded the document, smiled placidly upon Brothuh Threadgill, and continued:

"I had de ox fo' three days. At fifty cents per day, which is de sheer I's got to pay fo' his clo'es eatin', I owes a dollar an' a ha'f. An' fo' de res' o' dem fawty-nine dollars an' fo' bits, Brothuh Threadgill, you can puhpare to come acrosst."

Suddenly Jehu's jaws gaped. For a moment he gibbered fatuously. Ordinarily he might even have attempted argument, but—his eyes fell upon that crowd. For one fearful, fascinated moment they came to rest upon Mrs. Dovey Jackson's heaving superstructure. Then he caved—caved completely and ignominiously.

Mistuh Omen Shaggs, watching him count out perfectly good money, offered a suggestion.

"Jus' a word of advice, Brothuh Threadgill," he said softly. "De nex' time you porns a unmilk givin' ox to anybody you better make sho' he's one de unclo'es eatin' kin', too. 'At's all, Brothuh Threadgill, excep'—'at we lives an' learns."

The Extroducer

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

I REMEMBER reading somewhere that Dr. Guillotine, who invented the efficient instrument for cutting people's heads off, managed to get in wrong with the authorities with the result that he was himself beheaded by his machine. Which reminds of Emmons O. Perthwether.

I believe Emmons is what is called a brilliant conversationalist. Clever little quips flash from his tongue like little jets of pleasant lightning. He is electric in his quickness to see the opportunity for a witty word. And he is well posted, too. He goes over the papers carefully, reads all the new books, attends all the lectures and plays, and no matter what the subject of conversation may be, he is able to step right into it and turn it from a drowsy, stupid affair into a warm, lively event.

It is this gift that makes men like Emmons O. Perthwether such desirable club members. In some corner of the club a dreary conversation will be dragging along in a dull fog of words, let us say.

"Well, what do you think of the Russian situation now?" one of the men will ask, not that he cares a cent.

"Well, I don't know! If it don't get better soon, Joe, I'm inclined to think it may get worse," another will remark. "It's just like this Irish situation and the kind of cigars the house committee is stocking these days. I tell you, I can't smoke that Idura Perfecto. What I like is a mild domestic cigar—"

"I stick to a pipe," another member will cut in. "And that reminds me that when I was up in the Maine woods last summer—"

"How'd you go up?" another member will ask.

"In my car—I've got a Doojik runabout. She only holds—"

"Mine's a Pipipip. The trouble with a Doojik—"

That's the miserable, foggy way the average members of my club—the Troglodyte—carry on a conversation about Rus-

sia, but Emmons O. Perthwether is not that sort of talker. A conversation will be droning along like that and Emmons will come up and—snap!—there is life where there was ashes. He leaps into the breach. He grabs the breach and smacks it on the back. He tosses the breach into the air and shoots it full of holes. His eyes sparkle, his face beams, he spills golden statistics and winged words and aphorisms and general Grade A talk by the yard.

"Russia? I'll tell you something about Russia," he will say, pulling up a chair and shaking a virile forefinger at us. "Russia is done! Now, you'll ask why; I'll tell you why—eighteen versts northeast of Koppakallij, just on the verge of the Dubjobju Desert, is the town of Nijnitojnigob. It is the principal market place of the Khamtartars and the Mullinogors from the Dan-Baikal region south of Koobah. To-day—to-day, gentlemen—you can buy in the market there 18,654,000 rubles for thirty-four Chilian sesterci, and a pood of No. 2 Chinese whiffik costs 564 yellow piyen in the same market! Only day before yesterday, at five o'clock in the afternoon—or, to be quite frank, in the P.M.—I met Hunga Dinga Din, the eminent Hindu snake charmer, on Fifth Avenue, and I quoted these figures to him and asked what they meant. And he knows! He was in Calcutta only ten years ago, and he knows! He said to me—I give his exact words—'It means, mister, that Russia is done!' So, I say, Russia is done! Thoroughly and completely done!"

Thus he will take the conversation and toss it in the air and spin it and bite pieces out of it and spit them back, and enlighten us in fine shape.

With Emmons O. Perthwether in the club there is no longer any excuse for dullness. If he sees a group of ancient valetudinarians droning away, with one of them saying:

"But, on the other hand, professor, I have seen among the Celtic remains at Glof-na-Mnagl, in the Diocese of Ossory—" up will step Emmons O. Perthwether and say:

"And speaking of Ossory, old dears, have you heard the story of the two Irishmen of Kilkenny? It seems that one was named Mike and one was named Pat—or, no! I've got that wrong; one was named Pat and the other was named Mike. Well, neither of them had ever seen a Ford car—"

To the members of the Troglodyte Club, whose rooms resemble nothing so much as a gloomy cave, a fresh and zippy member like Emmons O. Perthwether was indeed a real blessing. Indeed, I more than once heard members say, as Emmons approached, "Ah, here comes our little ray of sunshine!" To see him remove his overcoat and glance around, his eyes beaming through his gold rimmed spectacles and the rays of the electrics causing his bald head to gleam like a gold globe, was to see something!

