

ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



THROUGH RABAT'S EYES

by Charles Beadle

10¢
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AUGUST 2

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A YEAR

How Many Faces has Four Bits ?

Funny thing about money. A half dollar looks different every time you lift it out of your pocket. It's hardly big enough to count when you are taking a girl to a show and supper, but next day it looks like a million dollars when you invest it at a lunch counter.

The more it buys the harder it is to spend.

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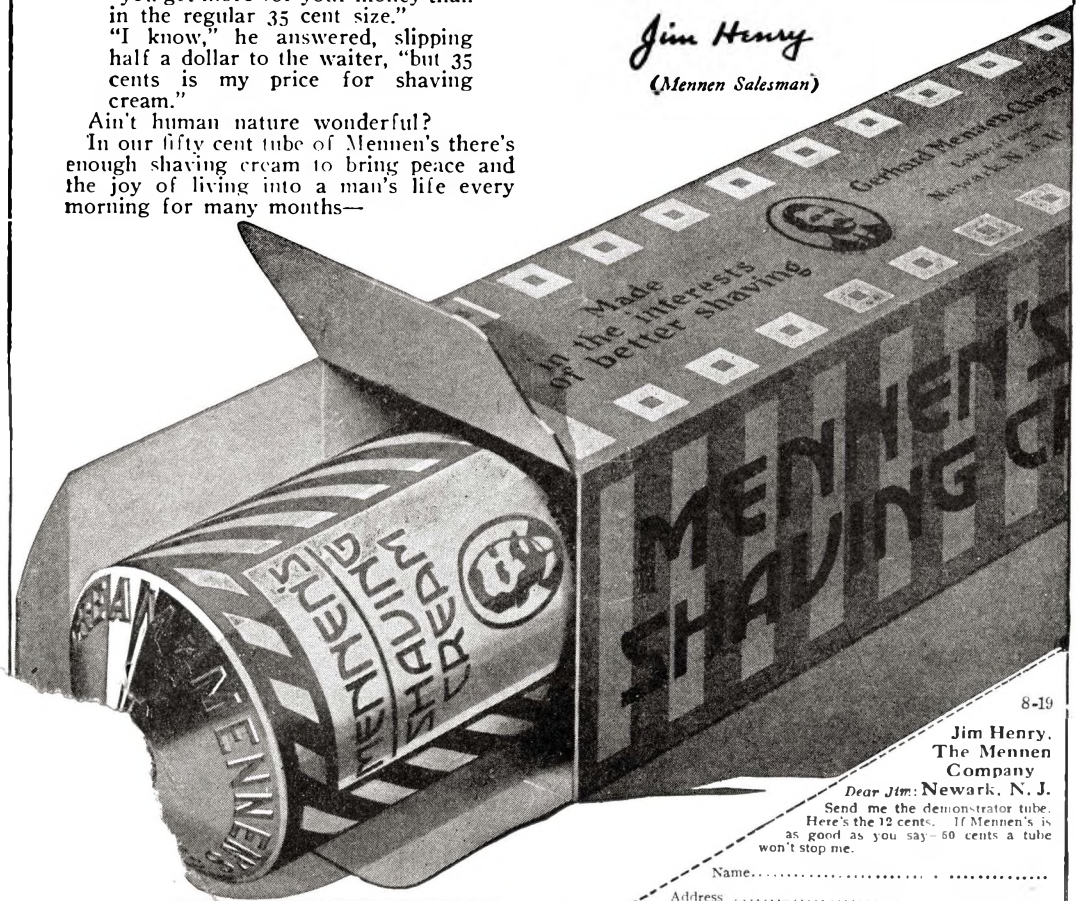
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Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)



8-19

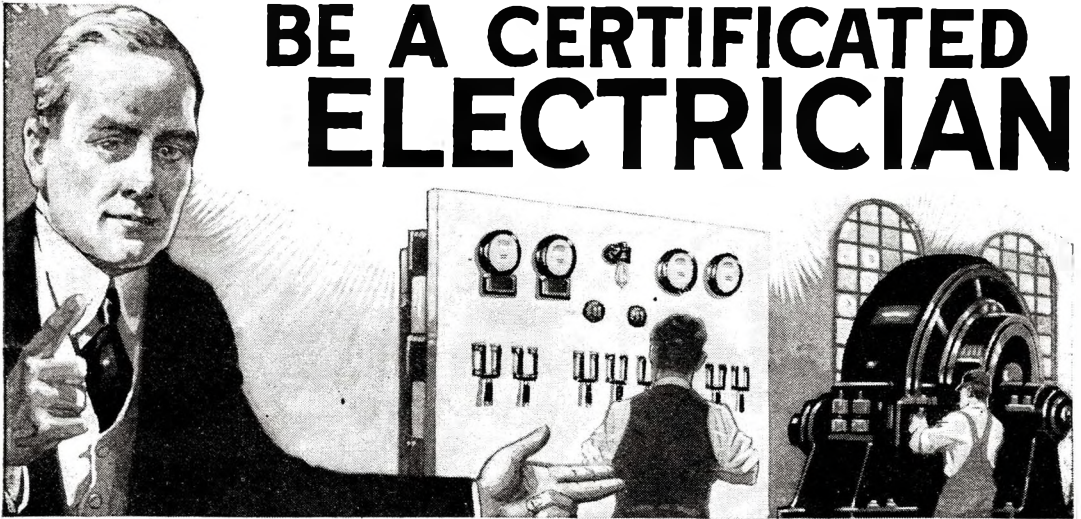
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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CX

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 4

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BY JOHN FREDERICK

Author of “The Hammer,” “The Higher Strain,” etc.

It Begins NEXT WEEK

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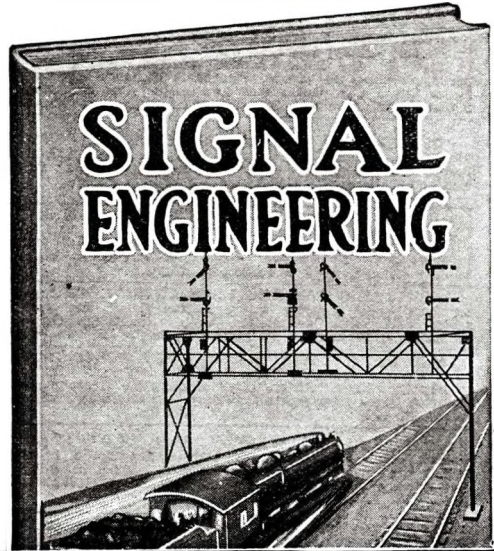
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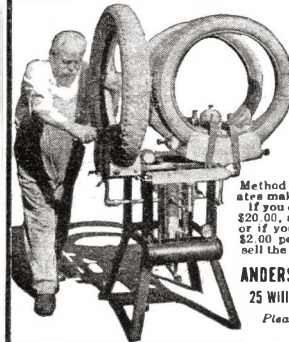
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Through Rabat's Eyes by Charles Beadle

CHAPTER I.

AN INTRODUCTION EXTRAORDINARY.

"Allah il Allah! La ilaha il Alla-h-h!
Wa Mohammed er-rasool Allah-a-a-h!"

THE cry of the muezzin wailed sonorously over the city filmed in the moonlight as with spiders' webs; was caught up by another of the priests of the faithful from the mosque in the Kasbah up on the hill; faded; was reechoed and died away in a lingering caress. The restless silence was stabbed like a blue curtain by a blunt knife by the jagged billows of sound of a donkey braying a solo; continued the asinine opera vocalizing the racial woes to startled stars seeking shelter behind the silvered veil of the moon.

In the Grand Soko, beyond the sepia shadows of the towered gate amid ragged rows of skin and linen tents, scattered fires looked like flowers in a thicket of rhododendrons about which fluttered lazily butterflies of blue. An asinine Caruso sobbed the last disconsolate note. The twitter and hum of animals and men held their mastery over the blue stillness until the tentative twangs of a

gimbri (guitar) precluded a wild voice emerging from a robed figure in the black triangle of a small tent; snatching at a note in the minor key, holding tenaciously and falling as if exhausted in dolorous half tones—to begin again the eery plaint of human longings in the mountains.

From out the cavern formed by the trees beyond the Spanish Embassy appeared the yellow eye of a dragon winking drunkenly; wobbled and rolled in delirium and resolved into a lantern swaying around the yellow-slipped brown feet and blue robes of a Moor. As he approached popped in and out of the paler rays black boots and elephantine legs in trousers. The party passed through the native encampment.

Sibilant whispers rose among the tribesmen come to market: "An infidel! Allah curse him! May Mohammed protect me from his evil eye! Yillah, the dirty pig!"

The swaying lantern illumined the singer, a brown face fringed with whiskers like tufts of moth-eaten cloth, and a gash of a mouth from which emerged the dolorous complaint. A fez cap was tilted upon the shaven head, and the jelab seemed to hang

precariouly upon the right shoulder, exposing the warmth of a red tunic.

As the pious expressions of racial prejudice fluttered round the clomp of boots, like locusts at the passage of an animal through the grass, the whites of large brown eyes fixed mystically upon space gleamed blue in the moonlight.

When the strangers had been swallowed in the sepia cavern of the great gate the lithe brown hands, plucking rhythmically at the strings of the gimabri, ceased upon the final wail. The troubadour rose effortlessly to his slippered feet and shambled off with the hillman's stride toward the great gate.

Down the tunnel of a street progressed the drunken dragon. Rabat slowed to a slither over the steep cobbles. The yellow eyes reeled and winked; suddenly leaped fantastically into a gargantuan stare that silhouetted the hood of a Moor and a derby hat; became the glare of the Café de l'Univers in the Soko chiko. In the shadow of a corner stood the troubadour and watched his quarry led to the inviting tables on the terrace.

The man sat down violently. The Moor stood for one moment by his side. A hand against the window pantomined from the pocket to the Moor. The guide sauntered away to the left down a black alley. The stranger rapped upon the table in the manner of the infidel. A waiter appeared and disappeared.

The brown eyes noted the man slump backward into the chair with gesture of exasperated despair. Then as slowly, and as dignified as fate, the troubadour stalked across the yellow-daubed cobbles until he stood at the stranger's shoulder. For a moment he remained motionless, appraising his victim in the glare of the window.

He observed a clean-shaven young face with rather thin lips compressed; a straight nose, and keen, fresh eyes that stared vexedly through tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses. The felt hat was thrust on the back of a head thatched with rumpled, fair hair.

"Hullo, ole chap!" drawled the troubadour cheerfully. "You come an' have a drink, whaaat?"

"What!"

The stranger started. As he glanced up

the look of amazement changed to blank bewilderment. Composedly the troubadour drew out a chair and sat down.

"All right, ole chap, don't get recited. Come an' have a drink, huh?"

"What the—" The voice changed swiftly to a sharper tone. "What are you, anyway? A guide?"

"Sure, me 'Rabbit'—'Merican guide," returned Rabat.

"An American guide! What, for the love of Mike."

"Love o' Mike!" repeated Rabbit joyfully. "I know him, sure. Me all 'Merican guide. I spik 'Merican. Love o' Mike! Yessir! Fine! Bully! Punk! O my Lordy! Can it! Oh, boy! Sinfooloosir! Yessia!"

For a moment the stranger stared and gasped.

"Can it! Oh, boy! Sin foo—what?" he repeated inanely. He put up one hand to his forehead. "What on earth—"

"Sinfooloosir!" persisted Rabbit indignantly. "You no spik 'Merican?" At that moment the waiter appeared with a colored drink. Added Rabbit: "Guess I'll have lil ole high-tail!"

"W-what!" gasped the stranger, and readjusted his glasses as if to confirm his eyes as well as his ears.

"High cocktail ball," amended Rabbit quickly. "I know. Sure."

The waiter disappeared, apparently comprehending this amazing order. The stranger choked, grinned, and shifted his chair again uneasily and said: "Now, who in blazes are you, and what d'you want?"

"I," stated Rabbit, "am Rabbit." And placing his hand upon his heart in a gesture most incongruous to his previous talk, said with much dignity in guttural accents: "Ana Rabat ibn Bussulham el Hero." Then, relapsing to his professional status, remarked: "I Rabbit, ole chap, guide 'osopher, an' brig'n'."

"'Osopher? Brig'n'? What are you talking about?"

Rabat produced two cigarettes from beneath his jelab and held them out in a grimy paw. "Have a cig-rette, ole chap?" he said affably. Almost mechanically the stranger took one. Rabbit shook his head

compassionately. "You no un'erstan' English, huh? I, Rabbit, strawdin'ry guide."

The young man appeared puzzled.

"Extraordinary is certainly correct," he admitted, smiling, "but as it happens I have already engaged a guide, thanks."

"No. You no 'gage guide, that bally insect, Mr. Baird," said Rabbit solemnly.

"Oh, so you know who I am, do you?"

"Sure. You 'Merican genelman come pay strawdin'ry brig'n' man plenty douro get back your girl. Mr. Ben Ghali napkid your girl and her papa up in mountains, cons'quently you all worked up, huh? I know."

"Worked up!" snorted Morden Baird. "I should say! But where the devil did you get all this dope?"

"Dope? Dope?"

"Yes, yes. All this information?"

"Ah, dope! Fine!" approved Rabbit.

"You know all mans talk your business in market? No? Strawdin'ry! You 'Merica markets no talk people business, huh? You come steamer Gebel el Musa. You very recited. You go 'Merican consul. You tell him get brig'n' man. He tell you must pay. He one dam' fool! You talk Moor man he tell you must pay. He two dam-fool! You talk bally insect. He three dam' fool! *V'la!*"

"Now I talk to you and you're the fourth damn fool!" commented Baird savagely. "Is that it?"

"No. good dope!" asserted Rabbit proudly. "I hillman. You give me one four times douro you want to give brig'n' an' cos you my fren' I go get your girl and her papa and you kiss her an' say: Oh, boy!"

"Look here," remarked Baird, laughing in spite of himself, "are you drunk or crazy?"

"Crazy? Yessir. I crazy-wild, cos Allah, he love me, but no drunk, cos Mohammed, he say no good dope. What you calc'late? You want me, your fren', get your girl, huh?"

"Look here—cut out the girl stuff, understand? How do you know that she—I'm not engaged to her anyway?"

Rabbit regarded Baird blandly.

"You know Mohammed, huh?"

"Yes, I've heard of him."

"He strawdin'ry man. He say three things more better than all things: Women, food, an' scent. You young man, huh? You no crazy-wild for food, huh? You 'Merican man you no crazy-wild for scent, huh? You—" Large explanatory hands and hunched shoulders finished the sentence.

"Damn you!" said Baird, laughing.

"Fine!" agreed Rabbit. "Now, ole chap, you come 'long me. We go get brig'n', huh?"

"But I don't know whether you're talking punk or what," protested Baird. "Have you got any references?"

"Ref'rences? I, Rabbit! I hillman, genelman," said Rabbit. Then, as if dropping a mask, he revealed again the hill troubadour of the market as he said in rich gutturals: "Ana Rabat ibn Bussulham el Hero!"

Baird stared at him perplexedly, conscious of the curious phenomenon.

"Well," said he at length, smiling, "I don't know what that means, but I must admit that it sounds mighty good! But all the same, that's no reference, you know."

The soft brown eyes in the curious, brown face, fringed with the moth-eaten whiskers beneath the jauntily tilted fez cap hardened. The figure grew higher rather than rose to its feet.

"Mr. Baird," said the rubber mouth, "Rabbit say: Good night an'—may Allah give you wisdom!"

"Say!" exclaimed Baird, jumping up as the robes swung royally. "Rabbit or whatever your name is, don't be offended. Sit down, will you? Say, you know I'm a stranger, an'—an' I come from Missouri."

"All right, ole chap," assented Rabbit graciously, "I know. Sure. Allah, he not finis' with you yet, huh?"

And, turning slowly, he sat down.

CHAPTER II.

"WHO'S LOONY NOW?"

MORDEN lay in bed and blinked at the glare without. On the right were French windows commanding a view of flat white roofs above a turquoise stretch of

water rimmed with yellow sand and framed in the purple mountains of the Riff; in front similiar windows opened on a glimpse of tree-tops and a bride-cake tower against the white-flecked emerald of the Straits of Gibraltar with the Spanish coast smudged in mauve haze.

Only thirteen short days ago he had been jerked from a perch of ordered life by a cable item in the morning paper.

MOORISH BANDITS HOLD AMERICANS.

TANGIER.—Advices from the American Consul at this port relate that the notorious bandit, Ben Ghali, famous for holding up Kaid Maclean within the last few years, has captured a well-known New York business man, Charles K. Seagrove, and his daughter. The ransom demanded is said to be over twenty thousand dollars.

Eileen in the hands of savages! Morden paled as he read hurriedly the paragraph beneath recounting the previous exploits of Ben Ghali, and that the Moorish authorities as usual declared themselves powerless.

Now Morden, after leaving college, had been to Europe and had visited Tangier, so that he knew well that Morocco had always been a garden of brigandage and disorder, even putting the South American republics to the blush in the matter of revolutions, which were as frequent as the equinoxes, a country where beyond the coast towns protected by the threat of war-ships it was notoriously unsafe for Europeans to travel.

Beside the recent Maclean case, Morden recollected with alarm that an English girl had been kidnaped just without the walls of Tangier and carried off to a Moorish prince's harem.

This was the first intimation to him that Eileen was in Morocco. A natural feeling of resentment grew against her father for having so recklessly exposed his daughter to unnecessary danger. The more he thought of it the more incensed he became, and more at a loss to understand what could have possibly persuaded the old man to run such fool risks.

Association filled his mind with images of their last meeting, when Seagrove had refused to consider for a moment his daughter's engagement to a young man who, he

had maintained, was merely a "damned lounge-lizard," and in order to convince Eileen that she had mistaken an emotional fascination for love, had whisked her off to Europe.

Although forbidden to correspond, Eileen had sent Morden two or three letters from various parts of the continent, and had said in one that after a stormy scene she had wrung from her father a promise to reconsider his decision if, upon their return, she was still of the same mind, with the proviso that Morden had done something to prove that he had the "goods"; a verdict which, although it gave hope was, upon consideration, found to be a tall order, for, as the young man grumbled, he could not go out and build up an oil trust in a few months or perform any other spectacular stunt calculated to impress a manipulator in millions.

But once the emotion of concern over the cable news had begun to subside Morden saw, or thought that he saw, an opportunity to make even such a bromidic father sit up and take notice, and moreover, he thought in the flush of enthusiasm, to turn the scales in his favor by rescuing the daughter from the peril the financier had placed her in. Immediately he had acted upon that wild-cat idea with a resolution which surprised nobody more than it had himself.

Luck was with him at the beginning, for there happened to be a boat for the Mediterranean leaving that noon which gave him time to visit the bank and taxi to the pier. On the way over he sought to allay anxiety regarding the safety of his beloved by endeavoring to map out a feasible plan.

To rush out to Morocco, to rescue the girl and her father from a bandit in the mountains and thus save the ransom of twenty thousand dollars, was both pleasing and romantic, and certainly should weigh with a man who thought in terms of the money market; but how to perform that feat!

Wisely enough, Morden had left the consideration of mere details until he had arrived upon the field of action, only to find that the consul was pleased to consider him—well, the consul was polite at all events. And Achmed, the guide, whom he

had engaged and who had interpreted at the somewhat incoherent interview with the Moorish governor, evidently privately agreed with the consul. Then had appeared this extraordinary guide, Rabbit!

Morden sipped his morning coffee, and began to ponder upon the wisdom of his decision of the previous night to employ him. Somehow he felt that Rabbit, in spite of the fact that he could not or would not offer any reference, could perform all that he promised, truly a scarlet cloak of deeds not lined with any neutral tint of modesty. Still so much was at stake that Morden felt nervous and desirous of some one else's opinion. Yet time was exceedingly precious.

From the consul he had, however, obtained the reassuring news that Mr. Seagrove and his daughter were for the present lodged in a tent, and more or less provided for, pending negotiations; but that he, the consul, feared that Seagrove would by his obstinacy in bargaining about the price of the ransom endanger—well, if Mr. Seagrove perhaps quite comprehended the Moor's attitude to women he would not consider the extra thousands worth arguing about, was the way the consul had put it, which naturally enough drove young Morden nearly frantic, and provoked a biassed statement of the failings of Charles King Seagrove, of New York and Fairhaven.

While Morden sat up, staring worriedly at the magnificent view from the windows a commotion began without the door; a torrent of harsh gutturals in altercation, a flow of softer but wilder sounds, a scuffle, a cry, and harsh mumbling. Then in stalked Rabbit.

"Hello, ole chap, whaaat?" he drawled. "You sleep fine, huh?"

"Yes, but what's all the fuss about?"

"Fuss? I kick Achmed. He bally insec', I tell you."

"But who told you—"

"All right, ole chap! Ya Houdi (Hey, Jew)!"

As Morden stared in bewilderment he saw the door open timidly, and the vision of a pallid face with a black mustache beneath a small black cap shaped like a pill-box.

"Who—" he began.

"Can it!" commanded Rabbit.

"What!"

"Can it! Shut your head! Sinfoooolsir! You no un'erstan' English, whaat? I bring man cut your head."

"Cut my head! What on earth—"

"Yessir! Cut your head, jus' like Mohammed man, cos you go with me, huh? All right!"

Rabbit waved an expostulatory paw and stuck a cigarette in his mouth. Morden gazed perplexedly from the queer figure seated as if in an unnatural position on a chair, one bare brown leg crossed upon the other beneath a gray jelab which was hanging as precariously as ever upon the left shoulder, revealing the red tunic, absorbed in lighting a cigarette stuck in the baffling face of a comedian hero, to the cringing form in the black gabardine who was bowing profoundly and muttering incomprehensible words.

"Animal tell you very good mornin'," explained Rabbit briefly, between puffs.

"How do!" replied Morden, amused. "But what does he—may I ask what he wants to cut my head for?"

Rabbit stared blankly.

"I tell you," he insisted as if dumfounded at such ignorance, "he cut your head jus' as—"

"Oh, shave me!" exclaimed Morden at the sight of a razor which had appeared from the folds of the funereal figure's garments. "But I shave myself, thanks, I—"

"Sinfoooolsir!" groaned Rabbit. "You no un'erstan'. See! Jus' like this!" and he exposed a skull like a dirty billiard-ball.

"Shave my head!" gasped Morden, raising a hand to his ample, fair locks as if in terror of instant execution.

"Sure!" assented Rabbit cheerfully. "You go long me fin' your girl, huh? All right. You go 'long like 'fidel you—"

"'Fidel?"

"'Nfidel," repeated Rabbit impatiently. "Not Mohammed man."

"Oh! Infidel!"

"Sure! You 'fidel wild man—" And he drew his hand across his throat.

"Oh!" Morden stared at Rabbit, startled by a thought. "But Mr. Seagrove and Miss—"

"Oh, bandit, he hill genelman. He wait for pay."

"But if—if Mr. Seagrove doesn't pay in time?"

"Course then he cut him throat and sell your girl for slave. Sure!" asserted Rabbit cheerfully.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Morden, sitting up in bed. "What—"

"All right, ole chap, you no lose your goat! You do what I tell you, catch your girl. Fine! Oh, boy!"

"You crazy nut!" exclaimed Morden, and mainly because his anxiety was relieved for the moment, he laughed.

"Nut? Nut?" repeated Rabbit.

"Yes, loony! Mad!" Morden tapped his head significantly.

"Nut!" repeated Rabbit diligently.

"Nut!" Then as if struck by a horrifying thought: "Him 'Merican?"

"Yes, that is American, all right!" Morden assured him, smiling. "Very much so."

"Fine!" agreed Rabbit contentedly, grinning. "Nut, huh?"

Meanwhile the Jew had remained in the cringing posture, his sharp black eyes watching Morden, the razor in his hand.

"Oh, well, what about your friend here?"

"Fren'!" exclaimed Rabbit scowling. "He no fren'! You no know Moor man not fren' Jew man, huh?"

"Why not?" protested Morden, ignorant of the ways of Morocco. "He's just as good as you, anyway."

"Him!" ejaculated Rabbit scornfully. He stared at Morden incredulously, muttered something in Arabic, and added: "Allah no give 'fidel eye to see." Then as if compassionately ignoring a bad breach of etiquette: "You sit in chair and this animal he cut your head, huh?"

"Very nice of him!" commented Morden, preparing to rise. "But what happens next?"

"Ya Musa!" shouted Rabbit.

Again the door opened and disclosed this time a patriarch who, with his long, gray beard, keen eyes, intelligent face, and hawk nose, might have posed for the movies as Moses. He muttered a courteous greeting as he bowed and set down a bundle wrapped in black cloth.

"Clo's for you!" announced Rabbit airily.

Morden stared at the various white tunics and baggy yellow trousers. A jelab of spotless-white wool the patriarch Musa laid out deprecatingly upon the bed. Rabbit spoke a sharp guttural to which Musa replied, fumbled beneath his black robes and produced an enormous pair of horn spectacles.

"In the name of Heaven what are those for?" demanded Morden in horrified accents.

"You wear speckuls, huh?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"All right, ole chap, my fren'. You come 'long me, you come like shareef man. Wild man, he not cut your throat."

"Shareef? What's that?"

"Shareef, he holy man—saint, huh?"

"Holy man! Saint! Me!" gasped Morden.

"Sure! Fine! Wild man, all man, he come kiss your finger; gets lots funny things—Un'erstan'? S'pose he want nice young wife awf'ly good, huh? All right! He come kiss your coat. Fine! He get awf'ly jolly wife!"

"Sounds good," admitted Morden, smiling. "But supposing he wants to talk. What am I to do?"

"You no talk! You holy man. I tell you come from Mecca, make swear word with Allah not talk seven year. Awf'ly, awf'ly, holy, holy, man!"

"But, good Lord!" protested Morden doubtfully. "They may think I'm just crazy!"

"Sure!" assented Rabbit energetically. "I tell you two times you holy man saint all same—same nut!"

CHAPTER III.

THE HOLY MAN.

AWAY to the south the plain was mauve in the afternoon sun. On the left a brown patch indicated a small village. Along a trail of red dust, made forty yards wide by the passage of innumerable animals which wound along a hillside flanked by a carpet of blue and white flowers, crawled a

caravan. In the van, upon a gaunt mule on a saddle which looked like a ragged red sofa, rode a being with a very dirty tarboosh (fez cap) and a dirtier green roz-zah (turban) a filthy fold of which was wound around the lower part of the face beneath a pair of enormous spectacles whose talc "glasses" were framed in horn rims half an inch thick.

The body was wrapped in a bundle of mud-stained robes, from out of which stuck a pair of brown feet in worn, yellow slippers. Beside him rode Rabbit upon another mule not quite so convincingly gaunt. Behind them plodded two decrepit horses and three donkeys laden with panniers as well as their riders. The sun was hot. The red dust of the trail seemed to float in the still air.

"Oh, my Lordy!" came a muffled voice from beneath the fold of green turban. "Can't I lower this damned turban for five minutes, Rabbit? There's no one in sight."

Rabbit exhaled smoke through his nostrils languidly.

"No good show face," he drawled. "Wild man know 'Merican man not holy man. Yessir."

"But I'm stifling!" protested the voice. "Just five minues! Have a heart!"

"Yessir, I got awf'ly jolly heart." A brown-stained hand crept out of the sleeve of the ragged jelab of the saint and stole toward the suffocating bandage. "Look! See!" warned Rabbit sharply. "Wild man come now. Look your speckuls sit end of your nose! Quick!"

"But I can't see a damned thing through this glass outfit," complained Morden chokingly. But he shoved back the enormous spectacles as the heads of three Moors showed over the shoulder of the hill ahead.

"Twis' your back like I tell you," urged Rabbit, in a whisper. "Knock your head jus' same you pray all time."

Obediently Morden rounded his aching shoulders and bobbed his head as the three horsemen grew near. As he had complained, he could see nothing at all through the mica of the glasses, but by wearing them as far as possible down his nose he managed to gain a vista of the passing scenery by squinting to one side.

He heard Rabbit's salute: "Salaam Ali-kum (Peace be with ye)" and more gutturals and Rabbit's introductory reply of: "Shareef, Mohammed bu Shaib (the sainted slave of God) pray for him that he may bless thy house!"

Morden heard the scatter of hoofs. He squinted violently, but could see only the hindquarters of Rabbit's mule. A fierce voice was demanding in Arabic. A little flustered, Morden began to nod more energetically. He felt the hem of his robe lifted, evidently to be kissed, and nodded like a Chinese mandarin, the grotesque absurdity of which was fortunately not appreciated by the tribesmen. After the salutation of the holy garments the man, piously greedy for blessings, continued to ride alongside, mumbling.

Squinting to the left, Morden could see the lean, hawk-nosed face of his disciple spitting requests. The impulse to speak was almost unendurable. Still the man persisted as if arguing with the holy man for particular privileges.

Morden wanted to yell for help to Rabbit, to tell him to tell the fool to go away. What Rabbit was doing or even where he was he could not see: only the figure of the tribesman against the mauve mist of the plain and the blue sky.

A violent urge seized one foot to kick his steed into a trot. Harsh gutturals flew about him. The man appeared to be getting angry at the noncompliance of the obstinate saint. Morden felt the horn spectacles sliding down his nose, and feared that the fellow would observe his eyes.

At last came the welcome sound of Rabbit's voice out of the heat and dust. The ardent pleader for holy intercession grunted, but he appeared to be so impressed that another kiss upon the holy garments was necessary before he ejaculated a most pious salutation and galloped after his companions. For five minutes Morden, as instructed, continued to nod violently.

"Rabbit!" he pleaded in a small voice at length. "For the love of Heaven, let me take off this damned turban!"

"All right, you 'scape," allowed Rabbit after glancing behind.

Morden tore down the bandage and

plucked off the huge spectacles with a prodigious sigh of relief. For a moment he could merely blink at the glare and inhale fresh air.

"Phew! This is awful!" he declared at last. "What on earth did that persistent idiot want?"

"He no 'sistent idjut," protested Rabbit. "He jus' ordin'ry dam'-fool thief. He ask you talk to Mohammed for him, tell Mohammed give him plenty 'fidels kill."

"Fid—oh, yes! Well, I thought his conscience must be pretty rotten."

"Shince? Shince?" demanded Rabbit.

"Con-science. The moral sen—the power inside you, Rabbit, which knows right from wrong."

Rabbit blinked interestedly.

"Tell you which right an' which wrong, huh?"

"That's the idea."

"Fine!" agreed Rabbit approvingly. "Cos that man no got shince, he jus' ordin'ry damn-fool thief."

"But even a thief may have conscience, Rabbit," persisted Morden, lighting a cigarette.

"Not damn-fool thief like him," asserted Rabbit, impatiently. "I know him I tell you. Each time he steal somethings he get caught. He no know wrong or right. Me, when I steal, I never get caught, 'cos I got shince. I know right. Yessir. Shince!" murmured Rabbit. "Awf'ly good shince, awf'ly jolly good! Yessir."

Morden smiled as he puffed gratefully at his cigarette.

"I'm sure Mohammed didn't teach you that, Rabbit."

"Mohammed? Sure!" asserted Rabbit. "Mohammed, he talk lot 'bout shince! Yessir. Shince awf'ly good. You no read Koran? Mohammed, he want new girl awf'ly good, he jus' have shince only 'cos he big prophet he have special angel come from heaven. He say Mohammed, Allah love you plenty; Allah, he say good for man have four wives. Ayesha fine girl, huh? Get busy. Yessir."

Morden laughed until he nearly fell off the mule.

"I've read your Koran, Rabbit," said he when he was able to speak. "but for

the love of Heaven I've never heard Mohammed interpreted as you have put it."

"You! You!" spluttered Rabbit anxiously. "You read my Koran?"

"Certainly. Comparative religion was my favorite study. But why?"

"You—you—strawdin-ry person!" exclaimed Rabbit, furiously digging his mule with the off-shovel stirrup to edge him alongside Morden's. "Strawdin'ry person! You, my awf'ly, awf'ly fren'! Rabbit kill thousand brig'n' for you an' get your girl you kiss him two times. By—by—Sinfoo-loosir!"

Morden stared at the unexpected expression of Rabbit's face and again nearly fell off his mule with embarrassment when Rabbit snatched up his robe and kissed it even as the wild hillman had done.

Rabbit extracted another cigarette carefully from beneath his voluminous robes and relapsed into profound reflection upon this abnormal phenomenon. Morden, too, appeared infected with a contemplative mood judging by the manner in which he watched Rabbit. Indeed he was conscious of a real regard for this queer person, the like of whom had never entered into Morden's world of men. The element of surprise at Rabbit's personality he recognized as being rather unjust; particularly from a democrat, and he noted the tendency to snobbery inherent in mankind.

Rabbit's magnetism of personality was rapidly developing an optimistic confidence regarding the outcome of the apparently crazy expedition, and also comforted him with the feeling of the comradeship of a real white man. While he was cogitating upon the past experience of this unusual "strawdin'ry" guide the subject's voice broke in upon him.

"I say, ole chap, my awf'ly fren', you look. That city of fren', Ben Ghali. We stop for night."

Conscious of the extra phrase, "My awf'ly fren'," Morden followed an indicating finger and saw a walled "city" nestling beside an olive plantation against the hillside, rose-tinted in the setting sun.

"You see large mountain?" continued Rabbit. "Fine! Upside him small city? Your girl, she sit there. Fine, huh?"

But Rabbit's study of comparative religion had not taxed his eyes as much as Morden's had, so he was compelled to accept Rabbit's description. However, within half an hour Rabbit's admonition to replace the enormous horn "specs" and the lower band of the turban was received with a resigned sigh and suppressed curses.

Morden nodded religiously and literally in the rear of Rabbit as their animals' hoofs clopped over the cobbled, narrow, and smelly streets of the city. By squinting violently to left and to right he caught glimpses of moss-painted walls, a ruined tower against a scarlet sky set with storks' nests, tribesmen with black elf locks projecting beneath camel-hair rope wound around half-shaven skulls in place of turbans, an occasional shrouded woman, and sometimes the big-eyed, fair-typed face of the Berber girl, for in the hills they are not so strict regarding the covering of the face as their orthodox brethren of the plains and towns.

So interested did he become in these twisted glances of a new world, and half blinded by the saintly spectacles, that he was unaware that his fool mule had followed a passing donkey until he heard a shower of evidently uproarious epithets in Shiloh—the hill tongue—from Rabbit, who seizing the rope which did duty for a bridle, led him round and through a tunnel into a cobbled yard.

The smell of the camels, spice, and garbage was pungent. His mount came to a standstill. Morden considered that he was expected to dismount.

Accordingly he slung one leg over the saddle. But the slipper of the other foot slipped. He tried to save himself, and sprawled upon the stones. His glasses bounced a dozen feet from him.

In the brief interval he glimpsed a mass of donkeys, horses, mules, and kneeling camels scattered among piles of bales and various lean brown faces with the elf lock of the hillman beneath the level line of roofs against the emerald sky.

Then as he trod awkwardly on his robes as he tried to rise, descended like an angry demon the figure of Rabbit, who, exhaling guttural curses, retrieved the glasses,

crashed them upon Morden's nose, yanked him to his feet and whispered a fierce injunction: "Knock your head! Knock your head! Get busy!"

Obediently Morden stood stockstill, bobbing industriously. Guttural speech and exclamations rose on every side. Morden expected to be pin-cushioned with fanatical knives at each moment. He followed a tug upon his sleeve, fell over a bale, and quickly found himself within a darkened chamber.

"Sit down!" whispered a fierce voice. "Knock your head! Make noise! Get busy!"

He sank upon his haunches wondering what on earth Rabbit could mean by "make noise!" In a brief squint he saw the yellow gleam of some artificial light upon dirty walls, a jumble of hoods and wild faces, and an acrid smell. A wild idea that he was supposed to sing was suppressed. He could recognize Rabbit's rapid and fluent speech amid the apparently menacing voices around him. What could Rabbit have meant? In desperation he bobbed diligently and began to make the weirdest possible noises in his throat that he could imagine.

Rabbit ceased. Comparative silence rested except for the liquid grumbling of discontented camels outside. Apparently the show was a success, he surmised. He increased to fortissimo: and paused tentatively.

Incomprehensible guttural coughs ensued. Rabbit's voice volubly explained something. Morden was perplexed. Squinting wildly, he caught another glimpse of a gray-bearded, gaunt face watching him intently. What should he do? In desperation he began again to make noises. Instantly there was silence. In sheer nervousness he ceased. Came another outburst of guttural discussion.

This time Morden decided to remain silent until he was given orders, although how he was to receive them he did not know. Then he started so violently that he nearly knocked off the spectacles, when Rabbit's voice said distinctly:

"Make more noise like million camels. Allah il Allah! Allah Akbah! Knock your head on ground two times. La ilaha

il Allah! Knock your head one time 'gain. Wa Mohammed er-rasool Allah!"

Gathering, as he had feared, that his life was at stake, Morden experienced for the first time in his life the adorable sensation of being so scared that he was beyond fear. He grasped the meaning of Rabbit's interpolated phrases, and summoning all his powers of acting, made the requisite noises and obeisances, even bumping his head up on the floor with an energy calculated to satisfy the most ardent fanatic.

Receiving no further instructions from Rabbit, he sat quite still, adding by inspiration of the excitement what he imagined to be the touch of the seer by tilting his chin slightly as if raptly viewing most wondrous visions of paradise. The act apparently was a great success. A most holy and promising silence ensued.

Again he squinted desperately. Shadows were moving upon the wall. A sweet smell of food was distinctly sensed. He became aware of figures nearer to him and the plucking at his robes. Drugged by the sweet scent of hunger, Morden unconsciously spoke aloud:

"O, my God, they're going to kiss me again!"

The realization of what he had done paralyzed him. He expected to be attacked and cut to pieces. Instead he felt his hand taken and in contact with a hairy mouth. He remained frigidly still and apathetic. Another and yet another pawed and mouthed his hand. Unconsciously he groaned. Obviously appreciative gutturals answered him. Then came much shuffling. He saw the side shadows disappearing. After a pause he heard Rabbit's: "All right, ole chap! You awf'ly jolly saint! Fine! Oh, boy!"

Morden plucked the glasses from his nose and blinked at a wooden bowl of chicken cous-cous.

"For the love of Heaven, Rabbit, what happened?"

"You dam' fool," explained Rabbit lucidly. "You fall off horse. You show your nose. Helluv a row! I tell them you saint. I tell you speak Mecca Arabic no same these dirty peoples. You make noise

jus' I tell you. Fine! You awf'ly jolly saint! Then they go bring present for holy man! Ob, boy!"

CHAPTER IV.

BEN GHALI.

WABBLY sounds, and the knocking as of a child beating a stick against a fence greeted Morden's ears. He stared with sluggish eyes at a green light upon a yellow wall. Through the aperture of the door he saw camels in the dawnlight munching and grumbling, which explained the liquid noises. But the knocking, which had ceased?

Above the opposite roof, a straight line of blue, appeared great flopping wings of sepia; wings resolved into exquisite sailing lines against glowing scarlet.

Morden stared perplexedly. The suggestion of the Japanese bewildered him. Japanese? Stork! Hence the knocking noises. He watched the great birds glide into a sea of emerald. Scarce sufficiently awake to comprehend where he was, he stared around the room. In one corner was a tumbled heap of gray blankets from which protruded a face fringed with moth-eaten whiskers. Rabbit! Morden gazed, wonderingly conscious of an affection for the owner of that cavernous mouth uplifted.

Very naturally, Morden's thoughts turned to Eileen away up in the mountain so near him. The suggestion of comparative proximity drew a pleased smile on his face as he wondered what she was doing and how she was being treated. Morden was more anxious to see Eileen for purely loverlike reasons, for Rabbit as well as the American consul had assured him that Ben Ghali treated his captives decently as long as the chance of a ransom was in sight.

The idea of a successful rescue which would have the desired reaction upon Seagrove cheered him. Even a wild project of holding up Seagrove for ransom with his daughter for the price tickled him. Of course, he reflected, he really couldn't do such a thing but—oh, how he would love to see Papa Seagrove's stern business face

crumpled into lines of indignant wrath. Anyway the old man would have to admit that he could do something when emergency called even if it were not in the almighty dollar line.

Turning to arouse Rabbit, he noticed the manner of awakening; not a movement of the features or the body as the eyelids slowly lifted half way and shot a quick glance around the room; then perceiving that all was well, the mouth closed with a snap and the rest of Rabbit began to stir. He sat up, rubbed a brown paw across his face by way of a wash, and remarked cheerfully:

"Hullo, ole chap, my fren'!" Then came a broad grin. "Mohammed he good to you las' night, huh?"

"I don't know about Mohammed, but I guess you did most of the doing, Rabbit."

"No," asserted Rabbit obstinately. "I ask Mohammed, he do. You read Mohammed book, cons'quently Mohammed he think you awf'ly jolly fellah! Sure!"

"H'm! But when are we going to get on the road, Rabbit?"

"Road? Oh don' you go get all worked up!" remarked Rabbit, grinning. "You wan' awf'ly bad go kiss your girl, huh? I know. Sure! Fine! Oh boy!"

"Rabbit! I wish you wouldn't make idiotic remarks—"

But the reprimand was as wasted as a breath of air against a sailing stork. Rabbit's mouth opened and a squalling volume of sound issued forth.

"What on earth's the matter?" began Morden.

"All right!" sharply. "You no fuss! I jus' call for coffee. We eat; then we go 'long after your girl. Man he come with coffee."

Morden caught a glimpse of the wild man, a scraggy bronze creature in a rope turban around wild locks, and clad in a gray jeiab, as he obediently thrust on the great horn spectacles and hunched himself into the corner to be as unobtrusive as possible. He heard Rabbit arguing with the man excitedly in Shiloh, the hill tongue, which is softer and more liquid than the Arabic.

At a word from Rabbit, he unmasked

again and found two steaming glasses of excellent, sweet coffee, some coarse native bread, and a basket of green figs.

While they were eating, Rabbit gave instructions for the day. So impressed with the throat noises, "like a million camels," Morden had made, was Rabbit, that he decided that the public would require an encore on every possible occasion.

After they had finished the meal, Rabbit made Morden don his disguise and sit quietly while he went to have the animals brought out and round up the men. But scarcely had he departed than a commotion in the fondak alarmed Morden and aroused his curiosity. A deep, gruff voice was shouting guttural commands. Protesting cries answered him. Silence, and again the uproar broke out.

Morden wriggled farther toward the doorway, and squinting to see that no one was nigh, pushed down the spectacles and peered over the top.

In the middle of the disorder of camels, mules, bales, and tribesmen stood a tall, stoutish figure clad in a spotless white silham. As he moved, holding up the robes to walk, Morden saw that he wore high, yellow riding boots, beautifully embroidered in colors, the swarthy face had bright black eyes rather large and intelligent above a nose like the beak of an eagle jutting outward over a great beard of black—a handsome, haughty type of Arab.

For a moment, Morden was scared as the fellow appeared to be coming straight toward him. He shuffled as far back into the corner as possible, thrust back the spectacles, and lowered the fold of the turban across his mouth. Guttural voices sounded without. Then to his relief Rabbit's voice whispered near to him.

"You stan' up an' get busy, ole chap. I take you out. You fin' stone and get on top of him and so you fall into the saddle and not lie down on the ground. Savvy? Un'erstan'? If wild man come kiss you you make more camel noises?"

"You bet I will!" assented Morden, with sudden heat. "But who's that fellow with the black beard?"

"Him? You see? You no know?" surprisedly. "He Ben Ghali ibn Omar."

"What! The brigand chief?"

"Sure! Fine fellow, huh? But Rabbit two times more clever than him by—by Sinfooloosir! Yessir. Now you come 'long. Get busy!"

This time no accident happened. Morden by squinting violently discovered the mounting block and clambered into the sofa saddle. On this occasion the mob seemed to have tired of or forgotten the new saint, for no one attempted to kiss him again. As he rode out, lead by Rabbit, he caught a glimpse of Ben Ghali squatted within a room, his bare toes protruding from beneath the white robes, surrounded by a number of hillmen and small glasses of tea.

They clattered along the cobbled streets down a maze of narrow lanes girt with moss painted walls, and through the great gate of crumbling stone out into the flower-strewn hillside. But not until they had ridden for nearly half an hour would Rabbit permit his saint to disclose his holy features.

Then was Morden allowed to remove the spectacles and excite his imagination by gazing at the distant spot on the side of the mountain which was the prison of Eileen and her father. Just beneath it and a little to the left he remarked a dull brown patch against the green.

"That city," explained Rabbit to his inquiry. "Fren's Ben Ghali live there watch out for your girl. Give him milk, eggs, chick'n." He puffed smoke and grinned aimably. "When Ben Ghali find him girl gone he cut off head ev'ry one his fren's neck. Yessir."

"Is that true?" commented Morden, a little distressed at the idea of bringing murder and sudden death even by rescuing Eileen.

"Sure!" asserted Rabbit cheerfully. "But very good for him wild man cos' they die dead for their caid. Fine! Cons'quently they go paradise first time, plenty girl! Oh boy!"

"Poor souls!" commented Morden. "Who said that they would? Mohammed?"

"Sure! You read Koran you no 'llect Mohammed he promise ev'ry one who die

dead for him go first time to paradise? Sure! Fine!"

"Yes, in effect he did, I suppose," assented Morden meditatively. "He was certainly some politician."

"'Tician? 'Tician?" queried Rabbit.

"Politician. One who is supposed to study—practise the science of government, but unfortunately he's usually a—is a—well, that is—oh, damn it, usually a darned grafter."

"Ah, pol-tician! I know him. Sure. But Mohammed he not pol-tician. Mohammed holy man—"

"So am I!" commented Morden swiftly.

"Mohammed," repeated Rabbit severely, "really truly, truly awf'ly holy man."

"I see."

"But pol-tician I know him sure. He one damned liar jus' you say jus' like Ben Ghali. Some time," confessed Rabbit, "I pol-tician. Jus' cos' you my fren' I pol-tician. When we come see your girl my peoples no let me go talk, but I tell 'em you holy man an' want go give 'fidels plenty bad words. Cusses? Un'erstan'? Cos holy man crazy wild they no dare stop holy man do what he want; cons'quently you go kiss your girl and tell her what you do. Un'erstan'?"

"Yes, I understand," complied Morden, resisting the desire to point out Rabbit's definition of a man "crazy wild," and Mohammed.

CHAPTER V.

UNMASKED!

"DAMN it! I'd give ten dollars for a cigar!"

"Oh, dad, don't be absurd! What's the good of grumbling?" retorted Eileen. "You're not in the Giltmore."

"Giltmore! Suffering Henry! I'd better be in a lodging-house than this!" Charles King Seagrove chewed a grass stem with his strong white teeth savagely.

"Dad!"

"Well, I would! You're young, child. I've got no stomach for romance."

"Romance! Good Heavens, I'd—I'd give—oh—oh, anything for a bath."

Eileen literally squatted in her dirty riding dress of green at the door of their prison tent and stared disconsolately across the mountain valley that at one time had been so full of beauty for her. Her Saxon hair was scrunched up into a bun behind her head as the best method of minimizing the risk of infection from the numberless horrors of the tent. The beauty of her face was smudged with the grime of a happy gutter child in spite of frantic attempts at ablutions with a tin cup of water.

Opposite crouched her father, whose belted hunting suit would have disgraced a small-town sportsman after a drunken Saturday night. His gray hair hung in wisps upon his grim forehead, and the "clear-cut" features for which he had been famous in those journals of the same political hue were obscured in a nondescript beard. He sat and stared and cursed; even used words which in any other environment he would rather have died than utter in the presence of his daughter.

On each side of the tent, with a flimsy partition of grass matting between, was a pallet of straw with camp blankets and bundled robes for pillows. On the flattened grass and earth of the floor were two empty glasses of coffee and in a wooden bowl the remains of the meal provided by their captors.

"Confound that hawk-nosed thief!" growled Mr. Seagrove for the thousandth time, chewing hard on the grass.

"It's your own fault, dad," reminded his daughter with becoming deference.

"My fault!" he exploded. "What the hell—I mean, what the devil—oh, for God's sake don't talk feminine nonsense."

"Why you should be so careful to differentiate between the place of torment and the proprietor. I cannot imagine," commented Eileen acidly.

An inarticulate noise and the severing of the grass stem in Mr. Seagrove's mouth was the only answer. Three weeks' confinement in a tent with rations limited to an unfamiliar cooking of eggs and chickens and more chickens and eggs, varied with half-price apricots and figs, sweet tea and coffee, and no tobacco, had played as much havoc with the resolution not to be "stung" as

with the temper of Charles Seagrove, and almost as much with Eileen's humor, who felt under stress of these unforeseen circumstances that none of these awful things would have happened if dad had not so foolishly insisted upon taking her on the European tour, quite oblivious of the joys of Paris, Venice, Vienna.

In fact, strange ideas had been built in that imprisonment. Eileen had almost flirted with a wonderment as to how her mother ever could have lived with such an irritable being as dad had proved to be, and he had cursed at an impulse to urge the marriage of his daughter with Morden Baird as the greatest punishment for impertinence he could imagine.

"Dad," demanded Eileen, "when do you think the messenger will arrive?"

"How the mischief do I know?" snapped Seagrove. Then as if with an effort: "Two days to Tangier, and it ought not to take the cable more than twelve hours—so perhaps the day after to-morrow. But think of the wickedness of paying this East Side hold-up twenty thousand good dollars."