I admit frankly that I was the man who proposed Emmons O. Perthwether for membership in the Troglodyte Club.

"Join us! We need you!" I told him. "The club is becoming moss grown and moldy. We require freshness and youth. The average age of the members is now seventy-two years and eight months, and it should be lowered. The dues are $100 per annum, payable in advance, plus the initiation fee of $200. Join us, Emmons; we need you."

I need not say that as soon as Emmons O. Perthwether joined the club he gave us the benefit of his advice. He gave it eagerly and freely. His suggestion that the gloomy brown curtains, brown upholstery, and brown walls be changed to something lively and more resembling the interior and furnishings of the Razzjazz Café was enthusiastically received, and, at the monthly meeting of the board of governors, referred to the committee on draft riots. This committee, it developed, had not met since the Civil War (1861-1865), and nothing was ever done about the refurnishing of the club rooms, because, when the committee met it discovered that fourteen of the original eighteen members were dead, and until the committee had formulated resolutions of regret for each of the fourteen, and passed them, and had them engrossed, no other business could be considered. Unfortunately the members of

the club and of the committee are so elderly that long before the eighth resolution was adopted, four other members had passed away, and since then they have been dying at the rate of two members for each resolution finished. Still, we may have a report on Emmons O. Perthwether's suggestion sooner or later.

Perthwether's other suggestion, that the club have the windows washed, needed no action by the board of governors, for Emmons prepared a subscription paper and pinned it on the bulletin board, heading it with:

Emmons O. Perthwether.....$1.00

Eight months later the subscription paper was still there, but no one had signed it. The only difference in it was that so many flyspecks had accumulated on the sheet that it looked as if the row of dots between the name of Emmons O. Perthwether and the $1.00 had married and had a very large family of dots, now old enough to play at large over the surface of the paper.

The other suggestions of Perthwether—that we have Tuesday afternoon teas for the wives of members, Friday evening dances, and organize a tennis and bowling team, were laid on the table pending the arrival of a time when the club accumlated enough money to pay the head steward's back salary, which was twelve years in arrears.

There is no doubt that the members of the club did bore one another. Most of us had been members for twenty-five or thirty years, and we knew each other too well. I have heard members groan when the aged Professor Vimblick entered the rooms, and I have seen members dodge behind curtains when Major Mikkus strolled through looking for a victim to whom to tell that interminable lion hunt tale of his. We were, I am afraid, to each other a lot of disgusting old bores.

Emmons O. Perthwether had this in mind when he approached me with his idea.

"Percy," he said in that beamingly eager way of his, "I have an idea! Do you know why the members of this club hate one another? They have 'gone stale' on each other. In the last year you have elected eighty-six members, all youngish men, and they never come to the club. Why? Because these old fellows bore them stiff! And the old fellows bore each other stiff. The trouble is that in this club no one can escape from any other member. They all know each other; they have all been properly and formally introduced. Each man is entitled to go up to any other man and speak to him — yes, talk to him. What this club needs is an official extroducer!"

"A what!" I exclaimed.

"An official extroducer," repeated Perthwether. "It is my own idea; I invented the word. An introducer, as you know, is one who introduces one person to another; an extroducer would therefore be one who extroduces one person from another. If you and I are formally introduced we have the right to speak to each other; if, on the other hand, you and I know each other, and we are formally extroduced by the club's official extroducer, we would become strangers instantly. We would have no right to speak to each other or even to recognize each other. If you and I were extroduced we would pass each other with unrecognizing eyes, as if we were invisible.

"Think what it would mean to this club, Percy! Suppose you were elected official extroducer—you would cast your eye over the room here. You would see old Vimblick yonder boring old Mikkus, as they have bored each other for years. You would walk up to them and say, in a calm but kind voice, 'Professor Vimblick, permit me to extroduce Major Mikkus; gentlemen, it gives me pleasure to make you unacquainted.'

"From that moment onward Professor Vimblick would not 'know' Major Mikkus, and Major Mikkus would not 'know' Professor Vimblick. They would not speak, they would not bow, they would be absolute and total strangers until some one introduced them again. And you, as official extroducer, could immediately extroduce them again if you thought best.

"In two days, Percy, you could extroduce every man who has been bored or boring. The new members could come to the

club with the assurance that they had been extroduced from all those they fear might bore them.

"I give this idea to the club, Percy, free of charge, but I reserve all other rights in it. I mean to push the idea. I have no doubt that in a few years every city, town and village will have its official extroducer. New York should have a Department of Extroduction, with a staff of official extroducers—say one extroducer to each ten thousand inhabitants. Upon request the official extroducer would extroduce any one who made application.

"Suppose you are introduced to a pleasant man, and he turns out to be the agent of the Rubber Heel Insurance Company. He comes and sits with you on the train; he stops you on the street; he calls on you at your office and in your home. He talks rubber heel insurance until you hate him. Presto! You apply to the Department of Extroduction, the official extroducer brings you together and extroduces you, and he dare not speak to you again. If he does he becomes subject to five hundred dollars fine and six months in jail.