"Well, don't, then, and we'll spend the rest of our lives here! Oh, dad, how can you be so perfectly stupid about a few wretched dollars! If Morden—"

"Morden!" scoffed her parent, really anxious for a subject. "He's probably dancing in the Castor or doing some other fool stunt!"

"You know very well that Morden would never go to the Castor," protested Eileen vexedly.

"For Heaven's sake, hasn't this experience cured you of such romantic idiocy?" Seagrove snorted, and added: "This would be your life in the East Side had I let you have your fool way. You'll marry a man, not a lizard! Hear what I say, girl?"

"All right, dad," assented Eileen, with exaggerated patience; "but Morden would not have argued over paying a ten-thousand-dollar ransom for me."

"Sure, he would not!" assented her irate father. "Because he never earned it, and never will!"

"Oh, do be quiet! What's the use of quarreling?"

"I'm not. It's the principle of the thing."

Besides, they simply daren't do anything to us, my girl. What on earth d'you think the United States consul's for, anyway? Why, they'd blow their smelly little town about their ears if— Just bluff! I know what I'm doing."

But in truth he had no conception of the risk they both were running in the land of the Moors, for Seagrove was as unacquainted with the Moorish point of view regarding women as with the tenets of the Mohammedan religion.

"Pshaw!" he added confidently, "nothing will happen except—except fleas. There, for Heaven's sake—oh, let's talk about something else, little girl. I know. I feel as mad as a wet hen. There! I'm sorry!"

Eileen leaned across and taking his hand kissed his grimy fingers.

"Silly old dad, as if you didn't know we're the best of pals! Only—well, you know! If only Morden— There, I'll be good, too!"

Quite solemnly each relapsed into a stare across the valley.

"Oh, look!" commented Eileen, after a while. "There's a caravan coming up the trail!"

"H-m! another delegation of prominent citizens to call upon us!" remarked Seagrove sarcastically, referring to the numerous visitors who came to stare and spit at the infidel.

Ten minutes later Eileen remarked again: "Oh, thank Heaven, they're going up to the village! Oh, dad, do you think that it might possibly be the ransom? Look—they've got donkeys loaded with panniers and they'd send the money in Moorish dollars, wouldn't they?"

"That was the condition old friend Ben Ghali made, as I understood that squint-eyed interpreter," replied her father, and added moodily. "But as like as not that fool Holt would send it in notes, which would mean another week in this confounded country club!"

"I do hope it is!" prayed Eileen fervently. "Oh, just *think* of a *real* bath!"

"Just think of a real cigar!" mumbled Seagrove, mockingly.

Eileen watched the last donkey disappear

behind the village huts. "Poor Morden!" she continued. "They're sure to have made a newspaper scarehead out of this, and he'll be nearly worrying himself ill, poor dear!"

"Poor dear nothing," growled her father. "That's about all he's fit for—worrying. If he'd only *do* something! I'll—poof!"

"But, dad, what *could* he do?"

"How the devil do I know, daughter? That's his job. But for Heaven's sake, don't talk about him. I've got enough as it is to irritate me!"

"All right, dad."

Seagrove selected another succulent grass stem to chew, and rolled wearily onto the other elbow. Eileen gloomily regarded huge holes in her stocking heel and wriggled into a more comfortable position.

"Oh, if only we had something—anything to read!" muttered Eileen. "Even if it were only the market quotations!" Then: "Oh Heavens, we *are* going to have visitors again! Dad! Look at this extraordinary creature!"

Mounting up the slight path of the incline leading to their prison tent was an animated bundle of dirty robes surmounted by a green turban and huge horn spectacles. Seagrove stared gloomily.

"Better get inside the tent, dear. He'll probably spit and throw stones at us."

"But look at him! What's he got that green rag round his face for?" persisted Eileen.

"How the devil do I know!" snorted Seagrove, beginning to retreat into the rear of the tent. "Probably got the toothache!" he snarled sarcastically.

"Poor dear! And how funnily he walks! He—"

"Eileen! Come in, dear!"

"All right, dad!"

As the strange apparition approached came a guttural challenge, and over a rock to the right of the tent was poked the long rifle of their hillman guard. Immediately the stranger lifted his arms, draping the robes like a scarecrow, and, as he slowly began to gyrate, uncouth noises, groans, and squeaks, issued from the bandaged face.

"Dad, he's crazy!" murmured Eileen, unconsciously drawing toward her father.

"Whirling, howling dervish, I suppose," mumbled Seagrove. "This infernal country's full of nuts."

Another challenge shouted by the man behind the rock was followed by a laugh. The dervish began to prance faster toward the tent, barking like a dog: *Bow! bow! bow!*

"Oh, dad, he *is* crazy!" murmured Eileen.

"Wish I had a gun," muttered Seagrove, as he edged himself in front of his daughter. "But you bet they won't let him do any harm to twenty thousand good dollars, my dear! Keep quiet, and pretend not to notice him."

They could see the sentry sitting on the rock against which leaned the long rifle, grinning and making guttural remarks. The maniac continued to "woof" vigorously as he capered right up to the doorway.

"Oh, Heavens, the horrid creature's coming in!" Eileen exclaimed as the man flopped on all fours.

"Hey, you, get out of this!" shouted Seagrove intimidatingly. "Allez! Go! Git! Hey!"

"All right, Mr. Seagrove! It's I, Morden! *Bow! Wow! Whoff! Whoff!* Eileen, don't be scared. *Miow! Miow!*"

Eileen suppressed a startled scream. Seagrove swore.

"What in—"

"I tell you it's Morden," came the recognizable voice, muffled. "But don't show you know me. I've come to rescue you. *Miow! Miow!* I must keep up this fool stunt for that fellow out there. Just act scared and listen to what I tell you. *Whoof! Whoof! Miow!*"

"By God, it *is* Morden!" muttered Seagrove, incredulously. "How on earth did you get here?"

"No time tell you. *Bow! Wow! Woof!* When I go a man will bring you a present of a big basket of fruit. *Miow! Miow! Whoof!* Inside are clothes like this for disguise. *Miow!* Understand? *Whoof! Whoof!*"

"Yes."

"Eileen, crouch against your father as if you were scared stiff. That's it. Sentry

looking, perhaps. *Miow! Miow!* As soon as it's dark you dress up just the same as I am. Cover your faces. *Bow! Wow! Boo!* A man will come back. He speaks English, with two other men got up like me. Saint, you know. *Miow! Boo!* The two men are real saints. They stop here, and you go off with the guide I send you. *Bow! Wow! Wow! Miow!* Do you *quite* understand?"

"Yes, Morden," assented Eileen. And she giggled a little hysterically.

"*Miow! Miow!*"

"By God, you've got the goods, after all!" admitted Seagrove. "Morden, I'll forget everything after this. That twenty thousand shall be my wedding—"

"Can't stop. *Miow! Miow!* Awfully nice, Mr. Seagrove. See you to-night. *Yow! Yow!*"

But just as the saint began to back out came the thrum of hoofs. Three horsemen pulled up their animals upon their haunches at the very door. The handsome black beard of the bandit appeared followed by the one-eyed Moorish interpreter.

With a guttural grunt Ben Ghali tore off the turban and the spectacles of the saint.

"Subhan Allah!" he exclaimed, and flung a volley of gutturals. Then he stood back, glanced at the scared face of Eileen, at her scowling father, at the angry face of his new captive, uttered a few swift words to his interpreter, and lifting his great black beard, began to rumble with laughter.

"Sheik Ben Ghali," said the one-eyed interpreter, "wish to tell you that he very pleased to have another guest with you and that the hotel bill will now be thirty thousand dollars.

"You confounded young fool!" snorted Seagrove, glaring at Morden. "Here's a nice mess you've got us into!"

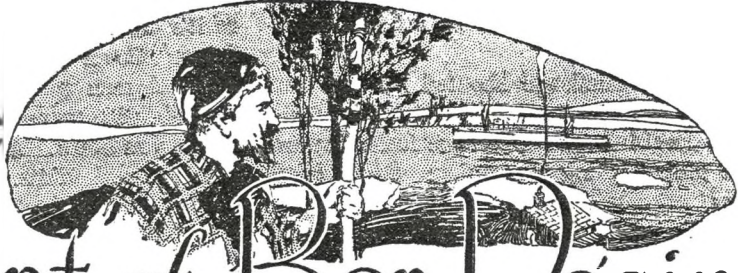
"Oh, dad! Oh, Morden!" whispered Eileen, when a fast galloping and a wild shout drew everybody's attention to the door. Racing down the hillside upon a great black stallion, with his head level with the pommel, was Rabbit, in full flight.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Morden savagely, "and now Rabbit's deserted me!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Saint of Bon Désir

By William Merriam Rouse



I.

FEW men believed that he was seventy-five years old—this *vieillard* who stood as straight as a pine, whose hair was black, and who could still eat with his back teeth. Yet such was the truth.

Noël Lefrançois, who kept a house which was half hotel and half store, had seen the snow melt five times since he had passed three-score-and-ten. He was full of years, but not of heaviness, and there was no man of his acquaintance in all French-Canada who did not wish him another lifetime. They called him, in all honesty, the Saint of Bon Désir.

The house in which Noël Lefrançois had chosen to settle down for his latter years was of the old time when they used to build three-foot walls and chimneys more than big enough to take the body of a man. This was fitting, for he himself was of the old time. In winter he wore a red *ceinture fléchée*, which passed twice around his waist and hung in a fringe at one side. This was an honor to him and an example to the young men, who are ever in danger of becoming Yankeeified.

For a decade he had sold flour and tobacco at Bon Désir, and opened his door to all the world; a gratefully quiet life after wanderings such as few men in *bas-Canada* had ever experienced. There was no one who did not know him. Explorers from the Ungava territory, woodsmen of Maine, *bûcherons* from Lake St. John, boatmen of the St. Lawrence, and many from the

cities. There was no *voyageur* east of Montreal who could not have claimed acquaintance with Noël Lefrançois.

"You are rich," said old Zénon Lamotte one August day when half a dozen men of Bon Désir sat on the porch of the *maison* Lefrançois and smoked together. "You are rich, M. Lefrançois. Why don't you stop working? You could have a house on the Rue St. Louis in Quebec, and do nothing but smoke and drink gin from morning to night."

A less kindly man than Noël Lefrançois might have been angry at such familiarity, even though a *habitant* means no offense when he asks what disease your grandfather died of—but not M. Lefrançois. He threw his head back until his long black hair tossed in the breeze, and laughed good-naturedly.

"Perhaps I am rich," he said as he took his browned clay pipe from his mouth, "and perhaps not. But I would not be seventy-five years on earth if I had lived in cities: and as for gin, I drink it only at the New Year, weddings, baptisms, and when there is a good excuse. *Mon Dieu*, Zénon! In Quebec I should be as lonesome as the devil at mass!"

Zénon grinned foolishly; and whatever he might have said was cut off by the coming of three men. They were *bûcherons*, and the paddles which they carried told that they had just come down the Saguenay to the St. Lawrence. Bright-shirted, sweating, stepping with the light step of men used to the forest, they nevertheless came

awkwardly up to the presence of Noël Lefrançois. They halted.

"You are welcome, *messieurs*," said the old man with all the courtesy of a *seigneur*. "I know you, Jacques Morin. As to the others, I have not that pleasure."

"Amédée Bois and Napoléon Laferté," said Morin, a stoop-shouldered giant with a tremendous, straggling mustache. "Napoléon, he is in trouble."

"Enter, *messieurs*," invited Lefrançois.

He led the way through the store, where all manner of goods were piled in a kind of rough orderliness, to a pleasant little room at the rear which served him as an office. It contained an old-fashioned secretary, stuffed full of yellowing papers, and a half-dozen chairs.

"How can I serve you?" asked M. Lefrançois, when his visitors had seated themselves with the stiff movements of embarrassment and on the edges of their chairs.

"I told you he was a good man!" burst out Morin, glancing at Napoléon. "But you would not believe me—"

"Keep still!" sputtered Laferté, growing brick red. Amédée Bois said nothing, but he wore a frank look of skepticism.

"*Eh bien!*" smiled Noël Lefrançois. "Father Giroux, our priest, is a good man. But as for me"—he shrugged—"I am a sinner!"

"But no, *monsieur*," contradicted Laferté, gaining a little confidence. "If what Jacques here says is true, you are a saint!"

"He needs money—" began Morin; but Laferté cut in hurriedly to make his own plea.

"My woman, she is sick, *monsieur*. And at Château Richer, which is far up the river toward Quebec. The doctors say she will die—the news was brought to me at Lake St. John. Now you and I know, *monsieur*, that if she can go to the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaurpré she will be cured. Is it not so?"

"Certainly," agreed Lefrançois. "You have no money?"

"Yes, *monsieur*, I have forty dollars!" He pulled out a blackened leather wallet to prove it. "However, it will cost all of a hundred to go and get her and take her to Ste. Anne."

"True, M. Laferté." Noël Lefrançois turned to the secretary and opened a drawer. He took out a sheaf of green money as big as his big hand could grasp.

"*Mon Dieu!*" breathed Amédée Bois. "What a way to keep good money?"

"It is more convenient like this," answered the old man absently. He counted out seventy-five dollars in soiled notes and handed them to Napoléon. "It is better to have too much rather than too little. And may the good Sainte Anne intercede for your wife!"

Napoléon Laferté took the money with a hand that trembled. It was plain that he had had no faith in the assertions of Morin, and that this unexpected generosity shook him.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "I do not know how to thank you, but if you will make out a paper I will sign—"

"That would be a waste of good time," interrupted Lefrançois. "When you are able you will pay it back and the matter will be forgotten."

Laferté got up and stumbled from the room. Morin and Bois rose to follow him, but their host put out his hand in a restraining gesture.

"Sit down, *messieurs*," he said. "It is better that he be left to himself just now—and meanwhile you can smoke a pipe with me and tell me the news of the Lake St. John country. Since I stopped my wanderings and settled down here I have to depend upon good *voyageurs* like yourself to bring me the news of Canada."

Morin, at least, knew that this kind of gossip of the far places, and indeed of any place, was the delight of M. Lefrançois. So he not only told all that he had heard and seen during the past few months, but drew from Amédée Bois accounts of fights, strange meetings, hard work and harder sprees. All this reputation of being a kindly gossip-lover had grown up since M. Lefrançois came to Bon Désir, and was considered a natural weakness in an old man who no longer felt able to swing an ax in the woods. Now he listened intently, occasionally putting in just the right word to keep the loose narrative going.

There was all the questing restlessness

of a young man in his bright eyes as he sat with his pipe cold in his hand and his big frame held taut as though he were ready to spring up at any moment. Bois, warmed to a certain tale and somewhat inclined to be boastful, was telling of a free-for-all fight in which he had participated at Chicoutimi.

"It began like this, *monsieur*. We were all in the bunkhouse smoking when the door opened and in walked this stranger—an old man with a scar on his cheek—"

"What's that?" barked Lefrançois, letting his pipe clatter to the desk. "Say that again!"

Both Bois and Morin looked at him in astonishment. His cheeks burned and his square old shoulders were quivering with the tenseness of his posture.

"An old man with a scar on his cheek," repeated Bois.

"With eyes the color of a knife-blade and a hooked nose?" demanded Lefrançois in a whisper.

"No, *monsieur*." Bois shook his head wonderingly. "I remember very well that his eyes were black because his skin was dark like an Indian's—as for the nose I can't say."

"Bah! A man's eyes don't alter!" Lefrançois made the exclamation good-naturedly, with a complete change of manner. He leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily—so heartily that he forced the others to smile. "It is always like that—I think I am on the trail of one of my old friends, and it turns out to be an entirely different man. When you mentioned the scar I was deceived, M. Bois."

Amédée Bois went on, but rather haltingly, so that it was not long before Lefrançois perceived that the time had come to show the men to their room; for Laferté would have to wait there until a boat going up the river touched at Bon Désir, and the others would at least remain overnight. Noël Lefrançois was his own hotel clerk and storekeeper: he had an old woman to cook and make the beds for his scattering guests, but otherwise he was alone in his house.

A little later Lefrançois went out to the rear of the rambling building. As he paused for a moment in the door of the woodshed, where no eyes were upon him, his shoulders

drooped, and for an almost imperceptible instant the weight of years seemed to bend his proudly held head and dim the sparkle in his eye.

Suddenly he shook himself. He seized an ax and moved to the woodpile with the quick step of twenty. For an hour, without a break in the steady rhythm of his movements, he split wood. When he finished his clear skin was bright with a healthful flush.

"It grows harder," he muttered as he went back into the house to prepare for supper. "But I will keep young! I will, I will!"

He ate well of *pâté à la viande* and beans cooked deliciously with pork—meanwhile talking with his three guests and trying not to see the frankly worshipful glances of Napoléon Laferté. After the meal, when the others had gone to smoke their pipes with those who gathered every evening on the porch, he went into the kitchen and took a bowl of *soupe aux pois* and some strong coffee from the hands of old Roxanne, the housekeeper.

Up to the third and top floor of the capacious building he mounted and walked along a corridor into a wing which gave forth the sound and smell of empty rooms. At the end of the corridor he put the tray and the candle which he carried on the dusty floor and unlocked with a big brass key a door solidly constructed of plank. He picked up his burdens and entered a slanting-roofed chamber.

The wavering light of the candle played over bare walls, a window barred with stout-looking irons, and a tousled cot bed. On the bed lay a young man, partly dressed, whose burning, deep-set eyes turned eagerly toward the old man. He raised up and extended an uncertain hand.

"Give me a drink!" he demanded.

"Of course, my son," promised Lefrançois cheerfully. He drew a small flask from his pocket and measured a generous drink of whisky *blanc* into the cup. "A little drink will do you good now, and then some soup and coffee."

The man on the bed nodded. He drank the whisky, sighed, and lay back. But Noël Lefrançois put a thick and powerful arm under his shoulders and lifted him up.

"Take the soup quickly," he said with a ring of command. "Then we will have a little talk, you and I."

With a growl of mingled protest and obedience the young man swallowed the soup in slow spoonfuls. Almost at once there was more strength and steadiness in him. He looked up at his visitor inquiringly, although with sadness lying over his face like a pall.

"Robert Poisé," began Lefrançois solemnly, "you have been drinking more than is good for any man. That is why I dragged you up here by the neck and locked you in. To-night you are sober—to-morrow you will have some strength and you can go out. But be warned. At this rate you will make yourself an old man while you are still young, you will never have any money, and undoubtedly you will go to hell when you die!"

Poisé suddenly turned over and buried his face in his arms. His body heaved with long sobs. Noël Lefrançois laid a hand upon his thick, dark hair and stroked it slowly.

"You are a fool, my son," he said huskily, "but this folly is nothing—it is like smoke from a chimney, to be blown away at once. You are foolish to permit yourself to worry."

"You don't understand!" cried the boy. "You know that I am a salesman for Morency Frères in Montreal, do you not? Good! Then let me tell you that I have spent three hundred dollars of their money and that I cannot pay it back. I will be put in jail—my mother will die! I was running away when I stopped here and began to drink to forget!"

"Do Morency Frères know?"

"Yes—it is hopeless."

"Would they accept restitution?"

"Undoubtedly. But even then I would be disgraced and unable to get work anywhere."

"I believe"—spoken very slowly and thoughtfully—"that you have suffered enough, and that you have an honest heart—it is written in your face. Therefore I shall loan you three hundred dollars, you will go home on the first boat, and after that one of my friends in Quebec will give

you work. You will say to your mother that her son will never again be foolish. All I ask is that you shall bring the money back to me yourself—a little at a time—and sit and gossip an hour or two with a lonely old man. Now sleep!"

Noël rose quickly and turned to leave the room. The eyes of the boy, astonished, shining with renewed hope, followed him with a doglike devotion.

"May *le bon Dieu* give you all blessings here and hereafter!" he cried. "You are a saint!"

Lefrançois passed out of the room and locked the door. He walked down the corridor slowly, his head bent so low that his chin rested upon his breast. But when he entered the kitchen again his head was held high, as usual, and he walked with the springing step of a young man. Roxanne, hands on hips and face drawn down with wo, met him.

"Bad news, M. Lefrançois!" she exclaimed. "Very bad news."

"What is it now?" he asked with a smile.

Roxanne was one who took a melancholy enjoyment in the sorrows of the world: moreover, she held to a suspicion that there was some kind of sorcery in the long preserved youth of her employer. She herself, fifteen years younger, was an old woman.

"It is the widow of M. Duhamel, the *avocat*," she said. "I have just learned to-night that there is not enough to eat in the house. Of course all the world knew that he died poor, but no one thought it was as bad as that, even when she sold part of her furniture. Father Giroux just stopped at the door and asked me to tell you."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Lefrançois. "That is bad—and all the worse because one cannot offer money to a woman like Mme. Veuve Duhamel. To-night do you take a new basket out of the store so that no one will know where it came from, and fill it with all things necessary to eat for two days. Leave it in her woodshed. That will give me time to think of some way to help her."

"Very well, *monsieur*," grunted Roxanne, pleased, and yet at the same time deprived of a mournful subject of thought.

By this time Noël Lefrançois, although

the evening was yet young, felt tired. He went to his room, a neat, severely furnished chamber, and began slowly to take off his worn clothing. The store, as usual, was left to take care of itself.

If Roxanne remembered to lock the door, very well—if not, it made no difference to the old man. Nearly every one in Bon Désir owed him a debt of gratitude, large or small, and those mean enough to steal from him were held back, he knew, by a kind of superstitious awe. It was said, indeed, that so holy was his life that he would go direct to heaven when he died. Had not Jean Legrand, who had stolen a side of bacon from the store eight years back, been taken violently ill the same night? So ill that his wife was a widow before the next noon!

This had been a hard day, for M. Lefrançois suffered with those about him who suffered. He had felt the anxiety of Napoléon Laferté, the remorse of Robert Poisé, and the despair of Mme. Veuve Duhamel. His hands trembled a little as he pulled on his patched cotton night-shirt. But the feeling of weakness disappeared when he was at last stretched out comfortably in the dark, and in five minutes he slept. He went to sleep peacefully, but with a keen feeling of hunger for something he did not have and dare not take—the comfort of prayer. A silver crucifix hung where it could be seen from the bed, and a rosary lay upon the bureau—yet Noël Lefrançois had not dared to pray for forty-five years.

II.

WITH the coming of the sun, Lefrançois was up and searching the St. Lawrence from one of the upper windows of his house. This had been his custom, during the season of navigation, ever since he had been at Bon Désir; for the arrival of a river-boat was to him of even more importance than the arrival of a *voyageur* from the remote places of the province.

This morning he picked up a *goëlette*, then a schooner, and finally one of the river-steamers plying between Montreal and the Gulf. It was outward bound, and as yet a long way off. He decided that he

would have time for breakfast before its arrival. Unless it was absolutely impossible he met at the wharf all boats, even the tiniest sloops, touching at the village.

When the gangplank of La Belle Marguerite clattered on the dock it turned out that there were only two passengers to come ashore—and they were an odd pair—an old man, richly dressed in American clothes, and a very young man with that quick, nervous air which all American tourists seem to have. The old man leaned rather heavily upon the arm of the young one, while on the opposite side he supported himself by a gold-headed cane. Their baggage, which followed them to the dock, made a good pile of expensive leather trunks and bags.

Noël Lefrançois's first glance at the strangers passed over them calmly and on to the unloading freight. Then his gaze wandered back to the face of the old man, who was inquiring for a hotel. Their glances met, and for an instant it seemed to Lefrançois that his heart stopped.

A sudden coldness set him trembling. He had looked into a pair of pale, steel-blue eyes, set prominently on either side of a heavy, curving nose. The lower part of the face, which had been that of a handsome man in youth, was covered by a straggling white beard. Did that beard hide a scar on one cheek? Lefrançois walked over to the pair, but without haste.

The old man whom he confronted turned, if possible, more parchmentlike. His cane rattled against the planking of the dock, and the young man glanced at him rather apprehensively, frowning at Lefrançois. The hotel-keeper bore the scrutiny of both of them without allowing a single muscle of his face to move; he had taken on a high color, but otherwise he was unchanged, and his voice sounded calm and clear as he spoke:

"Do you wish rooms for the night, *messieurs*?" he asked—"and a good Canadian *cuisine*?"

It was the young man who answered in halting French with the accent of Paris.

"M. Joseph Bramley expects to remain here a day or two, I think. He is making a pleasure-trip along the coast of the St. Law-

rence. I am called Frederick Stone, his secretary. If you have a good hotel we might as well go there."

"It is the only one!" smiled Lefrançois.

"Very well, then. You will see to the baggage?"

"But yes. And M. Bramley does not speak French?"

"Not at all," answered Stone. "He is an American like myself."

Again Noël Lefrançois smiled, and to himself whispered "Liar!" as he looked with a calculatingly searching glance into the steel-blue eyes. Bramley turned to his secretary and spoke rapidly in English—so rapidly that Lefrançois, who knew a good deal of the tongue, could not catch more than a word here and there.

"You are sure there is no other hotel?" asked the secretary uneasily.

"Quite sure."

"Tell him we will go—it makes no difference," from Bramley, and this time he spoke slowly enough so that Lefrançois could understand.

The three of them set off in the direction of the hotel, while the *voyageurs* who had come the day before followed with the baggage—having volunteered to carry it out of friendliness for Lefrançois. Once in the house Bramley fussed about his room; he objected to the color of the wall-paper, to the size of the bed, and all the while that he talked to his secretary he darted glances of suspicion and cold dislike at his host.

Noël Lefrançois kept a smiling face and a calm temper. He offered every furnished room in the house for inspection, and when at last his guest had chosen one for himself and another for his secretary, he departed with the same unflinching smile that he had worn in the beginning. To the kitchen he went first of all, to give orders to Roxanne, and then to the privacy of his own room.

Once within the walls of that small chamber a mask dropped from the face of Noël Lefrançois. His eyes became suffused with blood, his upper lip drew back until the strong, old teeth were visible at both corners of the mouth. He stretched out his great arms and crooked them together until he resembled nothing so much as a bear crushing an enemy.

"At last!" he growled. "After all these years of search and of waiting he has come to me in my own house!"

His arms dropped. Gradually the habitual expression of benevolent kindness took possession of his features, and when he went down again to face the eyes of men he was the straight, smiling, black-haired old man whom they knew so well in Bon Désir—incapable of a frown and so tender-hearted that he would not kick even a thieving cat.

Throughout that day Bramley, the rich American, kept to his room; but he sent innumerable questions by his harassed secretary.

When would the next boat go back to Montreal or Quebec? Could one go out to the Gulf and thence south to Boston or New York? Had the boats any regular schedule? And a thousand other inquiries of the same nature.

Young Stone, in a moment of confidence, confessed to Lefrançois that his employer had become more eccentric than ever within the past twelve hours—apparently he had given up his original intention of wandering through Canada at his leisure. By Stone, Lefrançois was informed that Joseph Bramley was a New Yorker, somewhat ailing, very old, and of late years obsessed by a strongly combated desire to visit the north. He had been there as a young man, said Frederick Stone.

Night came. Bramley had had his meals sent up and had not left his room all day. This suited Lefrançois. He jested with Morin and Bois and the humbly grateful Laferté, he smiled down the gloom of Roxanne, and he liberated the now happy Poisé, and gave him one of the best rooms. At nine o'clock, having made sure that all his guests had retired, Lefrançois went up to his own and set the candle down upon the bureau.

There was to be no comfort of clean sheets and soft feathers for him that night. With his face set in a strange loathing—strange to him—he paced back and forth, back and forth, muttering to himself now and then and twisting his strong fingers behind his back.

It was about two o'clock, when a man

might be supposed to sleep deeply, that Lefrançois took off his shoes and went softly out of his room. He had no need of a light for every turn and angle of the big building was familiar to him.

Before the door of the room occupied by Joseph Bramley he stopped and listened. No sound came from within. He tried the knob and found the door locked. That was as he had expected. He drew a slender pair of steel nippers from his pocket and with infinite patience found the end of the key, which had been left in the lock, and turned it. The bolt went back with a faint click, and he set his hand to the knob again. It took him all of five minutes to open the door.

The room was in darkness. From the bed he could hear uneven breathing, broken now and then by a sigh. For a moment he stood by the bed waiting, to make sure of the location of the head of the sleeper. Bramley stirred a little and caught his breath—he was waking up. Deliberately, and yet with swiftness, the left hand of Lefrançois reached out and sealed his mouth; then the right arm encircled his meager body and lifted him as though his weight had been nothing.

The hands of Bramley clutched frantically; he kicked. The right arm of his captor drew in slowly and inexorably so that breath whistled painfully between the fingers over the mouth. After that the prisoner lay still, limp and drooping, as he was carried out of the room and through corridors and up flights of stairs. In that same room, where young Robert Poisé had found rehabilitation, Lefrançois dropped the other old man upon the bed.

"Lie still and keep still," he said, "otherwise I shall take pleasure in breaking your neck at once."

Noël Lefrançois waited a moment to see that his command was going to be obeyed. Then he lighted a candle and saw to it that the door was fastened. He reached through the bars of the window and locked the padlock on a heavy pair of wooden shutters, putting the key into his pocket. And finally he drew up one of the chairs in the room and sat down by the bed, leaning forward to peer at the figure there.

Bramley lay as he had fallen, only his steely blue eyes moved. The candle-light brought out the sheen of silk pajamas and gave a semblance of health to his pallor. Lefrançois laughed with a sound like grating metal.

"You tried to hide the scar with a beard," he said, "but I saw it the moment I looked at you—and you couldn't hide that nose and those eyes!"

A bit of ancient white cicatrix showed on one cheek at the edge of the beard. Bramley sat up with a slight shiver and drew the covers about him.

"I was a fool to come back," he said. It was impossible to tell whether he was frightened—whether he was moved by any emotion.

"Yes," agreed Lefrançois, "but the north was stronger than the fear of me—you could not die without seeing *beau* Canada once more. Was it not so?"

"It was so. Nights when the stars are jewels over Quebec and the air makes one young again. I thought you might be dead by now."

"Ah!" The eyes of Lefrançois flashed and a triumphant hate overspread his face. "*Dieu, seigneur!* I have preserved myself for this hour! I knew it would come. You could not have stepped foot in the province of Quebec, except possibly in Montreal, without my knowledge. For years I traveled the province, here and there and everywhere, always looking for you and always making friends. Making friends, because I knew the day must come when age would compel me to remain in one place. From Fort Chimo to the States I have them, these friends, who bring me the gossip of every village and camp and Hudson Bay post—of every town.

"How they humor me, the men who are always drifting in and out of *Bon Désir!* And they come often, for when a man is in trouble he searches out Noël Lefrançois. They humor my desire for gossip. From east and west, from the sea and the barren lands they bring me tales of things they have seen and done. Always, as I smoke my pipe and listen, I ask a little question here and there as to the strangers they have met.

"Consider that well! I have given away everything, I have served all the world in order that I might build this great, unconscious service of intelligence. Once I went to Labrador to run down a man with light blue eyes and a scar on his cheek—it was not you. Six times in forty-five years have I hunted down the wrong man!"

Lefrançois paused, with a devilish quality of joy burning in his gaze. The man on the bed shuddered.

"I begin to understand," he said in a low voice. "That's why they call you the Saint of Bon Désir — with false kindness you've hired all French-Canada to watch for me!"

"Yes, Fernand Choquette, as surely as you came back—and I knew you could not die without breathing the air of the North once more—you were doomed!"

"Fernand Choquette!" murmured the other. "It seems strange to hear that name again!"

"You thought you could escape from yourself by changing your name—by speaking no French! *Mon Dieu!* Can a Frenchman change his soul? *A man is shaped by what he is even as he himself shapes his acts!*"

"Behold yourself!" answered Choquette. "You have acted the saint more than half a lifetime and your heart is still black with hatred! As black as it was—"

Choquette stopped. If such a thing was possible he became even paler than his natural hue—at least it seemed to the eyes watching him that he blanched, and immediately Lefrançois seized upon that hint for torture.

"As it was that night you lay at anchor in Chaleur Bay," he growled. "Two days after you had stolen Aimé-Marie Savard away from me—" His voice broke on the name and a sob wrenched his big body. "Perhaps you don't know that I know all of it. You stole her out of her father's house when she was alone, you dog, and took her screaming on board your *goëlette!* I learned that afterward from one of your men. And I followed you, alone in my sloop, beating up short-handed against a wind which I cursed. I was stealing toward you in a skiff that night when she broke

out of your cabin and jumped into the sea! *Dieu!* How I rowed! But it was too late—there was only a little flash of her hands above the water and she was gone.

"Ah, if I could have spoken to her just once! What did I care that she had been on board your boat two days? I loved her with a kind of love that you cannot understand! And then I put that scar on your face with my pistol—but you made sail and got away. For that escape I thank *le bon Dieu*, because now I have time and opportunity to make you feel a little of the torture that is waiting for you in hell, Fernand Choquette!"

It had been as though Noël Lefrançois were breathing a withering fire upon his enemy. He had risen from his chair, and, indeed, his features seemed to flame with the consuming power of his wrath. When he ceased speaking Choquette lifted his face from a hiding place in trembling hands—a face from which all the pretense of indifference had been wiped away by terror and remorse.

"Don't speak to me of Aimé-Marie!" he whispered. "I swear to you that she met no harm from me—I was trying to make her promise to marry me! And I can still see her standing at the foot of the companionway, her eyes filled with the wrath of God and her white hands lifted to draw down His curses!"

"Thou!" purred Lefrançois, using the second person singular in contempt. He had regained control of himself as quickly as he had lost it—the better to drench his words in scorn. "Thou slimy thing!"

Choquette was broken. He fell against the pillow and groveled, rooting his face deep into the bed as though he would hide himself. Lefrançois was satisfied for the moment. He smiled with a smile far different from that with which he met all the rest of his world.

"*Au revoir,*" he said, and walked toward the door.

"What are you going to do to me?" cried the prisoner, starting up.

"Leave you here, my friend!" Lefrançois looked down upon him with rich enjoyment. "Leave you here now. The rest you will learn later on."

He went out and locked the door very carefully, chuckling to himself as he did so.

Of course, Fernand Choquette would try to escape unless he had lost all of his ancient courage. But the window was barred, the shutters were locked, the door was of stout plank. That room had been waiting for him a long time, and in it there was nothing to work with. The chairs were of cheap pine which would break in the hands, and the cot was a flimsy, home-made thing. It had, in fact, nearly broken down under the weight of Poisé, and there was not a stick in it of sufficient strength to pry off a bar from the window much less to break open the door.

As to noise, Lefrançois had no fear. The room itself was nearly sound-proof, and it was in a wing of the building never used. Even the window opened upon a moldering, seldom-visited orchard.

Noël Lefrançois went to his room and waited there until the bright dawn had painted river and distant Laurentians. When young Frederick Stone came wandering out of the hotel he found his host gazing off over the broad St. Lawrence with his usual kindly smile. They talked together, and the secretary of Choquette, *alias* Joseph Bramley, went in to breakfast with his mind thoroughly made up that this country magnate was a man of parts.

It was about eight o'clock when Stone went to the room of his employer and, after prolonged knocking, dared to put his head in at the door. Then came bewilderment and growing panic. He fled downstairs to find Lefrançois smoking calmly on the front porch, much engrossed with old Zénon Lamotte in a discussion of the best way to take a panther alive. Five minutes after that a search of the hotel and village was begun.

That search proved fruitless. Stone and Lefrançois, aided by a curiosity filled company which included the three *voyageurs* and Poisé, went over the hotel thoroughly. They even went into the corridor, at the end of which Fernand Choquette was imprisoned, but the trial of a few locked doors convinced every one that Lefrançois spoke the truth when he said that every door was fastened.

How could any one doubt him under any circumstances? It was only the American who had the effrontery to try the knobs. Poisé knew of the prison chamber, but he would as soon thought of calling attention to it as he would have thought of striking his benefactor.

A murder would have been more tangible. For hours, while Stone ran frantically up and down the village calling upon what authorities he could find to do something, the more leisurely French-Canadians speculated. Some thought that the devil had made off bodily with the rich American; others, more learned, decided that he had wandered away from the hotel during the night, for it had been plain to see when he landed that he was a sick man.

At length this was the theory upon which his secretary worked. Stone organized searching parties to go east and west along the shores of the St. Lawrence, while he headed one to go north. Noël Lefrançois, for his part, sat on the porch and wished them all good luck and regretted that he was no longer young enough for such hard marching.

With night two of the searching parties returned: but the one with Stone remained out, for he had promised excellent pay to all who went with him, and a reward in case Joseph Bramley were found. Lefrançois condoled gravely the failure of the expeditions, and after supper he retired early to his room.

Noël Lefrançois sat down upon his bed. For a long time he sat there with his chin cupped in his hands, staring at the floor. Slowly he got up, entirely without that spring in his muscles which had made him the wonder of the parish, and walked to the bureau. He lifted the candle and peered at himself in the looking-glass. Gray hairs that had been so few as to be almost unnoticeable two days before were now thickly sprinkled among the black. The change was startling. And yet—why not? The event for which he had kept himself young by sheer force of will was taking place. What need, after it should be completed, for youth—or even for life?

Until long after midnight he walked, as he had done the night before, from window

to door and back again. Then, in the dead hours of the morning, he went back to the prison of Fernand Choquette. This time he took a plate of stale corn bread from the kitchen.

Something resisted, although yieldingly, his attempt to open the door of the barred room. He stepped in quickly, turned the key, and felt his way to the candle. Light revealed that Choquette had been lying upon the rough boards, pressed against the crack of the door. He raised himself and looked up with eyes clouded by fear and suffering.

"End it!" he begged. "If you have any pity, give me a drink of water and then end it!"

Lefrançois, smiling, put the plate of bread on the floor and sank into one of the chairs. Choquette rose and moved with evident weakness to the bed.

"You have had a bad day?" inquired Lefrançois.

"I have been in hell—a hell of remorse and loneliness! I have been hungry and thirsty! Are you a devil? I am too old to go without care like this! Take your revenge, Noël, and be done with it!"

"But I am taking my revenge, my friend!"

The prisoner groaned.

"At least give me a drink!"

"That is something you will never have again," replied Lefrançois, as slowly and solemnly as a judge in court might pronounce a sentence.

"What—no water? You're going to make me die of—"

"Thirst!" finished Lefrançois. "A little dry food now and then, but no water."

Choquette raised his hands—his whole body shook as with a chill.

"I'm an old man," he said hoarsely. "Have mercy, Noël!"

"Did you have mercy on Aimé-Marie?"

"I told you I was only trying to make her marry me! I will swear it by the cross!"

"Perhaps that is true. Indeed, I believe you. But you killed her, Fernand, as truly as though you had thrown her overboard, and you are going to die now. She loved me. And I—I said my prayers to her!"

"Don't you think that I have suffered these years? What do you suppose my life has been? Among strange people and always with her face before my eyes—her face as she stood at the foot of the companionway!"

"So much the better"—the reply came very quietly.

Lefrançois made the retort with all the coolness he had shown up to that moment; and then in the span of a second his restraint slipped away from him, and he leaped to his feet with arms flung out in a wide gesture—a gesture as though he would sweep away some attack.

"Do you want to cheat me?" he shouted. "For what have I lived these forty-five years without Aimé-Marie? For what have I made friends? For what have I exercised every day to keep myself young and strong? To find you and to be ready to kill you against all odds!"

With that he snatched the candle and ran from the room. He locked the door with fumbling hands and dashed toward the haven of his own room, careless of who might hear him. Once there he sank down upon the bed and lay inert.

Something that he could not at first analyze, or even name, was happening to him. The look of Napoléon Laferté as he took that money to go to his sick wife came before the mental vision of Noël Lefrançois. Again he heard the words of Robert Poisé. Out of the dim reaches of the years came scores and hundreds of such looks of gratitude and such words of veneration.

The gifts that he had given so freely, and the things he had done for men and women and little children, almost all with a selfish purpose, rose up and haunted him. They gathered around his soul—a ring of compelling ghosts. They would not go away. The dying men he had comforted in order that their relatives might humor his whim for gossip, the homes he had preserved, the ones he had saved from real sin, became each a separate instrument of agony. This vast, cunning scheme he had devised to bind men to him so that he could have a chain of spies through the north dissolved. The links became separate entities; and together they cried in a sad

and accusing chorus: "You are not the good Noël Lefrançois!"

He groaned and tottered to his feet—knowing in that moment that the thing he had worked and lived for was slipping away from him. His acts had shaped him. Revenge lay to his hand, but he could not take it. No power of his will, nor any hell-given power of hatred, could break his habit of being kind. His soul was molded otherwise than he knew.

With feet that dragged along hallways and marched heavily up-stairs he went again to the room where Fernand Choquette awaited a slow and terrible death. Into the chamber he went, his candle dripping grease. Choquette started up.

"I have come to give you freedom, M. Bramwell," said Lefrançois.

Ignoring the look of renewed terror, the fluttering resistance of feeble hands, he gathered Choquette under one arm and went out—down to the room from which he had carried his enemy the night before. He pulled back the covers of the bed and put Choquette gently down.

"I ask your pardon," he said simply, "and I shall pray for forgiveness from the good God!"

Out into the hall, and for third time that night to his own chamber. He was very tired, so tired that it required all the strength of purpose he could summon to undress. Yet that night, for the first time in nearly half a century, he knelt before his crucifix.

III.

YOUNG Frederick Stone came in swearing, exhausted, and not a little terrified the next morning: he planned to rest a few hours and go back to the search, which, however, he feared would be fruitless, as the search just made had been most thorough.

With a chill he forced himself to open the door of the chamber from which his employer had disappeared—but it would be necessary to look into his papers, to hunt for possible relatives and friends. He glanced at the bed and became frozen with astonishment. Joseph Bramwell was there, sleeping quietly.

"Mr. Bramwell!" whispered Stone, hardly able to believe the evidence of his senses; then he reached out a tentative hand and touched the sleeper. "Mr. Bramwell!"

The old man stirred and opened his cold, steel-blue eyes. He appeared to be slightly annoyed at the breaking in upon his slumbers.

"Well?" he said. "Is it time to get up?"

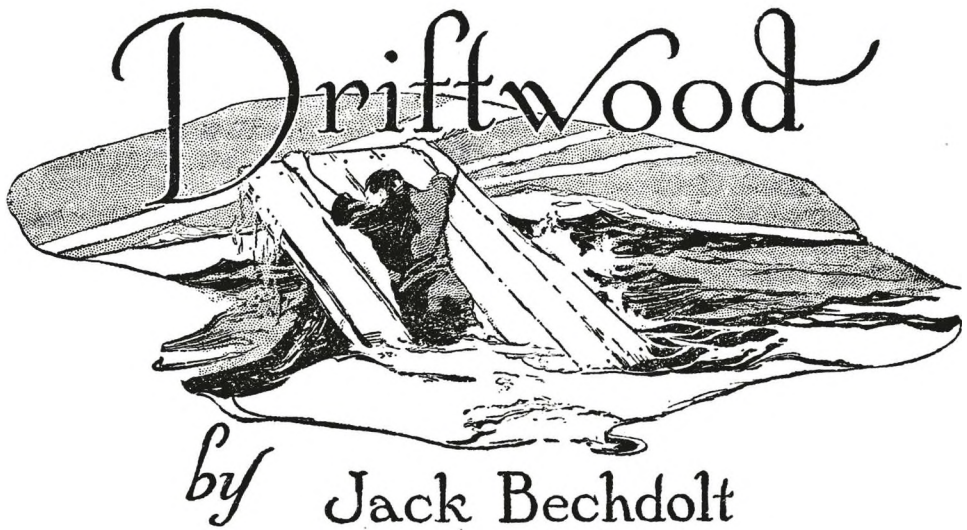
"What—what—" stuttered the secretary. "Where have you been?"

"None of your business," answered Bramwell. "How soon will breakfast be ready? Come now, inquire at once of the proprietor of the hotel. We must be on the move early to-day. We take the first boat for Quebec."

The news reached the porch of the hotel store with much less shock than would have been the case had the body of the rich American been found in the woods. Napoléon Laferté, Jacques Morin, and Amédée Bois had thought from the first that the devil had had a hand in the affair, as might be expected in connection with a heretic. What better argument to this end than that the American refused to explain anything? As to old Zénon Lamotte, he was quite sure that Satan had carried M. Bramwell into purgatory and back. Only Robert Poisé was puzzled—but he said nothing. More important to them all, however, than what had happened to the stranger was the effect upon Noël Lefrançois.

He sat among them, as had been his habit, with his well browned pipe in his hand. But it was not the same man who, two days since, had swung his shoulders with the air of twenty. Now those shoulders bent forward, even as he rested in his chair, and the hair that had been so black was gray, very gray. His eyes were dimmed a little, with that look of age which seems to see things beyond the vision of other men. Noël Lefrançois was old with sudden age—yet he was not broken. Upon his face there was a look of perfect and eternal peace. In his heart there was that which made him truly the Saint of Bon Désir.

Driftwood



by Jack Bechdolt

CHAPTER I.

SUVIAK ISLAND.

THE gale had dwindled into rain, and the rain into drizzle and the fog that is the normal condition of that part of the north Pacific. The rollers had lost their white teeth. They heaved up long and sullen; slow moving mountains of slaty-green water.

A number of curious objects were discernible under the gray light of a narrow horizon. Scattered at random, and toys of the sea, still they kept company, bound by some curious attraction of flotsam.

There were numerous planks and small beams of fir, new and bright yellow. A broken spar—part of a schooner's topmast—trailed a tangle of cordage after it. A half-empty oil drum bore grotesque resemblance to a floating mine. A common kitchen stool tumbled along briskly on its way, kicking its heels with a drunken abandon.

Chief of this flotilla of disaster was a hatch cover and coaming with broken deck planking attached. It might well have been termed the flagship, since it carried the only living intelligence—a man who was just now neither very intelligent nor very much alive.

The man wore a flannel shirt and overalls, and not even the soaking of the Pacific had subdued the poisonous bright blue of

the shirt, which contrasted oddly with his bright red hair.

He lay with his eyes closed, outspread hands clutched tight over the edge of the hatch. The motion of his raft rolled his body from side to side and the wash constantly flooded over him.

Once, an unusually violent heave of roller loosed his fingers and he slipped away.

But there was life and will power left in this refugee. He opened blue eyes and began a quick, grim struggle to win back his place. Strong fingers hooked themselves under the best spot along the coaming, and clung fast. The man's jaw set firm and his chin protruded with mulish stubbornness. But his mouth twisted into a whimsical, one-sided smile at his victory.

Dave Carden lapsed easily into consciousness, for he was thoroughly tired out, but some power of will triumphed even in coma and kept his lean, brown hands hooked tightly.

He was a big man, fully six feet two in height, and lean and hard. His face was drawn with weariness, grim enough, but always about his lips there lingered that amused quirk that made him seem to laugh at death.

So he drifted through weary hours, riding high on the crests, wallowing in the wash of the hollows, and his bright red hair and bright blue shirt advertised him to the empty world in glowing colors—ad-

vertised him to the dirty-hued little gas schooner that came pattering through the mist.

A jolly little stove, round and fat, sent a rosy glow into the one-room cabin on lonely Suviaik Island. It showed walls denuded of pictures and ornaments that had made the place a home; a floor bare of Indian rugs; loose goods and chattels packed away in a few barrels and boxes. Except for the stove and a singing tea-kettle it was apparent at a glance that the possessions of this tiny Alaskan home had been prepared for hurried removal.

The warm light lingered most kindly upon the girl, who stared at the fire in long moments of abstraction that always ended with hurried, nervous glances toward window and door and the shadows of the room.

She was a colorful figure, for although the room was warm enough she had not yet discarded the clothing donned for her daily walk to the beaches. The tam-o'-shanter she wore was a wine-red, her fuzzy sweater a golden tan, and the short walking skirt blue. She wore high boots of russet.

Joyce Grant was not typical of Alaskan womanhood, rather of the figures in sporting goods catalogues. And there was something too slender and graceful about her; too fine a texture of skin for the woman whose life is spent in wilderness.

The big storm had fled shrieking and howling to the westward, leaving the tangled wild grass and vine of weather-bitten Suviaik laid low by its fierce breath. But the silence that succeeded terrified her worse than wild weather.

The flashing, impulsive glances she cast about showed uneasiness. With each her eyes widened until fear looked from them.

In imagination she was seeing what she had glimpsed that evening to the westward—the poles of a two-masted schooner. And her racing thoughts read into this sight a message that clutched at her heart.

Of living things Joyce Grant was the only human on Suviaik Island. Her neighbors were the gulls nesting among the rocks, and a few half-tame, mongrel foxes whose

worthless pelts had saved them from destruction.

Nothing animate on the island could harm her, but something inanimate weighed her shoulders with care, and led her daily to scan the sea, alternately fearful and hopeful.

The thing that harassed her was fox skins, cured and baled, a half dozen light bundles worth a fortune, hidden away in a safe place. Though she knew well their value there were times—such times as those black hours of early morning when she woke, gasping, from fearful dreams—that she would gladly have seen these hoarded pelts sunk beyond recovery in the middle of the Pacific.

Had the pelts been hers and had opportunity offered, she might have obeyed one of these timorous impulses and deserted them. But only a half of them belonged to her; the other half she held in trust for her brother, Foster Grant—and the dying wish of her father imposed a sacred obligation upon her.

If a man loves solitude, let him farm foxes. An Alaskan island for his stock to live on, and a shack for him to live in suffice. Annually a visit to the mainland, seventy miles away, for supplies, and the yearly call of the schooner that takes his pelts to market, those are his diversions. For the rest of his time the fox farmer has his potato patch that helps to feed the stock, and the hunting of seal and sea lion for fox consumption.