"Think of being extroduced from your mother-in-law!"

When I brought Emmons O. Perthwether's suggestion to the attention of the board of governors of the Troglodytes I saw every aged eye brighten. It was amusing to see the eager gleam and then the effort made to hide it.

"Ah—I think the suggestion might be considered," said our president.

Professor Vimblick spoke up promptly.

"I move its adoption," he said. "For forty years I've suffered that infernal old bore, Major John J. Mikkus, to pour his insufferable lion tales into my poor ears until I'm half insane. We want this thing—we want this official extroducer. I move it!"

To my amazement the motion carried unanimously, and so did the one creating me official extroducer.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I will try to deserve this honor. I will try to use this power sanely. Before extroducing any one I shall use every means at my disposal to make sure they should be extroduced. I shall also establish an extroduction box into which a member may drop a slip bearing his own name and that of any member from whom he wishes to be extroduced, or that of any two members he thinks should be extroduced."

"Look here!" said Professor Vimblick, just before the board arose. "This extroducer idea is all well enough, but can't any young fool of a jackanapes step right up and reintroduce me to that perpetual talking machine of a Mikkus the next moment? I move an amendment to the rules that any persons extroduced shall not be introduced for six months."

The motion was unanimously carried.

The next morning I opened for the first time the extroduction box I had placed on the clerk's desk. To my amazement the box was half full of slips bearing the names of those who wished to be extroduced from others. As I was sorting them out, Emmons O. Perthwether strolled into the clerk's office.

"Hello, Percy," he said in his sunny voice. "Getting on the job, I see. I flatter myself I've done this club a deal of good by suggesting this idea. When—"

We were interrupted by the entrance of Professor Vimblick.

"Mr. Perthwether," I said, "permit me to extroduce you from Professor Vimblick; Professor Vimblick, it gives me great pleasure to make you unknown to Mr. Perthwether."

"Not half as much pleasure as it gives me," said the testy old gentleman. "No, not half!"

"But—but—" stammered Emmons O. Perthwether, "I didn't ask to be extroduced from—"

He stopped short, and turned rather red, for there was Major Mikkus edging up and grinning and nudging me and "standing over." In fact, all the usual morning habitués of the club were arriving in the clerk's office, lining up behind Major Mikkus, grinning meaningly, waiting to be extroduced from Emmons O. Perthwether. They had, if I may say so, beaten Emmons O. Perthwether to it.

I don't know what the moral of this is. Perhaps it is "Why invent guillotines?"

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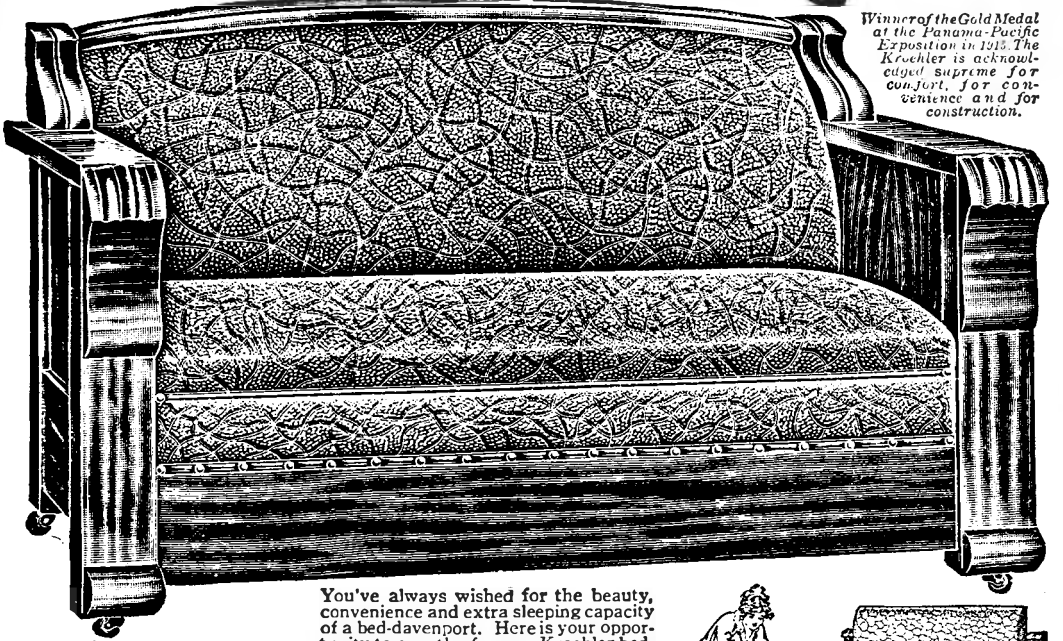

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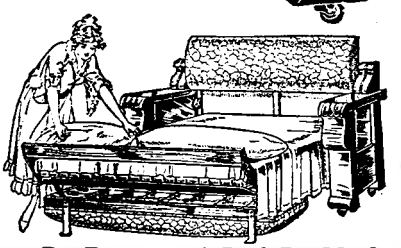

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