Twenty-five years before, Daniel Grant came to Suviaik Island, a man desirous to forget the world. He brought his motherless children, a boy, Foster, and the girl, Joyce.

His latter years he spent alone. Foster Grant had gone "outside" to carve his own career with a transportation company. Joyce was sent to school in California, and later to an art school in San Francisco.

But Daniel Grant would not leave Suviaik.

The loneliness brought him solace for the death of his wife; became a habit; became a passion; became the breath of life. He was satisfied.

But let a man hide ever so well, death

will find him. A warning of the end caused Grant to travel seventy miles in his dory to the Indian agency on the mainland.

"Bad heart," said the government doctor. "A year's about the most you can hope for." He added politely: "Sorry, Grant."

"I'll miss Suviak," said Grant thoughtfully. "Never mind—lots to do before I go."

His son, Foster, had disappeared, nobody knew where. He wrote a note to Joyce, telling her what he wished. Two months later a trading schooner, calling at the mission, carried his letter south. He wrote, also, to Davis, his agent in Seattle, instructing him to call at Suviak for the pelts.

Then Daniel Grant returned to his lonely island and killed his foxes, every animal of value. Some he might have sold at a good price to other fox farms, but like the ancient Norsemen, who took their dogs with them to Valhalla, Daniel Grant sent his animals on before.

He cured and baled the pelts and waited the arrival of his daughter and the schooner, Ivory Bird.

But death sailed faster. A premonition of the end sent him again to the mission, where he died. A week after his burial, Joyce arrived. Obeying her father's last wish, she had herself taken to Suviak by the mission launch.

She had been on Suviak a month, waiting the arrival of Davis in the Ivory Bird. Despite her fears, she had no other intention than to remain until Davis came—or until some means presented of saving that fortune in furs.

That the pelts were worth a large sum and a half of that sum was hers did not greatly move Joyce Grant. An aunt in California with whom she had made her home twelve years regarded Joyce as her own daughter—she was certain of a home and plenty.

But her father's wish was a sacred obligation—and duty to her lost brother added to its weight upon her.

So she stayed, alone and afraid.

She had made her way that day toward the rocky promontory at the northeastern

end of Suviak, a matter of two miles and a half from the cabin. For company, she had the wild sky and the flat, lonely landscape—and a wretched old fox that crept for a time near her heels and whimpered for the largess of seal meat it had been used to.

The calendar showed that the Ivory Bird, supposing Davis had been usually prompt, was due and past due. Daily she walked to the promontory to scan the sea, fearful that the schooner might never come; fearful that some other vessel might appear.

A fortune in pelts cannot lie long unnoticed, even on an island lonely as Suviak. It cannot lie long under guard of but one frightened girl before somebody knows. It might seem that the winds themselves carry news of it abroad.

Twice during his annual visits to the mainland had Daniel Grant been raided. The finest of his young foxes had been killed and their pelts carried away. Once his cabin was burned in a spirit of wanton mischief.

Raiders were the bogies of Joyce Grant's childhood. Once they had come while she was on the island and her father had fought them off. Never could she forget how she had cowered beside her brother in the cabin and heard the distant popping of the rifles and, for the first time, sensed the terrifying desolation of the place, inspired by fear for her father's safety.

Fear of raiders kept pace with her to-day—nor ever could be shaken off until the pelts were safe aboard the Ivory Bird. It was impossible that Daniel Grant's last acts were not remarked; extremely improbable that his disposition of the pelts was not known or guessed at.

Her hope in leaving Suviak unmolested lay in the promptness of the Ivory Bird.

The glasses to her eyes, she scanned the quieting sea intently and for a long time, as she did daily. Always it had been a fruitless errand. So it seemed to-day until that last, final, second-thought look, that seemed to spring from intuition.

Far to the west, faint against a yellow streak of sunset, were penciled two bare poles—the masts of a schooner.

Earth's curvature obscured the hull, even the masts wavered faintly in her vision.

Within a few minutes no trace was left—the vessel was gone.

But until darkness Joyce lingered, looking until her eyes ached and her brain reeled with fatigue. At last, reluctantly, shivering with night's chill, she turned back to the cabin, conscious of a growing excitement.

Long into the night she sat at the ruddy stove, before her mental vision the picture of the bare-poled schooner. That this vessel, glimpsed so briefly and so sketchily, directly concerned her and Suviak Island she never for a moment doubted. Though it rode far to the westward, she was perfectly certain of its destination.

But of its character intuition told her nothing.

Her slender, white hands clasped in her lap, her dark eyes wide with imaginings, Joyce prayed with all her heart that it might bring friends—and trembled lest it bring foes.

CHAPTER II.

THE DICE DECIDE.

THE hot, potent sting of whisky made Carden again aware of the world about him. He woke to strangulation. Much of the liquor had been spilled over his shirt, and its fumes sickened him. He lay, face down, gagging, and heard voices.

The first remarks were high-pitched and whining, with a querulous, waspish venom. He caught a part of their sense:

“—you can throw him back in again, that's what you can do—and be damn quick about it.”

Before the reply there was a pause in which Carden came to realize that he was lying on the deck of a vessel, and decidedly ill at ease. Then somebody answered in a growl: “Throw him back yourself—that ain't my way.”

“By God, I'll do it!” said the whining voice. “You take a lot on yourself, Boren, stopping my schooner and wasting time over this rubbish. A man! Hell's bells and lily white daisies! What d'you think we want of another hand?”

“I tell you we ran him down, ran square

into him!” growled the other. “I couldn't help but see him.”

“If it 'd been my watch, I wouldn't of seen him.”

“No,” meaningly, “I bet *you* wouldn't. By the Lord, Webb, there ain't any humanity in your belly. Sure, you'd let him drown!”

Carden realized that he was the object discussed. He raised himself, swaying giddily.

His wavering vision recognized first the man with the shrill voice. He was a large man, at first appearance a fat man of medium height, though beneath the outer coating of blubber powerful muscles were concealed. What hair he had was a tow color, but even when he wore the battered cap now on his head, one could see his skull was mostly bald.

His round face, with button nose and small, pussy mouth showed little expression, but his eyes were bewildering. They were the eyes one sees sometimes in a mongrel dog and, more rarely, in a human. One was china blue; the other brown. The effect of his direct gaze was extremely disconcerting.

“You've wasted time and you've wasted good whisky—look at that bottle, a pint half gone!” The stout man, whom Carden learned to know as Doggy Webb, held a half empty flask toward the light. “Pure waste!” he shrilled, and directed a du-colored glare of hatred at his companion.

The second man, Boren, was a hulking, woolly looking brute, with matted black hair and a ragged, black, horse-shoe mustache. His face was tanned mahogany, and his hands were big and gnarled.

His reply to Webb's complaint was the impatient exclamation: “Oh, hell!”

“What I'd like to know,” Webb swept on, “is how to get rid of this bum—”

“Why not ask him?”

Carden's question made both whirl about. He was sitting up, a little uncertain of movement, but smiling quizzically. When he smiled, which was often, he looked boyish.

“I take it,” Carden continued, “I'm about as welcome as seven-year itch.”

“I tell you frank, mister, you've wasted

a lot of our time—and good whisky,” Doggy Webb accused.

“Oh, hell!” the hulking man repeated, and the tone at the same time rebuked Webb and reassured Carden for the skipper’s rudeness.

“That’s all right for you to say, Boren,” Webb complained sullenly, “but I stand to lose—”

“What do you lose?” asked Carden.

“I lose a lot of time for one thing, putting you ashore—it’s a good day’s run back to Valdez—”

“Don’t put me ashore,” Carden answered quickly.

“I don’t want you here—”

“Why not? I’m a good, lively hand, can do most anything—”

“I don’t want you,” Webb repeated positively.

“I’ve had experience. Got so’s I could do a trick at the wheel aboard the Ivory Bird—”

“The Ivory Bird!”

Webb and Boren uttered the words simultaneously.

“Was that the ship you’re from—was she lost?” the skipper demanded.

“Smashed on a reef. God knows what reef, I never saw it before, and the skipper was too busy to tell me its name. All hands lost, far’s I know.”

“Now look at that!” Boren exclaimed. “All the kicking you’ve done about my picking him up—and he brings us news—news that’s worth money, too!”

“Well, now we got the news, he ain’t no more good,” Webb objected.

“I tell you I’m a sailor—”

“How long you been a sailor?”

“About four—no, pretty near five weeks—”

“I knew it!” Webb glared angrily, and even Boren looked disconcerted.

“I’m a good, lively hand,” Carden defended his reputation stoutly. “I guess you can use another hand.”

“I tell you I don’t want one—don’t need a man. I don’t want any strangers aboard—and, anyhow, I don’t want you. Now, I got to put you ashore.”

“And I tell you,” declared the rescued man, with sudden energy, “I don’t want to

go ashore—and I won’t go ashore. It—it isn’t healthy for me ashore.” He grinned,

Captain Doggy Webb and his mate Boren stared sullenly at the passenger, and the red-haired young man stared back. Then, abruptly, his face brightened. He searched his pockets and brought forth two ivory dice. Cuddling them in his fist he whispered caressingly at them, shook them, held them close to his ear to listen to their answer. He nodded as if satisfied with their message.

“Look here,” he grinned, addressing the staring pair. “I’ll make you a proposition. I’ll shoot you craps for it: you win, and I jump back into the Pacific; you lose, and I ship with you at any old job you got loose. How about it?”

“You’re crazy!”

“Am I? Try me once!” Carden became deadly serious. “I mean exactly what I say—I’ll shoot you for it. If I lose, over I go, into the drink.”

“Yes, you would!”

“You got plenty of men to make me pay if I don’t. Are you game? Yes? O-o-o-h, babies—o-o-o-oh, dice!”

Crooning his summons to the ivories, the strange young man swept his palm open and rolled them over the deck. Webb and Boren started forward to read the cubes.

“Little Phœbe! My lil sweetheart! Watch her come out for me.” Carden cuddled the dice again, shaking to match his throw. “You home, Miss Phœbe; you gwine come to see me?” he murmured absurdly and cast again.

They read a three and a two—he had won.

“Didn’t I tell you!” he exclaimed happily. “This sure is my lucky day.”

“Hold on there; I never agreed to do such a thing!” Webb was angry and shrill. “I wasn’t making any such play.”

“Ah?” said Carden softly, inquiringly.

Boren, ashamed of his skipper, growled some inarticulate profanity.

“The gentleman wants another chance,” Carden murmured. “All right, I’ll roll ’em again. Are you game now?”

“Um—yes,” Webb nodded slowly. His ill-matched eyes glistened with a look of

cunning. It was plain to see he expected to win this time.

Carden read the look. "I'll add a condition," he proposed. "If I win, you throw in a drink of whisky with the job. Game for that?"

Webb hesitated long. "Ye-e-es," he nodded at last.

"O-o-o-h, baby dice, come out an' roll!"

Again he cast with a savage yell of delight: "Read 'em and weep!"

A five came up. The other die rolled on, wavered in a crack of the planking and showed two. Natural—Carden had won.

"Gambling's a dam fool waste of time," Webb complained bitterly.

"You said it, skipper! The whisky, please."

The fat man hesitated. Boren reached out his big hand and took the flask away from him. He also handed to Carden a glass from the rack.

Carden eyed glass and bottle speculatively. Then he began to pour. While Webb watched anxiously he kept on pouring, his hands steady as rocks. He filled the tumbler until it brimmed, and he added the final drops from the flask with meticulous care lest they spill over.

Webb began a shrill protest. He had not uttered two words before Carden was on his feet. He swung back a door that opened on the deck and the brimming glass went hurtling into the sea. He sent the empty flask after it.

"That's rotten-bad whisky, captain," he said composedly. "You're safer without it aboard."

Doggy Webb vented a shrill trumpet of rage and his fist raised to fell the man who dared waste his whisky. Something in Carden's steady glance halted the blow. Instead he remarked with bitter emphasis: "All right, my lad, you pay for that out of your wages. Now listen to me. What's your name?"

"Carden—Dave Carden," the new hand after a moment's hesitation tacked on the customary "sir."

"Carden, this here schooner Potlatch is trading, and the men in her works on lays. The lays is all taken up, so you get wages. But I got to find you some slops—and

there's a matter of a pint of good whisky. All that's coming out of what you get, you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Carden grinned.

"I'm skipper of this schooner and I'm willing to save your life—if you can show decent gratitude."

"What do you want?"

"If you stay with us you got to do what you're told—"

"Sure."

"And keep your mouth shut about our business—"

"That's understood."

"And—and you got to be game for anything. Listen here"—Webb glared with venom—"you may go with us, but, by God! you'll never come back if you show any yellow, d'you get that? Better make up your mind now that you're going into trouble—and if you don't like trouble—if you ain't willing to take a chance of your life and—of a jail, you better jump overboard right here and save a lot of worry. Are you game?"

"I tell you I'm game for anything." Carden returned Webb's stare with a grim, unspoken meaning. "I said I didn't want to go ashore because it isn't healthy for me there. That's straight—there's too many people looking for me. I stowed away on the Ivory Bird to get out of reach of the police in Seattle—and all I want right now is to keep going. Now, are you satisfied?"

Webb turned uncertainly toward Boren. Boren nodded. The skipper showed petulance with this decision. "Yes, you can nod," he squeaked. "It's dead easy for you to nod, but—but how the blazes do I know he's safe to keep aboard? How do I know he won't go blab our business the first chance he gets ashore? How do I know?"

"Take a chance," growled the mate.

"I tell you I don't like taking chances. Chances! Hell, chances ain't good business." Wheeling abruptly on Carden, he added bitterly: "All right, you get on forward. Mr. Boren will find you some dry slops. Get out of here!"

With Boren's help Carden found a bunk in the forecabin and procured some dry clothes.

He found that the crew of the Potlatch consisted of six men besides the captain, cook, and mate. They were not a friendly lot, but by evening he had managed to gain a small place in the confidence of an under-sized little cockney whose name was Frank.

They were sharing the watch. The schooner had been puttering steadily over the rough swells, and as the day died they picked up the silhouette of an island to the eastward.

"What's this schooner's business?" Carden questioned.

"Trading mostly, a little freight sometimes. And now and then we tykes a charnce with a bit of business of our own." Frank eyed the newcomer suggestively, and grinned.

"Humph, so I'd guess. Take the t out of trading and I guess that describes the business."

"Eh, w'at d'you mean, tyke the t out of tryding?"

"Raiding," Carden suggested softly. "I hear there's fox farms in the islands hereabouts."

Frank grinned slyly and nodded. "That there's one," he said, jerking his thumb at the distant land.

"We going in there?"

"Well, myte, I 'ears we are."

"What's it called?"

"That? That's Suviak Island, that is."

Carden stared with a new interest. "That's funny," he murmured.

"What's funny?"

"Nothing, except that's the place I started for in the Ivory Bird. Seems like I'm bound to get there."

CHAPTER III.

CARDEN GOES ASHORE.

FRANK eyed the newcomer with sudden suspicion. "W'at d'you mean—you started for Suviak in the Ivory Bird?" he demanded.

"Just what I'm telling you. I stowed away in Seattle to get out of reach of the police, and first thing I learned was we were started for Suviak. Now it seems I'm still on my way."

3 ARGOSY

"Know anybody there?"

"No. Do you?"

"No, but I know this; there's a 'ell of a lot of fine fox pelts there wyting for some lucky stiff to come along and tyke 'em. Reg'lar fortune in furs. Oh, my eye, w'at a lark!"

"So that's why we stop at Suviak?"

"Oh, my, no!" Frank snorted with heavy sarcasm. "'Course not; we're stopping there to pick the bloomin' dysies so's to myke dysey chines!"

"Humph! And I was told the only raiders were the Japanese poachers that come over from Siberia."

"Sure, that's right. You'll see the Jap flag flying off the old Potlatch by morning. There's some use to everybody, I says, even the Japs."

Carden stretched luxuriously. "Never fought under the Japanese flag before," he yawned, "but I'll try anything once. What's the odds so long as it's a scrap?"

"Huh, you don't stand no charnce of that! You'll be left to keep ship."

"What's that?" snapped Carden, suddenly grim.

"You'll be left to keep ship," Frank repeated, with a lofty condescension toward the newcomer. "You ain't got no lye in this end of the gyme. We're all in on this together, d'you see, a company like. We're pardners, so to speak, the skipper and Boren, and the six of us. You'll stye aboard with the cook."

"I will, huh?"

"Well, rather! Wyte and see if I ain't telling you stryte."

Several hours later the six from the fore-castle were summoned aft for a conference with Webb and Boren. Carden was left in charge of the wheel, and since the schooner was now carrying all the cloth available to take advantage of a lazy wind, he was not even at the pilot-house wheel which was just above the deck-house aft where the partners met. He was managing the vessel from the open deck, astern.

Left out in the cold, Carden took steps to inform himself of what was going forward in the cabin.

Quite willing to trust to luck, he slipped a gasket over the wheel spokes and lashed

his helm. Then he walked softly amidships and listened outside the door.

Out of a confusion of voices he finally understood Webb's whine: "Near's we can figure there's anyhow pelts worth twenty thousand cached there," Webb was saying. "Old Grant had seven prime silver grays when he killed off the pack, and some pretty good blues. Twenty thousand in skins, boys—ain't that worth a try, eh?"

"How many's on the island?" somebody asked.

"Don't know," Boren growled. "What's it matter; there's eight of us—no, nine now."

"How about that new hand?" another interrupted.

Carden listened with bristling interest.

"He stays aboard," Webb began. "Keeping ship with the cook is his—"

Webb stopped abruptly, and there was an ominous silence. Warned by this, Carden sped aft swiftly, keeping in the shadow of the house.

The cabin door banged open, and Webb thrust his head out. By the time his eyes were accustomed to the gloom the skipper saw Carden's silhouette at the wheel.

When he was relieved later Carden went forward slowly. There was an ugly look about his thoughtfulness. He stopped short of the forecandle hatch to address himself to the sky. "They think they're going to keep me out of the fun," he threatened. "Think I'll stay aboard and keep ship with a cook! Huh, they got a fat chance of making me do that!"

He went below, still deeply thoughtful.

The deck of the Potlatch ran flush to her bows, and the men were berthed in the peak below decks. It was a small but not uncomfortable place, with six bunks. Carden's blankets were spread on a locker top.

"I'm going to get into that scrap," he was repeating to himself. "They'll have a fat chance to keep me out of the excitement—a fat chance. Don't mind working for nothing, but there's got to be some excitement about it—yeah, a fat chance."

His eye surveyed the dim place quickly. The lower bunk on the port side was vacant. It was a very desirable berth. A

hulking towhead named Peterson occupied it by some prior right.

With sudden inspiration Carden sat down on this bunk, doubled quickly into its narrow space, and stretched out, pulling the blankets around him. He was careful not to tuck his coverings about him in such a way as to impede his movements.

The several men who were awake and saw him, said not a word. A fascinated silence that was awe descended upon them. Their eyes kept turning toward the scuttle, anticipating the entry of Peterson.

Peterson came. He stooped to crawl for his bunk, and he caught sight of its occupant. A moment his jaw sagged in blank astonishment. Then he loosed a bellow of rage.

"Coom haar out o' that, you blank, blank, blank."

He translated the summons into action swift and terrible. His heavy, booted foot launched a kick at the man under the blankets.

And at the same second the blankets underwent a swift agitation, Carden made a dive, and emerged as he had been bidden, but clinging with both arms to Peterson's leg.

The towhead went down with a crash that shook the ribs of the Potlatch. His red-headed opponent was on top of him, and the businesslike smack of his first blow made the watchers gasp.

A volcano of wrath seemed loosed in the tiny forecandle. Two heavy bodies were rolling, crashing into stanchions, caroming off again, thudding and thumping against the planks.

In wild yells of delight the spectators applauded the battle.

Then above the uproar rose a louder yell—a yell that broke into a sob of pain.

"My wrist! Holy Christmas, lay off'n my wrist—yow!"

The hatch slammed open, and Boren precipitated himself into the fight with a deep, warning bellow.

The mate found Peterson huddled in a corner, his left hand clasped about his right forearm, holding up a dangling, crooked hand.

Carden, squatted a couple of feet away.

was glaring at him like a watchful cat, a figure of red-haired fury, his lip lifted in a snarl.

"My wrist, she bane broke, Mr. Boren," Peterson greeted him. "Tha's bane one damned lunatic. By Yosef, somebody better kill him with an ax!"

Boren's hand fastened under Carden's collar and flung the newcomer into a corner. Then the mate examined Peterson's broken wrist. He led Peterson away. Presently he returned and bade Carden follow.

Doggy Webb greeted the trouble-maker with a shriek of rage. For five minutes he held Boren and Carden spellbound by his eloquence. When the shrieking tirade was done he demanded with sudden lapse to querulousness: "Now, what the hell d'you mean, spoiling a good man that way? Tell me quick, before I kick you off my boat. You know I could kill you for that, and the law wouldn't do nothing? Spoiling valuable men."

"First," gritted Carden, his blue eyes cold with anger, "when you say you could legally kill me, you lie. If you did the law would hang you for it. And anyhow, if you feel like killing, try it once—I'm game."

He paused a moment, inviting further trouble. None came. "No?" he mocked. Then with the curious, quick return to good nature that was characteristic, he grinned his whimsical smile.

"I'll tell you why I did it, captain. I want to go ashore with you to-morrow—and I heard there was one man too many aboard."

"Sacred, suffering codfish!" roared Boren; "you plain dam fool! You mean to say you started that fight so's you could take Peterson's place to-morrow?"

"Yes, I did. I gathered there was some doubt about whether I was a scrapper."

Boren and Webb exchanged a quick glance.

"So," Carden swept on cheerfully, "I thought I'd give you a demonstration. Well, Peterson won't do you much good for a while, 'specially with a rifle—and I reckon there's likely to be some shooting to-morrow. so—"

Doggy Webb answered this ingenuous plea abruptly and satisfactorily to all parties but Peterson.

"You go?" he squeaked, red-faced with passion. "You're damn right you'll go ashore—and I hope to high heaven you stop a bullet when you get there. If you don't, by all that's holy I'll maroon you on Suviak. Now get below—and if you start anything more, I—I—" He stopped, choking at his inability to find words to picture his frame of mind.

"Thanks, captain," grinned Carden. "Good night."

He went below to sleep peacefully as a baby.

Morning was gray and cold with raw fog.

The Potlatch lay close in toward the rocky promontory at the northeastern extremity of Suviak Island.

The injured Peterson, his right hand in a sling, was glaring over the rail at the eight men who were going ashore in the boat.

Carden returned his glare with a wave of the hand and a flashing smile.

"Hey, Peterson," she shouted, "get that straight about your lay in the loot. I don't make any claim—not a cent."

"No, you're dead right, he don't!" Webb squeaked vehemently.

There was a general laugh.

"Just the same," Carden muttered to himself, "if I wanted a share I'll bet *you* couldn't stop me taking it!"

He left off muttering to caress his rifle lovingly. Each man had a rifle, and several carried revolvers besides.

The boat moved in briskly toward a gently curving beach that lay inside the promontory and was sufficiently sheltered from the surf to afford good landing in ordinary weather.

All eyes were fixed on the lonely island. It showed not a sign of life.

Because the tide was pulling against them they came in close under the promontory and had to round a portion of it in order to reach the sand.

Carden was scanning the rocks, his eyes bright with excitement. He showed some-

thing of the pleased pride of a small boy stalking imaginary Indians. His quizzical smile contributed largely to this effect, and the shining of his blue eyes.

From somewhere ashore came the crack of a rifle, and the water about the boat's bows splashed up a little geyser that sprayed Carden. Rowing stopped with momentary confusion.

A second shot raised a shower of splinters from the gunwale.

The men in the boat threw themselves as low as possible.

"Where 'd that come from? Damned if I can see," Webb complained.

The bang of Carden's rifle answered him. Carden's quick eye had caught a wisp of smoke drifting from among the rocks, close to the water.

A half-dozen shots answered him in rapid succession.

"Stop that, you fool!" Webb shrieked, as Carden aimed again. "Lie still a second; let's see how many's there."

The boat drifted in dead silence.

There came to their ears a hail in a clear, far-carrying contralto that was strangely sweet, despite the defiance of the words. "In the boat there! Keep off, I warn you—sheer off!"

"Suffering saints!" Carden exclaimed. "It's a woman!"

He strained his eyes toward the rocks, hoping to catch some glimpse of her.

"A woman—sure, it's a woman. I know that!" Webb was listening, one hand cupped to his ear, his round face intent. "What I want to know is if she's got anybody with her."

"You heard me!" the defiance came again. "Are you going to keep off? I'll shoot!"

"By God! boys, I believe luck's with us," Webb murmured. "She's alone." He raised himself and answered boldly:

"We land where we please. You fire again and you'll be mighty sorry before night. Where's those fox pelts?"

"They're where you won't get them. Webb."

The answer brought a surprised murmur from Webb. "Knows me, eh? All the more reason—" He stopped to listen.

"This is my last warning. Now clear out."

"Row into the beach, boys. Pull quick, she can't hit you," Webb directed. The boat was put under way with a nervous energy that showed some doubt of Webb's reassurance.

"I warned you," came the woman's hail. "There's a schooner due here long before you can find me or those pelts."

Webb chuckled.

"I guessed it—she's all alone! She's bluffing. Pull harder, boys, we—"

The cap flew from Webb's head, and the crack of the rifle cut off his words. He ducked low.

"I see her!" Carden called suddenly.

"Shoot, you fool, shoot—"

"She's gone again. She's in some kind of cave down there on the water-line—a cave under the rocks."

With studied deliberation the hidden rifle now began to harass them. Bullets chipped the boat, splattered the water close by, kept the occupants worried, but did no actual harm.

Webb was frothing with rage. "Damn her!" he squealed. "I'll kill her if I hang for it, I will! I'll get that girl out of there if it's the last act I do. I—I—"

"All right; we're out of range now," growled Boren.

They landed without further molestation.

The cave from which the shots were coming commanded only a limited sweep of water. So long as they kept close to the rocks that sheltered this girl of the island, she could not fire on them without exposing herself to answering fire.

On the beach Webb was businesslike.

"Look over the cabin first," he commanded, "and you, Sharp, and you, Charley, stay here on the beach, and if that woman shows her head, shoot it off."

They visited the little cabin with its packed household goods. They ransacked every corner and unpacked every bundle without finding even so much as a fox hair.

Their disappointment raised a savage humor among these men. They smashed what things were breakable with a blind fury, and to crown their work set fire to the ruin they left. Carden, with all his love

for excitement, proved the first to tire of this insensate fury.

"Never mind," Webb declared, "we'll starve her out, by God! We'll see how long she can hide in them rocks with eight men on her trail. And when we get her we'll find a way to get them pelts."

"Yes," cried Frank, with an evil grin. "And there's the lady to consider, too, eh, mytes? Some lucky stiff gets 'er!"

CHAPTER IV.

STATE OF SIEGE.

DOGGY WEBB looked very thoughtful. Apparently the madness that had caused him to swear terrible vengeance on a woman had evaporated like steam. Presently he drew Boren aside, and the two argued for several minutes.

Carden, listening curiously, interested in every development of the strange, lawless enterprise, heard Webb repeat several times: "I tell you it's good business! Taking chances and losing men ain't my way."

"Boys," Webb announced, "we're going to have a talk with that woman under a flag of truce. Who's got a flag?"

His curious eyes swept the little group.

Habit, which clings in a curious way, sent Carden's hand to his pocket in search of a handkerchief before he remembered that he had not used such a thing for many long months.

Webb's eyes stopped at Charley. Charley was a half-blood Indian and something of a dandy. He was wearing a somewhat frayed but undoubtedly white shirt with a Byronic collar of the kind once popular as "sport" shirts.

"Gimme that shirt, Charley," the skipper commanded.

Charley parted himself from his apparel with evident reluctance. The shirt was lashed to an oar.

"You, Carden," Webb directed, "you're so curious to see everything, you row me out to the mouth of that cave—and if that woman's got the crust to fire on a flag of truce, I hope to Heaven she hits you!"

Thus invited, Carden helped get the boat afloat, for the tide was ebbing and had

stranded it; then he and Webb climbed in. Webb carried the banner of truce in the stern. Carden labored hard to urge the heavy craft into the little bay.

"Hello, the cave!" Wave hailed shrilly. "Flag of truce—come out an' talk!"

Carden ceased his rowing, and they tossed gently a few hundred feet from the rocks and safely outside the surf that boiled savagely around the tunnelloke mouth where the girl defender was concealed.

"Keep that boat farther off! Keep off!" Her answer was prompt and challenging.

"Flag of truce!" Webb repeated vehemently.

"You're too close in, you and your flag. I'll give you five seconds to put that boat out—"

Carden, whose back was toward the cave, began to move his oars without waiting Webb's command. There was a thrill along his spine, for he recognized a dangerous quality in the sweet contralto hail. For the first time, he realized that there were disadvantages in possessing such a big body.

"Now, will you talk business and be reasonable?" Webb demanded presently.

"I haven't any business with you, Webb—"

"But listen—"

"You're wasting time, but—oh, go ahead. Talk fast!"

"Miss Grant, we come for them pelts, and we might's well have 'em. You don't stand a Chinaman's chance against eight desp'rate men. Now, listen to reason—"

"You're drifting in again," warned the voice. "Keep that boat out, red-head!"

Carden snatched a glance over his shoulder, and grinned recognition of this personality. But he saw nothing of the speaker.

"All we want's them pelts," Webb argued.

"You'll never get them. They're right here with me—and safe."

"You give 'em up, and I promise nobody 'll hurt you, Miss Grant. There ain't a man here will even speak to you—we'll beat it."

"I don't doubt that. You know the Ivory Bird's due now. They'll be glad to find you."

Webb laughed squeakily. "The Ivory

Bird—why, Miss Grant, didn't you know? She's wrecked, total loss, with all hands but this man in the boat with me. Tell her, Carden."

"Yes, that's right, Miss Grant," Carden called. "I was on the Ivory Bird, and she was lost day before yesterday in the storm."

"Is that so? Very interesting!" Her comment was in such a tone that Carden blushed red as his hair at the implication he was lying.

"The Bear's coming over from Valdez, too," she added triumphantly. "They're looking for you."

"Aw, hell, you can't bluff me!" Webb taunted. "There ain't a revenue cutter this side of Dutch Harbor right now. And if you don't be reasonable, by God, Miss Grant, we'll stay here till we starve you out, and that's the truth. We're going to get them pelts."

"Oh, are you! Well, you're going to quit talking about it mighty quick. Pick up those oars, red-head. I'll count five. One—two—"

Carden picked up the oars.

"Wait," Webb urged, "you'll be sorry for this—"

"Three—four—"

"You'll be damned good and sorry—"

Whang! Her rifle completed the count of five. The oar that bore the flag of truce was knocked from Webb's hand.

Carden was rowing without any need of urging. But as he rowed he studied the rocks and the cave with close attention. Now that the boat was swung about, he had a good view of them.

They returned the flag of truce to Charley, whose face showed relief when he found there were no bullet-holes in his cherished shirt.

"She won't keep up that high and mighty tone so long," Webb insisted. "All we got to do's wait a while. She'll come out. By thunder! I'd like to know how she got in there, anyhow."

"I think she did it at slack tide, swimming in when the surf was easy," Carden suggested.

Boren nodded approval.

"It could be done again, too," Carden went on.

"Maybe," said Webb promptly, "but I ain't going to do it—nor anybody in this crew. Can't afford to lose men. We'll starve her out; she won't last long."

"I don't believe them pelts is in the cave," Boren pondered. "She wouldn't risk getting them in, might spoil 'em. No, sir; I'll bet they're hid somewheres—"

"Um!" Webb stared thoughtfully at the desolation of rocks and grass and tangled vine. He was thinking hard.

"Take a couple boys and make a good look; we got all the time in creation, Boren. The rest of us 'll stick to the beach and watch that fox-hole."

With two men Boren set off on the almost hopeless task of combing every rock and inch of ground on Suviak for a cache of fox-pelts. It was agreed that if shots were fired his party should return at once.

The long day wore away in idleness. A couple of men kept watch of the cave entrance; the rest loafed.

Boren and his companions were back toward evening, tired out and irritable.

The boat was sent to the Potlatch for provisions. The men who made the trip were careful to keep far from the rocky promontory where Joyce Grant was hidden. Even so, her sniping fire worried them.

Carden, who was one of the boat party, made a personal report of events to Peterson. He persisted in regarding the tow-headed man as a friend, an attitude which Peterson accepted with more calmness than at first.

"About as exciting as movie-pictures of Brooklyn," Carden summed up. "Rats! I ought to have stuck to sheep-herding, or some exciting job like that."

"Ay t'ank you got enough fun breaking my wrist," Peterson commented gloomily.

"Well, if Webb don't get that woman out of there, by the holy, I'll do it!" Carden vowed. "Eight men taking a day to beat one woman. That's a hell of a way!"

"Yah, you like to stop a bullet, huh?"

"Rather do that a heap sight than sit on the sand and count my fingers," declared the red-haired young man earnestly.

Peterson watched him over the side in silence. "Yoost a plain damn fool," he muttered thoughtfully.

The plain damn fool began negotiations with Webb when he returned ashore. "Look here, captain, I been thinking—"

"Who asked you to think? I'll do the thinking for this outfit."

Carden persisted grimly. "And I tell you there's no sense in us sticking around here waiting to starve that woman out. I've looked over that proposition. She got in there; why can't we?"

Webb scorned to reply.

"You're worrying about her shooting," Carden plunged on. "Hell, why not take a chance? We're eight to one."

The rest of the crew were drawing about them. Webb read in their faces an interest and a certain sympathy with Carden. Waiting was annoying them. He deemed an answer politic.

"I never seen a red-head yet had any sense," he whined, with bitter sarcasm. "Maybe we could get in there if we rushed it, though it's tough swimming among them rocks, but we'd sure lose a man or two, and it ain't necessary. Boys, them pelts are good as ours right now. All we got to do is wait for them."

"Wait nothing!" Carden's growl carried a threat. "For the love of fighting, boys, are we going to sit on this beach till we grow whiskers and let a woman laugh at us? Let's go get her."

"No!" cried Webb. "I'll shoot the first man starts. I'll play this safe."

"Safe! Sure, you'll play safe, you would!" There was no misunderstanding Carden's sneer.

"Shut up!" Webb yelled angrily. "You'll go too damn far."

"I'll go this far," Carden persisted, disregarding the skipper's ugly look. "I'll go far enough to say you don't deserve those pelts. You a raider? Huh! You're a plain burglar, a sea burglar."

Webb's hand closed over the revolver at his hip. His curious eyes narrowed with a nasty, cold stare.

"No, by the saints, even a burglar wouldn't let a woman bluff him like this. You're a sneak thief—that's it."

"Cut that stuff!" warned Boren, stepping between the white-faced skipper and Carden. "You've said too much now. Get

out of here! We won't have any fighting aboard."

"Wait!" shrilled Webb. "Wait! Listen, you bright and shining high cockalorum—listen here! You're so quick to tell everybody where they get off, let's see how yellow you are. You say it's easy to get into that hole and grab the girl."

"I certainly do."

"Then do it! Do it—you hear me? Do it, or by eternal hell I'll plug you so full of holes a sieve 'll look watertight alongside you. Do it—do it—do it! Start now, you hear?"

"All right!" Carden's voice rang strangely. "I heard you the first time. I'll do it—alone. Eight men against one girl—hell! I'll show you how one man can get her out."

"Yes, you bet you will!" Webb lashed at him. "You'll go in there now, or the fish 'll get you."

"Watch me!" bade Carden. There was a quiet assurance in his tone that made them all stare.

He turned away and walked up the beach toward the rocky promontory. On the way he picked up a fair-sized drift log and swung it easily to his shoulder. As far as Webb would allow, the men followed him.

"Stay back," Webb warned before they reached the tunnel. "He's so damned anxious to go it alone, let him. Don't nobody hold me responsible. He brought this on himself."

Carden picked his way along the rocks until he reached a point just above the tunnel-like entrance to the cave. Here, of course, he was quite out of sight of the defender of that refuge.

Carden had spent most of his time studying this hole where the breakers boiled in. Even at slack water the surf made it a dangerous place to swim, but not impossible for a strong swimmer. He recognized, too, that the water shoaled quickly, and reasoned that where the girl was hidden there must be a strip of dry sand of some extent.

He had also wondered if the cave were not accessible by some rear entrance, but a careful search of the rocks had convinced him there was none.

Now he deliberately kicked off his shoes.

He raised the drift log high in his arms and took a final look about—at the sky, already turning gold with evening; at the desolate island, and the huddle of men who watched him; at the Potlatch, the only visible thing in the empty seascape.

He threw the log into the boiling water below with all his strength. Its splash was answered promptly by a rifle-shot.

Immediately at that signal Carden dived. Before the second shot he had come up behind his log, and was whirled on the back of a curling breaker into the tunnel-mouth.

The water roared in his ears and boiled beneath him. It drew him to one side and the other; it sucked him under; it spewed him up.

One second it hurled the irresistible weight of moving tons upon him; the next it seemed to dissolve into thin air and drop him on the sand.

And the rifle bullets came singing by, whining eagerly, as they sought their target.

Beneath his feet he felt firm sand. He fought with all his strength to win to one side where his hands could grasp the rocks. The twining currents held him—and he realized that the girl was shooting now with a deliberate precision.

A bullet buzzed close to his ear. He dived.

The drift log swept in with the swell, tumbling in and out of the white water like a living thing.

Joyce Grant concentrated her fire upon it—hit it, and again.

Too late she realized what it was—only a log!

She wheeled about, white-faced, bewildered, fearful.

Had she killed the man with some previous shot, or was he now among the rocks, hiding in the shadows?

She glanced again at the water, straining her eyes against the light. Were more of them coming?

The embrace of rude arms swept her from her feet; pinned her hands tight to her sides. The rifle dropped from her grasp.

She was swung clear of the sand, crushed tightly against the man's soaking clothing.

An ear-splitting yell of triumph, boisterous, terrifying in volume, deafened her.

"Got her, boys—I got her!"

CHAPTER V.

ADVENTURE.

THE captor followed his shout with a burst of laughter. Then to Joyce Grant's utter astonishment his arms relaxed, and he set her gently down on the sand.

She stepped back a pace or two, uncertain what to expect. She recognized that this was the red-haired man who had rowed the boat, the man who told her the Ivory Bird had been wrecked.

She saw that he was tall, a good two inches over six feet; lean and hard, carrying himself with a grenadier swagger. Because of the laugh his face just now looked unusually boyish, and his blue eyes twinkled. They seemed to express mischief—yes, incongruous as it was, they showed nothing more alarming.

And by the ruddy light that flooded in the tunnel mouth Carden had his first look at the girl. He had a quick glance of appreciation for the brave color of her dress—wine-red tam-o'-shanter, the golden-tan sweater of fine, silky wool; the short blue skirt and the russet high-boots—then his gaze lingered on her face.

He saw that her head was small and aristocratic in its carriage on a slender neck. He responded instinctively to the fineness of well-modeled features and the wide set eyes that stared at him with terror.

Carden knew at once that this was one woman in a thousand. He was quick to respond to beauty of any sort. He admired and loved whatever God had made well. His stare turned from that first wild exultation to growing admiration.

Then he laughed again, a more moderate chuckle.

"Got you!" he repeated. "I did it alone. Ho, that fat-headed Webb will look sick now! You know, he said it couldn't be done."

"Y-yes?" Joyce murmured uncertainly.

Her eyes held Carden's, but her right hand was creeping downward toward the sweater pocket.

"Yep! His idea was to starve you out—eight men sitting around waiting for one woman to get hungry! Huh, I guess I showed him what a little nerve will do!"

"Yes, yes; you showed him."

The hand neared its goal. In the pocket was a pistol. To hold his eye she smiled—just a little too eagerly. She snatched at the pocket. "Oh, no, you don't!"

Carden caught her arm in a tight grip and forced it upward. Her face was grim. "Now, let's see that gun!" he panted, while his free hand snatched the weapon from her.

"Humph, nice little thing!"

He dropped her pistol carelessly into his pocket and released her arm. Her breast was heaving rapidly, and she glared like some helpless, trapped animal, white with fear.

"Listen; get this straight!" Carden warned sternly. "I got you—you're mine—my prisoner—"

He wheeled about, the warning unfinished.

From outside there came a chorus of shouts and the splash of heavy bodies into the water.

Four men were swimming in through the surf. They found an insecure footing, and spread out until the one nearest the rocks found handhold. Then, hands joined, they breasted the undertow, heads and shoulders exposed.

As they came they yelled boisterously to each other and to Carden.

Boren led the party, and with him were Charley, the half-blood, and Frank, and a man named Sharp.

"Hold her!" shouted Boren. "We're coming—we'll give you a hand, boy!"

Farther distant, from among the rocks, they heard Webb's shrill encouragement:

"Go on in, boys! We got her now!"

Carden muttered to himself as he snatched up a rifle. "Oh, *we* have, have we? Where'd you get this *we* stuff, anyhow!"

Then he shouted, and the four who waded saw that the rifle menaced them.

"Get to hell out of that—and quick about it!"

They stopped wading, wavering uncertainly against the currents, staring.

"Outside with you!" Carden warned harshly. "I'm going to shoot."

"Hey, what's this—" Boren began.

The rifle answered him.

It was Boren who had reached the rock, and was half towing, half dragging his companions.

The bullet shattered his arm. His shout of pain told of the hit.

His handhold loosed, Boren rolled under a wave, and the three who depended on him were engulfed. The backwash swept them seaward, bobbing black specks amidst the white lather.

Carden sent two more bullets above them as a warning.

Then he lowered the weapon and turned about to face Joyce Grant, who watched in a state of dumb astonishment. He smiled whimsically. "I guess that 'll hold 'em a little time."

"You—you—" Her throat was dry and her husky voice almost unrecognizable. "Why—did you—do—that!"

"Why, I—I don't know!" Carden seemed a little surprised at himself.

"Don't—don't you—want them to—come in?"

He blinked. "No, I guess not. That's it—by God, they'll not come in here! This is my hole now; I fought for it and—and—Why, sure, let's keep 'em out." His smile became cordial as an explanation dawned on him. "Hell, there's no fun in eight men sitting around starving out one woman—no excitement in that, so I—I joined on where there's something doing. Now, if they're so damned smart, let's see 'em get us out of here."

Joyce still watched, uncomprehending.

"Here!" he bade impatiently. "Here, take the gun and keep an eye out for any of those crooks. I got to have a look at this cave—got to organize our defense. Get us? Huh! A Chinaman's chance Doggy Webb can get *us*!"

That part of the cave which was dry was not larger than a small room, floored with clean sand, and littered with an accumula-

tion of drift. It was backed and roofed by solid rock—there was no rear entrance, as Carden had guessed.

Ignoring his prisoner, to whom he had just handed a weapon, he made a thoughtful examination.

Joyce Grant had provided herself with plenty of ammunition for both rifle and pistol. She had brought, also, a large tin box of hard crackers, a few tins of meat, and some bars of sweet chocolate.

Then Carden made a discovery that caused him to frown.

"That all the drinking water?"

"Yes; I—I expected to be—alone."

"Good fathers, girl, that wouldn't last you a week!"

"But I had so little time when I saw the schooner coming and—anyway, the Ivory Bird is due soon."

Dave Carden smiled sadly, reprovingly. "I told you before—the Ivory Bird is wrecked—total loss—and as far's you're concerned, no insurance."

"Is—is that true?" She peered anxiously across the gloom. The light of sunset was fading rapidly.

"True as I stand here. I was on her, a— a member of her crew. The Potlatch picked me up."

"And no help—is—coming; no help—"

Her whisper faded into a desolate silence.

"Well, as to that, you just got some help. You got me," Carden chuckled. She made no answer.

"Now, don't feel too bad about it," he went on reassuringly. "Doggy Webb can never get in here—he hasn't got the nerve, and none of that gang will take a chance for him. We can stick it out together until they get tired—or something happens. Only—well, I wish you'd brought more water."

"You really mean you'll help me—help me to beat them. I—I can't believe—you *will* help me?"

"I told you I would," he answered with dignity.

"But—but *why*?"

"Well, like I told you, for the fun of it, principally. I—I'm kind of that way. I like to scrap with the under dog, he's got so much more to scrap for."

"If you do—help me, I—I'll pay you well. The pelts—"

His answer showed that he was deeply offended. "Did I ask you to pay me? The pelts—oh, damn the pelts! I may be a raider, but I'm no cheap crook." He chuckled at this paradox.

"Well, come on." He turned away. "Let's build a small fire back there in the angle where it won't show us to that gang. It 'll kind of make things homy."

He kindled a little blaze, arranged so that its light did not reflect even a glow into that part of the hole where one of them must watch against surprise attack. At first the smoke was annoying, but the effect of light and warmth in that weird hiding went a long way to alleviate the terrors of night.

"Give me the rifle," Carden directed. "I'll sit out here and keep watch, and you can curl up there by the blaze. I'll get my sleep after sunup, if that's satisfactory."

Joyce handed him the gun, and he squatted on his heels in the shadow where he could watch both her and the entrance to the cave.

His eyes turned oftenest to the slender girl dressed with such incongruous smartness. After a long silence he spoke: "You don't belong around here."

"No, I don't. I lived on Suviak a few years when I was a little girl; I never saw it again until six weeks ago." She told him with growing confidence of her return, and how she was trying to carry out the last wish of Daniel Grant.

"California," Carden mused when she had done with the story.

"I like that country first rate. I was born down near Palo Alto, went to school around there—fell in and out of love with a lot of nice girls when I was a kid there. Nice country—nice folks, mostly. Some day I'm going back—"

"Tell me something," Joyce interrupted.

"Sure, lady. Shoot!"

"I don't quite understand you. You—you don't seem to belong with those men out there. You're not a raider—not a common thief."

"Thanks," said Carden curtly. "Let me tell you for your information, I've

been a lot worse than that. Don't get any romantic notions—"

"C-a-a-a-rden!"

The hail was thin and shrill, Doggy Webb's voice.

"Hello!" Carden roared back jovially. He added with a savage laugh: "Keep your head down or I'll ventilate your fat brain, skipper!"

"Carden, listen! What the hell's all this craziness about? You shot Boren in the arm. Say, what's eating you, anyhow? Let us in—we want them pelts."

"If you think you can, come and get 'em."

"Hey, look here, be reasonable! I'm willing to give you Peterson's share."

"Thanks." Carden was jovially sarcastic now. "Save it for Peterson."

"Yes, and you can have the girl, too. None of us give a whoop for her, the damn—"

Carden interrupted this with a shot. On its heels came an excited yelp from Webb, then silence.

"Pretty near got him," Carden announced gravely to Joyce. "Saw his head sticking over a rock."

She made no comment. Her face was drawn with fear.

Carden raised his voice, addressing whomsoever would listen.

"Webb, any of you, get this straight. I'm holding the girl and these pelts against the lot of you. If you want either one, you got to take 'em from me—and if you try somebody's going to get hurt. Take warning!"

There was no answer.

Carden settled back to his watching. He offered no more conversation, and Joyce, huddled by the fire, was absorbed in a new terror.

"I'm holding the girl," he had said.

She read an awful meaning into those words.

The agony of her fears held her rigid, afraid even to move lest she attract his notice.

From time to time she snatched frightened glances into the shadow, toward where she could see his figure dimly. Always she was aware that he was watching her.

Watching her, and gloating perhaps in anticipation!

The cave was murmurous with all manner of strange noises. The surf among the rocks talked incessantly in odd, hollow moanings, and the smaller waves on the shingle uttered sounds almost like human speech.

There was an overtone always present there, the steady grumbling of breakers, and sometimes the rock beneath them quivered as a heavier wave shook some exposed point.

Joyce grew utterly wretched in her weariness, yet dared not relax nor close an eye.

Her thoughts grew bitter. She accused herself. Why had she not shot straighter and killed this man while he swam into the cave? More than life depended on her skill—and she had failed. And why, oh why had she handed back the rifle when he asked for it so confidently?

Then she remembered the pistol, and began to form a plan. She would wait until he dozed, for surely he would doze in time. He had dropped it into his coat pocket. She could recover it. Once she had that he would never lay hand upon her!

The time dragged drearily to the monotonous music of the surf and the occasional snap of a burning timber—nothing more. The tide was flooding again and growing noisier.

Cautiously she relaxed her numbed limbs—and peered sharply to note if she had attracted his attention. He seemed to huddle immovable, his face turned seaward. Perhaps he already slept!

She moved about a little; coughed. No sign of life from Carden.

She whispered his name; repeated it a little more boldly. No answer.

With all the stealth she could command, noiselessly, she moved slowly toward him, stopping often to peer and listen.

The pistol was in the right-hand pocket—the side nearest her as Carden faced the sea.

She crept close beside him, close enough now to hear his steady breathing. She waited until her eyes became thoroughly used to the gloom.

Her hand passed lightly along the coat, lifted the pocket flap, and plunged within.

Where it was caught and held in a grip like a trap.

She gasped in alarm, her fingers struggling for freedom, then remained perfectly quiet, paralyzed with fright.

Carden drew her hand from his pocket. His iron grip hurt her.

"Come back here, by the fire," he said grimly. Close beside her he drew her toward the light. He stared down on her with a cold, deadly anger.

"You little fool!"

His voice was hard.

"So you thought that was why I came—because I wanted you? Hell!"

"Look here." He released her hand and took the pistol from his pocket. He held it out. "Take the gun—keep it. You think a gun would keep me from taking you if I wanted you? After the way I came in here and got you, you think that toy would stop me?"

"If I wanted you, like you think, I'd take you. You hear: I'd get you if you had forty guns.

"But don't worry—I don't want you. Now, get to bed and sleep, because you've got to keep your eyes open in the morning, while I rest. Get to bed, you hear?"

"I want you? Hell!"

CHAPTER VI.

REBUKED.

IT was Carden's hand on her shoulder that roused Joyce to comprehension of a new day. After the excitement of that night she had not expected sleep, but physically she was more tired than she realized.

She had obeyed Carden's growling order to "get to bed," without a word, strangely reassured by his contemptuous disclaimer of any interest in her. And reassured, she slept soundly and peacefully.

His morning greeting was a little less curt than his good night.

"Roll out!" he ordered. "I'm ready to do some sleeping on my own hook."

But before he rested, he searched out a long pole from the drift in the cave, and

borrowed the red cap from Joyce. He placed the cap on the end of the pole, waded neck deep toward the mouth of the cave, and protruded the pole slowly until it was in line of fire.

Any hope that the raiders were gone was promptly dissipated. A half dozen shots sought for the red cap.

"Guess they thought it was my carrot top they were shooting at." Carden grinned wearily as he returned the tam-'o-shanter to Joyce. "Well, keep an eye on 'em—and wake me if they start anything."

He stretched out on the hard sand, closed his eyes, and slept with a suddenness that made her gasp. Carden had the faculty, common to all healthy animals, of sleeping at will, but his instant forgetfulness of a situation that concerned her so vitally roused in the girl a sense of pique.

Last night she had feared him because she took it for granted he desired her; this morning she felt at least a slight annoyance because he showed no interest at all in her!

While he slept she divided her attention between the monotonous business of keeping a lookout and studying this man who had invited himself over to her defense just because he loved excitement.

Carden was unshaved and uncouth enough in appearance, yet, so she decided, not bad looking. Outwardly as rough and as desperate as any of Doggy Webb's outfit, he still managed to convey the suggestion that he once had been a gentleman.

Joyce decided that his smile and the quick intelligence of his glance must be chiefly responsible. His lean, brown hands, too, showed signs that they were strangers to ordinary manual labor.

In the midst of her speculations he wakened quietly. "What's going by?"

Joyce glanced hurriedly seaward, a slight flush in her cheeks at being caught off guard and neglectful of duty. "The boat going out to the schooner; keeping far out. Your ear's quick. I didn't hear them."

At Carden's suggestion she sent several shots after the distant boat.

During the long day there was no other diversion. The boat returned shoreward from the Potlatch, and the tide flowed and ebbed, and flowed again; nothing more.

Doggy Webb and his companions maintained a puzzling silence.

"Probably," Carden guessed, "they're looking some more for those pelts."

"Do you suppose they could find them!" she wondered with instant alarm.

"How should I know! I don't know where—"

"They are hidden under a—"

Carden interrupted the revelation with upraised hand. "Don't say it unless I ask you. When you've got a secret worth money, keep it. Don't trust anybody until it is absolutely necessary. Suppose you did tell me and you got out and found the pelts gone? Knowing my reputation, you'd always believe—"

"I'd always believe you innocent!"

The exclamation was instinctive. Judging by her face it surprised her as much as it did Carden.

"Oh, you would?" he drawled with a trace of a skeptical smile. "By just what process of feminine reasoning would you figure that way?"

"Why, I—I don't know exactly. I just *would!*"

She blushed a little at her own earnestness. Carden ended the discussion abruptly. "You take altogether too much for granted," he sneered. "Don't trust anybody, it's bad business."

At hour intervals during the afternoon they relieved each other's watch. In his off time, Carden prowled and swam about the rocks of the tunnel.

"Got to map out a good way out of here in the dark," he explained. "To-night I must go for water."

She made no comment, but every mention of the errand brought a worried look to her eyes.

Her worry deepened as evening came on. In her soul she was afraid of being left alone again—alone in the dark cave. But she hesitated to express the fear.

After sunset, Carden built another little fire for her. Then, with the jug for drinking water under his arm, he gave her final instructions.

"I'll not be so very long. The spring is on the beach between here and their camp—or where they chose to camp last

night. So you won't mistake me for Doggy Webb in the dark, I'll whistle just before I dive in—remember. And meantime, keep a sharp eye."

She looked up anxiously and choked on a word. "I—I—"

"Yes?"

"There's a little water left yet, isn't there? I've been very careful."

"Yes, about a pint. If you'd only brought even two jugs! Well, maybe I can steal the water beaker from the boat."

"Wouldn't that last us till to-morrow—if we were very careful?"

"Maybe, but we'd be thirsty by to-morrow night, so—"

"But—but maybe something might come to-morrow—some schooner, or a revenue cutter."

"Or maybe Doggy Webb might decide to let you keep the pelts for a present—that's just as likely," he sneered.

"But surely, while there's no actual need, we—"

"Look here, are you afraid to stay alone?"

"Yes—yes, I am." There was something straightforward in the confession that touched him.

"I—I hate the dark," she added impetuously. "I hate this island and fox pelts and—and everything. Oh, I am—I'm afraid—afraid of it all!" She ended in a miserable, tremulous whisper.

"Well, that's too bad—but it can't be helped now," he retorted, with a cool indifference that annoyed her. The words did more than annoy, they roused a desire to retaliate, to hurt him in return.

"Don't mistake me," she burst out proudly. "I'm not asking any sympathy from you!"

"All right. Good-by. Remember what I told you."

He waded into the surf, and she stood in the dark, staring after him. He returned unexpectedly soon, not five minutes later.

"You're right, after all," he explained himself. "Another day, if we're careful, won't matter much. No use risking things; and well, I'm sorry if I seemed unsympathetic."

"I never asked your sympathy," she protested coldly, and moved back to her corner behind the fire. He took up his watch without further comment.

But next day they were thirsty!

The pint of water did little good. The very air of their hole in the rocks was salt with spray. The tinned food they ate was salty. And the day was warm, even in the cave.

Except that they showed an instant willingness to fire upon anything emerging from the rocks, the raiders evidenced no other tendency to risk their lives in attack. Their boat made several visits to the schooner. Otherwise the day was uneventful.

"This time I've got to go," Carden announced long after dark. "Listen! I'm leaving you the jug, there's still a little water in it and I'll depend on stealing that keg out of the boat. Remember, same whistle when I return. S'long."

This time he did not turn back. Never before had she felt so alone; never in her life had she waited the return of a man with such emotions!

In the deep shadow she kept her watch, rifle ready. Her eyes, strained against the faint gray light of the cave mouth, found a new and menacing shape in every moving crest of foam; her ears heard in the hollow talking of the water a new warning with each minute.

She crouched until her legs were cramped with weariness, and feared to stir. Her head ached with the constant effort of attention. She wore a wrist watch, yet she feared to move close enough to the little fire to read its dial, so she had no definite measure of the eternity that intervened between his going and the distant pop-popping of guns.

She sprang up, rifle ready, and every sense alert. The firing seemed to be coming closer. She heard the echo of a shout and then the whistling signal—Carden!

He emerged dripping, and snatched the rifle from her to send a few warning shots seaward. Presently he handed back the weapon. "Stay on the job a few minutes more, will you? That's the keg on the sand. It was devilish heavy, and say, got a

handkerchief or something? I think they plugged me in the shoulder."

"They shot you!"

"Nothing much—if you've got some sort of cloth to fix it. That Webb's a light sleeper, I'll tell the world! He caught me at the spring when I was filling the cask, but I mixed in with him, and I think I gave him something to remember me by. But when he yelled they all woke up, and somebody made a lucky shot."

"Come here by the fire. Let me see!"

She took instant and complete charge of the situation. Carden was led to the fire and Joyce laid back the shirt from his shoulder. The wound was bloody, but of no great importance, a scratch across the flesh that promised to give him a stiff left arm for a while.

Joyce bathed the wound and bandaged it with strips torn from her shirt-waist. As she worked she talked, and Carden listened humbly, with only a faint trace of amusement, to her scolding.

"It seems to me that men like you never learn good sense," she blustered angrily. "You had no call to take that risk, even if we did need water. When Webb came you could have run—oh, yes, you could! But, no, you're like a blundering, chuckle-headed boy—you had to fight. You had to stay to try and whip him! I don't suppose it mattered a bit to you that I was left here alone—that I'd have died of thirst if—if you hadn't come back. If you would use a little judgment—" She paused suddenly, the bandage finished. "There," she added, "don't mind my scolding."

She smiled down at him as she spoke, and her shining eyes told of her gratitude.

His reply brought her to her feet, tense with indignation.

"Say," he drawled, the whimsical smile twisting his lips, "not falling in love with me, are you?"

Dark color flooded into her face and receded, leaving the skin dead-white. Her wide eyes blazed with anger.

"What—what was that?"

"Not falling in love with me, I hope?"

"You—you cur. You yellow cur—to dare—dare—"

Carden's face became grimmer. He sat

up before he spoke again. His level, significant tone caught and held her attention in spite of that first flare of indignation. By his manner, grim, serious, commanding, he made her hear him.

"I mean—don't go too far with me. You have shown an interest, a friendly interest—don't do it. If you feel any liking for me, forget it! You hear; forget it.

"If you feel an impulse of gratitude toward me—don't show it.

"I'm human after all—and normally susceptible. Don't encourage me. I'll tell you why.

"You asked me once before who I am. I'll tell you; I'm a man wanted by the police—a fugitive from justice—"

"Wanted by the police! You—a criminal—"

Carden met her startled gaze serenely, and nodded. "A criminal," he repeated. "Not at all your sort—not in your class, you see. You can understand that my acquaintance might prove very embarrassing. If we should meet a United States marshal—"

Joyce shook her head, incredulously.

"You mean I don't look it?" Carden guessed. "Shucks, looks are no indication. One of the mildest, meekest, nicest little old chaps I ever knew had murdered his wife. I never murdered my wife, because I never had one, but—well, they're looking for me. That's how I come to be here. I—I think the technical charge is swindling—or obtaining money under false pretenses—or some such low-down meanness."

"I don't believe it!" Joyce cried.

"You will after I've told you." Carden gave her a quick, harsh glance. He continued, staring into the fire, his face serious for once.

"I've been called plain damn fool often enough. I never realized it so thoroughly before, but I am—just that. Drifting is dangerous business—isn't that a fine, fat-headed, trite observation! I never thought I'd be guilty of a bromide like that—yet, it's funny, how you realize the truth of those ancient wheezes if you live long enough!

"I've been a drifter most of my life—the last ten years, anyway. If I were trying

to make a play for your sympathy I'd make up some yarn about a girl, I suppose, and blighted love—all that sort of thing. Well, there wasn't any girl—any particular one—no blighted love—nothing but a disposition to take short cuts, and a sort of love of excitement and variety, I suppose.

"During ten years I made it my business to try everything once. I've made a lot of money playing the races—and lost it at poker. I've been a newspaper writer—and a pretty good one, too—and quit that for sheep-herding. I was chauffeur of a wheelbarrow on a concrete dam for six months, and liked it. I was a very rotten actor with a medicine show, too. And I've been a bum consistently for much of my red-hot career."

He noted Joyce's quiet smile. He read its significance, an amused comment that his revelations were nothing frightful. He went on, calmly:

"Last fall I pretty nearly married a girl—she was a waitress in a beanery in Tacoma. If I'd succeeded I suppose I'd still be holding my job as a motorman and paying for a little house out Point Defiance way, a dollar down and a dollar a month—only another fellow ran away with the lady—he was a taxi-driver.

"Crossed in love by the villainy of the taxi-bandit—really, Miss Grant, she was a nice girl and she had me going! I quit the street-cars and picked up an old chap named Blye, Captain Erastus Blye, an old adventurer who had a scheme to dig up buried treasure on the Amazon. Buried treasure was just the sort of bait to catch me then. I went in with Blye—I became secretary and treasurer of the Amazonian Treasure Company—not incorporated—and I helped him sell stock to a lot of suckers who should have known better. At that, I won't say I swindled them—there may be a buried treasure down there on the Amazon—if there is it's still there—at least we didn't get it!

"But we got a schooner and had a heavy duty engine put in her, and got her all fitted out. Then, when the expedition was ready to sail, the man who sold us the gas-engine libelled the vessel for debt. The court sent a United States marshal aboard.

"The schooner was lying in a quiet anchorage outside the city. She stunk horribly of gasoline—no wonder, we spilled enough of it around for the benefit of that marshal—and the marshal was a dyspeptic! That man certainly had no business leaving dry land. He got terribly sick one night, when the schooner was rolling, and he rowed ashore, expecting to die on dry land. Then Blye and I and a half-dozen of the treasure-hunters stole the boat and started for the Amazon!

"We got almost to the Canadian line in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, when a revenue patrol boat caught us—fired a shot across our bows and dashed up just like they do in plays. Well, then, there was the devil to pay! We were all under arrest for contempt of court, piracy, barratry, everything on the calendar short of murder—and the stockholders ashore, sore as boils, laying the wires for a big criminal suit to send us all over if the Federal court left them a chance. A nice mess!"

Carden smiled ruefully at Joyce. "Not a very romantic story—nor very pleasant," he apologized.

"While they were towing us back to Tacoma," he went on, "I took Blye's advice and jumped overboard, swam ashore, caught a trolley for Seattle, and stowed away on the Ivory Bird. The Federal court has a long, strong arm, and I'm not anxious to get in reach of it again.

Silence followed this recital.

Carden stared gloomily before him. Finally he added: "Get me right, I'm not asking any sympathy from you—not trying to make any play. Only I wanted you to know how I stand, so—so you wouldn't make any mistake about me. I've been a bum, I am a bum, and chances are that now I'm going to stay one. So, please take warning."

He rose from the fire and held out his hand for the rifle. "You get to bed," he bade Joyce. "My arm's all right, and I'll call you if you're wanted."

He retired to the shadows and left her to ponder her judgment of him. Finally she pronounced it.

"Carden!"

"I'm listening."

"I think you are—"

"What?"

"Plain damn fool."

CHAPTER VII.

PLAIN DAMN FOOL.

JOYCE GRANT gave her judgment in a manner that was not unkind. Carden nodded a silent acquiescence, and continued to stare fixedly into the dark.

Lacking any reply Joyce added a friendly "Good night" and disposed herself to sleep with a curious, satisfying sense of well-being that quickly brought forgetfulness.

When Carden roused her in the morning they greeted each other like old friends. They made the usual experiment with the cap on the pole, and found Doggy Webb had not relaxed his vigilance.

"Something's bound to happen pretty soon," Carden observed thoughtfully. "That gang will get tired of waiting, and when they do—"

"When they do they'll give us a chance," Joyce prophesied stoutly.

Carden gave her a quick look of admiration. "Spoken like a true sport," he commended. His praise brought a grateful smile.

She continued to study him as he slept, confirming her opinion of the night before. "Some day," she thought, "something will happen to make him grow up into a man—and when it does he'll be a real man—a man worth something!"

A beam of early sunshine penetrated among the rocks and lighted the face of the sleeper. Joyce thoughtfully moved herself until her body screened him from the glare.

Nothing broke the monotony of the morning nor interrupted the trend of her speculations about the wanderer. When he woke in the afternoon he swam out among the rocks to reconnoiter. From a safe hiding he sent a well-aimed shot among the watchers on the beach that provoked a chorus of fire in return.

"That man Webb," he reported on returning, "is the original cautious Clarence, but, shucks! He can't keep seven men

satisfied with doing nothing forever. They'll start something when they find we can hold out here for a couple of weeks."

He sat beside Joyce on the sand, sharing a tin of meat and a box of crackers. A sack of tobacco he had found in his pocket finally obtained sufficient dryness to burn, and he filled a pipe with eager interest.

Stretched luxuriously, he got the pipe to going and sighed a vast satisfaction. "Believe me," he chuckled, "if Circe had only handed Ulysses a pipe or a sack of the makin's he'd never have wanted to get back home again. Ithaca was never like this!"

"Ulysses had a home and a wife to look after," she reminded.

"You're right, and that's a bad combination for a man with the wandering foot. I'll bet Penelope used to get good and sore when she sat up nights waiting for him to come home. Yes, the old boy had most of the fun. Kind of tough on her!"

"Is it such fun as all that?" Joyce asked, a little wistfully.

"Sometimes," he admitted. "Ever been in New Orleans in the spring?"

Joyce's quick shake of the head set him off. He spoke of many places and many sorts of people, and he talked well. Once, when he had finished describing to Joyce the life and people of an odd little court in one of the quaint village remnants on the west side of New York, she exclaimed: "And I thought I had seen New York! I've been there six times, long visits, and they took me to all the 'quarters' and all that sort of thing—but I saw nothing, nothing at all. I can remember nothing but dirt, and smells, yes, and a glorious museum. You have seen the real city."

"Speaking of the Metropolitan," Carden interrupted, "did you see the water colors in Brooklyn?" Again he was launched into narrative, for description of Sargents and Winslow Homers that showed his intelligent appreciation led him into a story of how he had posed for a sculptor making an allegorical group that crowns a great downtown building.

And from sculptors somehow, it seemed a natural step to describing a mob scene from the wings of the Metropolitan grand opera, thence to a Russian revolution hatched in

the deadly dullness of the Bronx, and so by way of a dethroned monarch who sold stationary on Ninth Street, Kansas City, to an aged and gentle student of Confucius in San Francisco.

Between them there was no longer a barrier. The very effort Carden had made to build one seemed to have brought them closer. Circumstances were forgotten—for two hours they were comrades roaming strange places and seeing a world of many colors.

"Why, that's splendid!" Joyce exclaimed finally, her dark eyes glowing down at him. "Splendid. You have lived, and I—I've existed like a—~~a~~ mussel on a rock. After all, I wonder if Penelope's mistake wasn't in staying home? If she had gone with Ulysses—"

Without a word Carden rose to his feet and walked away. His face was grim. Joyce was left, her sentence half finished, puzzled and hurt.

With himself Carden communed savagely. "Will you never learn sense! You're making a mess of it again—just plain fool—and, oh, God, how sweet she is!"

He sighed and repeated: "How sweet she is—and how much I want her!" Then he stared savagely toward the sea, his face bitter with the intensity of resolution.

But the look changed quickly. His blue eyes widened. "By the Eternal, at last!" he exclaimed.

"What? What is it?" Joyce hurried to look.

"You see that—on the horizon?"

"Yes, fog."

"Fog, that's it! Fog, and lots of it. If the Lord is good to us it will roll in here, roll in good and thick. Why, I've been praying for that fog!"

"You have a plan?"

"Sort of a one, yes. It's this. We could slip out in a fog without any trouble. That gang keeps the boat on the beach, and I figure we could get it before they are wise—that is, if luck is with us. Then, the schooner—there's nobody aboard but the cook, who doesn't count, and Peterson, who's got a broken wrist. I can manage them—"

"You think we could do that!"

"It's worth trying—better than starving to death in here—or waiting till Webb gets us—the only thing is those pelts—"

"I can get them in five minutes' walk—"

"Then," Carden declared, "that's settled. If God sends us that fog, we try it."

To himself he added: "And it's high time! I've just got to get away—and keep away—from that girl!"

The progress of the fog was leisurely, but even before sunset there was no doubt it would be thick. It choked out the light of day, narrowing its horizon until even nearby objects faded from view. Its breath was dank and chilling, but to these two it was the air of freedom.

"Keep close beside me," Carden whispered when at last he judged it safe to start. "No talking, mind, not even whispers, unless you have to. First, we'll get the boat. It was unguarded last night, and to-day I saw it, in the same place. If we can get that afloat we'll hide it among the rocks, then go after the pelts. Don't be afraid, I've got a hunch we'll put one over on Doggy Webb yet! Girl, we're going to win!"

For answer she seized his hand and gave it a quick pressure. He snatched it free, and they started, wading into the surf.

Not for nothing had Carden explored that channel daily. Now he knew it well enough to guide the girl to the rocks outside at a minimum of risk. Dripping and chilly, they began a slow, careful progress, feeling their way among the boulders they could not see.

The material world had vanished from all sense of sight. Only the rocks they stood upon remained real. The rest was fog, thick and muffling, a stifling, woolly cloud that hushed even the roar of breakers to a mutter.

They had been an hour, or perhaps longer wandering in that short stretch of rock and sand between them and the raiders when Joyce whispered despairingly: "Carden, I'm afraid we're lost—I'm all twisted!"

"If only I could catch a glow from their fire!" Carden sighed.

Close beside him another voice spoke, and they shrank, startled, behind a rock.

"That's the blooming water down there

—nearly fell into it." Carden recognized the speaker as Frank.

Boren's growl answered from a little distance. "This way, up here. Now I got the lay of it. Come on, boys."

They heard the scrambling progress of Frank climbing the rocks. They heard his heavy breathing. He passed close enough to touch. And soon after a low mutter of voices and the sound of steps—then silence.

"Now, I know God is on our side," Carden whispered. "That gang is going to rush the cave!"

"You think so?"

"I'm dead sure. Nothing else would take them out in this mess of fog. If only they have all gone!"

"Some of them might have gone in the boat."

"Not to-night," said Carden with certainty. "They'd get smashed up in the surf."

They crept on again, and on, until at last a dim blush in the mist before them told of a fire.

Carden turned sharply to the right until he stood in water. Then, assured of his direction, he moved on toward the spot where he had seen the boat.

A step at a time, scarcely daring to breathe, they groped ahead.

Joyce Grant was conscious that her heart beat with a terrible rapidity, and that her throat was dry and aching. But she must keep on and keep pace with Carden's coolness and method; she must—

"That you, Charley?"

The voice came close behind her, almost over her shoulder. Her hands gripped Carden's arm convulsively. He loosed them and pushed her away, not unkindly.

"Who's that?" the challenge was repeated.

"Hello at the boat!" The hail was Webb's, coming from the general direction of the fire. "What 'd you say?"

"I thought I heard somebody, sir. I—*holy mackerel!*"

With the shout merged a woman's shrill cry of fright, then silence.

Stepping, as she thought, from the unseen watchman, Joyce had collided squarely against him. And almost instantly after

Carden had glimpsed his figure looming large in the mist, and struck.

The blow went home and dropped the fellow neatly. Carden sprang to the boat, on which he had been seated. With all the weight he could command he shoved to loose it from the sand—to start it toward the water.

Beside him Joyce struggled valiantly.

The boat scarcely budged.

Lying idle, the ripples of high tide had helped to imbed it. Under the best of circumstances it would have taxed their strength to drag the heavy craft to water; now it was impossible!

And toward them sped men running, one of them Webb, judging by his shout.

Three pistol-shots in rapid sequence, then three more, evidently the signal of recall for the men with Boren. Carden answered with a few wild shots toward that sound, then he and Joyce were running, his arm about her to urge her on.

They reached the cut bank that divided the beach from the flat land beyond. They scrambled up and plunged ahead blindly. Grass and vines whipped their faces and tore their clothing. Creepers tripped them. They moved without sense of direction, intent only upon escape.

Carden was first to call a halt. "We don't know where we are!" he whispered. "For all I know we've gone in a circle. If we keep this up we're just as likely to run straight into them. I don't hear anything, so here we stay."

Joyce dropped beside him and lay for a time, gasping. Only now did they realize how hard and how desperate had been their flight. Carden marveled.

"Never ran like it; never was scared like that before. Funny; must be because of you and Webb; kind of got my nerve, thinking he'd get you." After a long pause he added grimly: "Well, this is a mess!"

"It's the end, isn't it?" Joyce replied, with startling calmness.

"The end!" Carden blustered. "Where d'you get that stuff, the end? We're not licked yet, and we won't be."

"Carden, that's nonsense. You know better."

"Why, look here, as quick as the fog

lifts a little, so we can see where we are, we'll go back after that boat—if only the damned fog would lift!"

"Yes, *if only*," Joyce repeated. "What's most likely is that when it lifts it will be morning, that's the way of it here. Morning, you understand, and they'll see us."

Carden groaned like a man stricken. "God forgive me!" he muttered. "I got you into this!"

Her denial came in a flash. "You did not! I got into it of my own free will. You—you have been splendid—splendid!"

"Don't," Carden begged brokenly, "don't! I—I—if you knew how it hurts!"

For answer she seized his arm and brushed her cheek against his rough sleeve.

Carden pushed her aside with a trembling hand. "Miss Grant—" he began.

"My name is Joyce, Carden."

"Miss Grant, please don't do that. You—you break my nerve. I need all the sense I've got just now for this job. They are likely to make trouble if they find us, and—"

"Make *trouble*!" Joyce echoed. "You don't know Webb as well as I do. He has—well, quite a reputation—I mean in his dealings with women. There were a couple of cases. The man is a thorough beast! And by this time I imagine he's angry enough to murder us both with pleasure. But, Carden, I'm not afraid."

"Afraid? Of course not!" He tried to make his tone hearty.

"No," she repeated, "not afraid, because he'll not get me—alive."

"Joyce! You—you mean—"

"I mean just that," she repeated calmly. "We have the pistol, and if we can we'll get Webb first, and, I hope, some of the others; but, anyway, it will save me."

"What nonsense!" he cried shakily. "What—what utter rot."

"You know better."

"You sha'n't do any such thing. I—we—we'll find a way."

"And if we don't I am not afraid to die," she insisted calmly. "I—I don't mean to worry you, but I wanted that understood. I am not afraid, only—Carden, you asked me a question last night. Now, I want to ask it of you. Are—are you falling—falling in love with me? Are you?"

"Joyce! In the name of God's mercy, please—"

"I only thought," she murmured humbly, "that perhaps you were caring—a little. Or does Ulysses ever care? Does he, Carden?"

"Listen!" he groaned hoarsely. "You know why this—this thing—why I can't answer that! You know why—what I have done—who I am."

Joyce sighed contentedly and brushed his arm again with her warm cheek. "I believe you do care—a little," she said softly. "If—if I have to—to go, would you mind saying it—saying it to me? I could go gladly, I think, if—if you said that."

Carden sat perfectly still, breathing hard.

"Carden," her arms went about his neck and she pressed close to him, "say it now, *mean* it, if it's only for this little time we have to wait!"

She pressed closer, raised her lips to his. His arms about her tightened savagely.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHINAMAN'S CHANCE.

THE fog was lifting, shredded by a brisk wind that came off the sea. As the clinging blanket that had muffled Suviaik ripped into ragged streamers it exposed the sky, and that sky was rosy with dawn. The world about them grew light.

Carden crouched to peer cautiously, eager to know just where their hiding-place, chosen in blindness, was located. At first he could learn little, for all about them was that same, flat desolation of grass and vine without shrub or eminence to give a compass bearing.

Gradually he rose higher, until he stood upright, studying the desert place with knitted brows.

A bullet whined close beside his ear, and with the accompanying report came a yell: "'Ere 'e is, mytes, I found 'em!"

Then Carden fired and dropped back beside Joyce.

"That was Frank," he said quietly. "I got him, but I'm afraid it's too late. Hark!"

Others were answering Frank's shout. They were surrounded.

"I make it five," Carden whispered thoughtfully. "Frank was the sixth, but there's one shy, unless that fellow by the boat last night got it worse than I thought." Later they found this surmise correct. The man who watched the boat had struck his head on a rock when he went down under Carden's blow. The fight started at odds of six to two.

"A Chinaman's chance!" Carden was muttering. "Got us surrounded, and they'll close up the ring. Well, I've know some Chinamen who took chances and got away with it. We'll give 'em hell while we can."

"This is the end," Joyce said calmly. "Let's not fool ourselves, Carden."

"Perhaps," Carden nodded. Their eyes met and held in a glance that questioned and answered many things.

"Ca-a-a-a-arden!"

Doggy Webb was hailing. His whine was shrill with triumph.

"We got you, Carden! Got you sure. Better come out before we blow you full of holes. Besides, we'd hate to muss up the young lady."

"Thanks," Carden interrupted grimly. "Thanks awfully—and go to hell!"

A chorus of lead answered this.

"That damned Webb," Carden grifted. "Hiding somewhere in a hole, playing it safe, you can bet on that. He'll let the rest of 'em do his fighting—that's Webb."

Then he knelt close beside her, his hands on her shoulders, his blue eyes shining tenderly.

"Joyce, it's good-by, I guess! Always have to say that some time, better now, perhaps; but—but, oh, God, it's hard to say—it's hard! Joyce—"

A brief little time they clung close.

"Good-by," Carden whispered. "I love you—I always did, right from the first."

"And I," she answered him, "I always will love you, Carden, now and always. Good-by! God keep you!"

Carden brushed a mist from his eyes and flashed on her one of his lightning smiles. "We're going to fight, sweetheart, fight like bobcats," he promised. "You watch!"

"And Joyce, girl, promise me something."

"Anything."

"That pistol, use it if you see a chance to plug any of them, use it to protect yourself, but not—not—Joyce, promise me to save that last shot until—until I'm through—until they've got me. Will you, Joyce? Promise?"

"Yes, dear. Until you're—you're—until I'm certain you have finished your fight."

Carden sprang to his feet with a wild yell, an exultant, echoing whoop as joyous and defiant as cock-crow at sunrise. It was the yell of a man who lived, every inch of him, and gloried in his life.

And as he rose the rifle spoke from his hip, for in that flash he had seen an incautiously exposed head.

The head went down among the grass, and the red-haired defender crowed: "One down! Come on, you rotters, who's next? Who's next to go? Stand up and take it. I'll cure you of your cold feet. Blaze away, boys, blaze away, I give you leave. When you get through, look out, I'm coming after you, I'm going to get you, every maimed and spavined, flat-footed slacker in the lot of you. And when I'm through I'll get Doggy Webb. Shoot, damn you, shoot, I give you leave!"

He had little need to give them leave. Five rifles were talking as fast as their users could pump shells, and the air about him was singing with flying lead.

They had no need to complain of their target. Carden loomed tall above the hiding, red hair ruffled by the wind of dawn like some defiant battle-flag, head thrust slightly forward, his brilliant, blue eyes watching the smoke-puffs that floated above the grass, the rifle held low and ready for a wing shot.

About him the air was poisonous with death, and yet he moved unscathed, like a man protected by a miracle. His very daring seemed to carry a charm of its own. Upon the five who fired, for still the last man wounded was contributing a few wild shots, his defiance had a strange effect. It was breaking their nerves.

A bullet clipped his coat-sleeve and trailed out a ragged streamer of cloth.

"Ow-o-o!" He raised his voice in a dog-like howl that mocked them. "Rotten, rotten, rotten! What's the matter with

your eye, Charley; and you, Boren; and you, Hoskins? Can't you shoot any more? Rotten! Now, look out, I coming after you!"

Observation had shown him that two of the five who ringed him were shooting close together. Turning his back on the others, with calm disdain, he started deliberately toward the spot, wading through grass that was waist high.

They saw his hand go slowly to his ear and come away, stained. He stopped curiously to inspect the blood on his fingers and laughed again, a nasty, savage laugh. Then he went on.

He was close up now on that spot in the grass where the two rifles were going. His own gun came into swift play, answering their fusillade.

Blood from the superficial cut on his ear was running down his face, staining the cheek-bone, trickling a red stream to his chin. His wide, blue eyes were terrible in their brilliance, and he was laughing—laughing until white teeth gleamed, defying the murder they sprayed on him.

Of a sudden came a movement in the tall grass, a swaying of the massed stalks as of some body in motion—in retreat. He turned a stream of lead upon it, and the movement stopped. A man screamed in mortal agony,

And without warning another rose to his feet, hands high above his head. He was Hoskins, one of the most villainous of them all in outward show, and the first to quit.

Carden thrust his rifle into Hoskins's middle with an abruptness that doubled him over.

"Turn around!" he barked. "Right in front of me now. That's better; that's it. Now, old body-guard, lead me over there to the left—to the left—where all that wild shooting's coming from. Look out, you snake-in-the-grass, I'm coming after you now!"

Peering swiftly from behind the living body that shielded him, Carden advanced again, and the rifle-fire stopped. Boren rose to his feet, hands empty and held high.

"Holy miracles!" he rumbled. "The boy's crazy!"

"Yeah, Boren! Come into the fold; come in, you lost lamb! That's it, team up

with Hoskins here. You birds 'll think I'm crazy before I'm through."

Now they heard the whine of Doggy Webb pouring out a stream of rage that was like burning acid. "Charley!" Webb shrieked. "Carrol! Get that damn fool. Get him! Oh, hell; I'll do it if I have to kill all three of 'em!"

Carden located the voice and Webb's fire, then ignored both. He wheeled himself and his living shield instead toward the point where Charley, the half-blood, was firing, and Charley's fire ceased. Even Charley was afraid to kill his mates. So he, too, came out of hiding and joined the captives.

Still careless of Webb, Carden herded the three of them back to Joyce, searched them for more weapons, and left them in her care. Somewhere in the grass the wounded Carrol was groaning, and there remained Doggy Webb, unscathed.

"Now, Doggy!" Carden was erect again and on the move. "Your turn next, Doggy Webb. Do your shooting quick, because you won't have long!"

Straight upon Webb's fire he advanced at a run. The distance was perhaps a few hundred feet, no great space, for Webb had closed in and was resting his gun carefully for methodical work.

Carden ran a full minute, and luck was kind to him. He was closing in now. Webb's fire held good, and it was reasonably accurate, considering the speed of the target. Largely it was a question of nerve. If Webb held out, nothing mortal could save the red-haired damn fool: Webb was bound to get him who laughed at death, if his nerve was good!

But the mongrel with the ill-matched eyes had only mongrel blood!

They heard his shriek: "*Oh, God!*" and saw him rise to run with all the speed and cunning that fear could give him.

He ran half exposed, and Carden after him. Carden did not pause to fire, the fight had become a race. Love of life barked at the heels of Doggy Webb and sped him on in a burst that no man could disparage. And love of the chase, and desire for vengeance—a personal vengeance that would sink his fingers into the neck of that stout ruffian—speeded Carden.

Joyce, on her feet, watching them, and heedless of her prisoners who stared beside her, saw Webb top a slight rise and pass on beyond. She saw Carden stop with a gesture of abandonment and heard his wild shout of laughter. He turned about toward them.

From that distance she saw his wide grin: then simultaneously there came the last bark of Webb's rifle, and Carden spun about, shot from behind; spun about and dropped.

A terrible stillness settled over Suviak.

Joyce Grant discovered that she was running. She was speeding toward the rise, hair streaming, eyes staring straight before her, a woman who had become a fury.

As she ran she cried a terrible vengeance in a voice shrill and harsh, a voice inhuman in its bitterness.

Past the prostrate Carden, unmindful of him, she crossed the rise and plunged on beyond. Before her Doggy Webb was flying, running again with knowledge of murder in his heart.

Suddenly he disappeared completely. Some rock or bush or hollow had given him sanctuary. Only she found his rifle, discarded in fright. The man was gone, swallowed up by the loneliness, as if he had never been.

Joyce Grant raised a clenched fist to Heaven and swore her vengeance: "I'll kill you, you hear, Doggy Webb? I'll kill you, if I spend the rest of my life waiting to do it. Hide if you want, you'll not tire me. And when you're through, when you're starving, and come sneaking back, I'll be waiting—waiting to shoot you like the dog you are!"

She turned back, her face white as paper, the black eyes made larger by the somber painting of fatigue, glowing with a light unearthly.

So she walked back slowly, sobbing for breath to ease her tired lungs, and found Carden alive and sitting up.

More, he was grinning.

"Got me in that shoulder again," he announced. "Getting to be a regular sieve—just like a Swiss cheese—eh, Joyce?"

A little past noon the revenue cutter

Grant, searching the islands for survivors of the wrecked Ivory Bird, put into Suviak. Her officers found three unharmed but crestfallen raiders, and one man badly wounded, under guard of a young woman and a slightly battered young man with a cheerful grin.

A search of the place discovered another raider with a fractured skull, who had crawled among the rocks along the beach; a dead man, Frank, the cockney, and finally Doggy Webb, who surrendered gladly, and eagerly claimed his legal right to protection against the girl who had sworn to murder him.

The prisoners made a boatload, and the strange pair who had saved Daniel Grant's pelts waited on the beach for a second boat.

Carden found himself alone with Joyce. She looked up at him with a smile. "Had you something to say to me, Dave?"

"Yes, I have." He hesitated and his clenched fists and widened nostrils told of a struggle within him.

"About last night—" he began.

Joyce blushed.

"Last night we—we were excited and romantic, and—and a lot of things like that. That sort of thing's liable to go to anybody's head a little, but don't worry. Of course I understand, and you under-

stand. It's quite all right with me. As quick as I can, I'll be at it again—just as soon as I can testify against Doggy Webb and his crowd and help to put them where they belong. Don't think I—I'll forget your kindness, and—and all that; but now the excitement's over, why, of course—"

There Joyce stopped him short.

"Dave Carden!" she cried vehemently. "You mean to tell me you lied to me? You didn't mean what you said? You don't want me, Dave?"

"Joyce, I—I'm not fit. I'm a rotter. Why, the police will be looking for me—that treasure business."

"Oh, the treasure business!" she scoffed. "Why, Dave, I asked the lieutenant about that. He left the Sound after you did. It's all over already, the trial and everything. Blye, your friend, took all the blame himself; he deserved it, and he took it like a man. And you—why, Dave, nobody's looking for you now. Nobody wants you, except me, Dave."

"Still, I—I'm a feeble sort of crutch, Joyce, but maybe if you gave me time—Joyce, will you give me a chance—a chance to make good for you? Will you, Joyce; just a chance—"

"Dave, there's just one chance I'll never give you: the chance to leave me again."

(The End.)

THE LITTLE ROGUE

JUST a little thing you said,
A little thing I did—
Love covered up his curly head,
And ran away and hid.

And the full long I searched for him,
And you, another place,
(Perhaps our tear-stained eyes were dim)
We could not find a trace!

But when one day our pathways crossed
We had a sweet surprise,
The little rascal mourned for lost—
I found there—in your eyes!

Charlotte Mish.

Unconvivial Isle

by

Roy W. Hinds



I.

THE storm, as evanescent as the threads of a dream, had passed when Pickard awoke. His sleep had been deep, and aside from the inevitable tippler's headache, he didn't feel so bad. He shuffled from the bunk-galley into the cabin; and then, with bright daylight streaming through the port-holes and windows, he saw the havoc. A cold fear laid hold of him, as though a massive hand of ice were squeezing out his life.

Instinctively Chester Pickard felt that he was alone. Only men who have been left to die in waste-lands feel that utter desolation of heart that flings the earth from beneath their feet and peoples the surrounding solitudes with countless spears of danger. He swung open the companionway doorway and dashed to the deck.

Pickard saw that the *Turtle Dove*, her superstructure swept as clean as a vulture-picked carcass, rested at a slight angle in the water. He assumed she was on a reef, though as he peered over her side he saw nothing but water, flashing brightly in the after-storm sunlight of the semitropics.

A hundred yards away was land—a brilliant stretch of green-verdured foliage tucked in from the sea by a wide hem of white beach. He stared, but apart from flitting birds he saw no sign of life. On every other side there was nothing but the

smooth face of the sea, serene and quiet—utterly exhausted after a night of disastrous revelry.

Pickard raced about the swept deck and cried down hatchways for his companions of the previous day; but only the sound of his own hoarse voice came back to him. He then reasoned that, in storm, most of the men would have been in the pilot-house, and the pilot-house had been torn away and scattered before the gale. He stumbled down the companionway into the fire-room and engine-room. The fire was dead, and there was no sign of the men whose duties had been there. They probably had gone on deck when the craft struck, and were claimed by the sea.

He was alone, as forsaken as a solitary rude cross in the desert. He fell upon the floor and sobbed in utter despair.

Chester Pickard was not a coward, and it wasn't long before a calm settled over his agitated soul. The desire of youth for life rose higher and higher, and he hastened back to the deck, grim-faced for the struggle he felt lay before him.

"Poor devils!" he exclaimed, thinking of the companions so lately flung to a raging sea. "Poor Britter!" Chester had become very fond of Britter.

II.

CHESTER PICKARD, broker's clerk, was a convivial young man who spent most of his

non-working hours in seeking companions with whom to drink, and, above drinking, talk. Had Chester been deaf and dumb, he never would have taken a drink. But he was not deaf and dumb; many a harassed bartender in New York could make affidavit to that.

It had been his habit, after leaving his work, to repair with a few companions to a certain cozy saloon in the financial district. These young men would drink and chatter an hour or so, and then his companions would leave Chester clinging like a wet rag to the bar, after they had had what Broadway calls sufficient and the Bowery calls "all youse can hold."

Somehow Chester, who had no home ties, couldn't bring himself to go to his boarding-house after a certain number of drinks. It was the same performance every time they foregathered. Chester would plead with all, and then with individuals to stick around a while; but they were wiser.

The bartender in this particular saloon would refuse to sell Chester more drink or even to talk with him, so the young man would fare forth. If he found convivial companionship, he would stick until the last. Failing to find companionship, he would go home. He never drank unless he could do so with friend or acquaintance.

On a certain afternoon in May Chester became very drunk and, in leaving the saloon, wandered in a strange direction. He soon arrived at a point where the city was completely turned around, like a sign-painter's "S"; he was steadily progressing down-town. He stepped into a saloon. The bartender was busy and was rather curt in his "What 'll it be, sir?"

Chester took a high-ball and attempted to draw the bartender into conversation. That gentleman uttered a word or two, as pleasantly as he could; but it was plain that he was as bored as a Senate stenographer. Chester soon took his departure. His wanderings finally brought him to a doubtful saloon on the water-front near the Battery. Formerly he had sought company in brighter places, but to-night he felt in a strange mood, so he entered the sailors' hangout.

There was a motley crowd at the bar and lounging about the place. Fumes of vile tobacco and vicious whisky almost impelled him to retreat, but various shaggy eyes had turned his way, and he felt better by assuming a boldness and breasting the bar. He was cautious enough to order a glass of beer. The bartender, a hulking, broad-jowled individual, set a huge scoop of beer in front of Chester, and he sipped it tentatively. Soon he finished the beer and, becoming more reckless, he ordered a high-ball.

When Chester awoke he was lying, as naked as a peeled apple, on a rude bunk. He was conscious, first, of burning thirst, and second, of a raw chill. A blanket was lying huddled against the wall, and he pulled it over his twitching body.

His quaking nerves settled down slightly when the chill passed, and suddenly he came completely to his senses. He realized that he had awakened in a strange room, and had a vague fear that office-time had passed.

His blinking gaze fell upon the bottom of another bunk only a yard above his throbbing head. A swishing roar assailed his ear-drums, and he was conscious of a roly, tossy sensation. Used, however, to tossy mornings-after, he didn't think this strange.

A pillar of gray light streamed across his bunk from an opening two feet above his head. Chester saw that he was in a very narrow room—nothing more than a cell—for there was but a narrow aisle between his bunk and the farthest wall.

Chester raised up on his elbow. A volcano was raging in his vitals, and his head wobbled drunkenly. He peered through a round glass window. He was at sea!

For the fraction of a minute he gazed, stupefied, upon the limitless expanse of swelling waves and the dipping gulls wheeling like black plumes against a leaden sky. The nauseating sickness of the morning-after submerged in a swell of terror, and he leaped from the bunk. His terror was brief. Anger gripped him.

He grasped a bare arm that protruded from the bunk above. A tall man, clad in flannel pajamas, sat up on the edge of the

bunk, bent his head from the low ceiling, disinterred a pair of slippers from the disarray of his bed-clothing, and in a moment swung lightly down to the floor.

"Good morning!" the man greeted cheerily. He was a nice-looking chap, a little older than Chester, with an engaging smile. "Here"—and he pulled some garments, rough clothes of the sea, from a locker under Chester's bunk—"get on some clothes before you freeze to death. I had you all covered up when you laid down, but you must 've done some heavy kicking in the night. Get on some clothes, and then we'll talk."

"And we'll talk about the quickest way to get me ashore," said Chester angrily. "I suppose I'm shanghai'd—I've heard of such things—but it won't be well to try to keep me shanghai'd."

"We'll talk about that later," said the man pleasantly. "I'd dress if I were you."

"Where are my own clothes?"

"I expect they're dry by this time; you fell out of the boat, you know, when we brought you aboard. Don't remember that, eh? I don't suppose you do; it was a peach of a jag you had on. Your clothes are out in the cabin; but, as long as you're at sea, why don't you dress in these? Your own clothes are hardly suitable"—and the man smiled—"for rough weather, and it looks as though we're going to have some."

Chester was calmer now, and he realized that anger would gain him nothing. Besides he was cold. He found a complete outfit of clothing, heavy and rough, but comfortable, and a sou'-wester hat. His host also proceeded to dress in similar garments, and it wasn't long before they stepped from the bunk-galley into a small cabin. The cabin was low-ceilinged, like that of unusually small vessels, but it was comfortably furnished and cozy.

"My name is Britter," the man said. "I told you last night, but I expect you've forgotten that. Yours, if I remember right, is Pickard. Now then, Mr. Pickard, we'll have a little drink, and then we'll have breakfast. By that time we'll feel better, and be able to understand each other. I'll tell you now, though, that you weren't shanghai'd—that is, strictly speaking. We

did, I admit, take advantage of the fact that you were soused; but we didn't shanghai you. You came aboard of your own accord. We stated our proposition to you, and you liked it. Of course, you don't remember that. You probably wouldn't have accepted it if you'd been sober—but we'll talk of that later."

Britter brought forth from a locker a bottle and glasses, and each man swallowed a stiff drink. It settled Chester's nerves and he felt better. The adventure of the situation was gripping him now, and within his soul a strong, keen enjoyment was springing up. Chester Pickard, the broker's clerk, at heart was a soldier of fortune, too optimistic to quarrel with fate. Britter opened a door and stepped up a short companionway, shouting to a sailor standing on deck near the forward rail.

"Tell Moxey we'll have breakfast now," he called. "Breakfast for two—in the cabin."

Chester, silent, alternately gazed at the tumbling sea and the hospitable Britter. He wasn't sure but what he liked him.

"My pardner, Dorsey, the man who was with me last night," Britter explained, "didn't come along. He's coming next trip."

"Supposing you let me in on the secret of just why I'm aboard this ship," suggested Chester. "I confess a mild interest in the affair."

"In a few minutes," smiled the host. Then he grew serious. "I know you're not a man with a family," he said. "At least, you told us that last night; you said you had nothing in the world to hold you in New York except an ordinary clerk's job. I think you're sport enough not to worry. Am I right?"

"I'm not worrying especially. I'm curious."

"I'll lay every card on the table as soon as Moxey brings the breakfast and clears out. In the mean time, we still have this bottle. Here's Moxey now; let's hustle in another drink before we eat."

Moxey, a red-faced ship's cook, took from a wide-bottomed basket tin dishes laden with fried bacon and potatoes and biscuits. He poured mugs of fragrant

coffee from a steaming pot and then withdrew.

"Now I'll explain a little," Britter volunteered when they were seated. "This schooner is the Turtle Dove, and Dorsey and I chartered her to take our first cargo of stock down to Caliana. We told you all about it last night, but it's better to go over it all again.

"Caliana you never heard of—that's what you said. Well, Caliana is a republic about the size of a voting precinct down in the mountains of the Isthmus. By a little political manipulation, and particular care in mixing drinks, we've cornered the liquor-dispensing privileges of the whole republic, which means two saloons—one in each of the country's two cities. Dorsey is coming down next month with more stock—"

"You mean that this ship is loaded with booze?" Chester asked.

"I'd say she was loaded with booze!" Britter assured him. "Twenty thousand dollars' worth of assorted booze—that's what's in her belly this minute. Everything from a dash of bitters to refreshments for a national convention. You never saw more kinds of booze in your life. Everything except beer—beer's too bulky. Those niggers down there don't want beer, anyway. They want sure-fire booze.

"The president of Caliana is a cross between a Mexican mule-driver and a Yucatan nigger. He made a trip to New York about three months ago, and wandered into a saloon Dorsey and me were running on Tenth avenue. We took a look into his wallet and then introduced him to a system of mixed drinks that almost made him take out citizenship papers in the States.

"Nev-ar will I go myself back to Caliana!" he says. 'I will organize myself to be a ceetezen of these great country where lives the liberty-loving gin-rickee! Another one of them what you call a Bronx cocka-too, please—and long may she wave!'

"He hung around our place three days, during which we learned a lot about Caliana and accumulated a fine system of profit-sharing ideas.

"When the executive sailed for home, Dorsey went with him, with the saloon business of the republic in his pocket.

"It won't be necessary, your highness," Dorsey told the president, 'for you to go to New York for an eye-opener. We will bring you a couple of American saloons and educate your noble people up to a proper standard of self-government and delirium tremens.'

"It took a little money, too, and a dicker by which the president will be properly reimbursed; but he got legislation which absolutely gives us a monopoly on the booze business for three years. If this president is reelected, we'll get an extension.

"But whether we last longer than three years or not, we're bound to clean up. The country's full of gold, and those niggers are very illiterate when it comes to drinking—never having had anything but rum to get educated on. When we inoculate them with our curriculum of milk punches, gin fizzes, and brandy high-balls, they'll fight to lay their gold on the bars.

"That's the reason that I put to sea with this cargo of blind stagers."

"That all sounds very nice," commented Chester, "but I don't see yet why you were so anxious to get me into it. What do you want me for—an advertisement, or something like that?"

"No, no, my boy," Britter hastened to assure him. "We have two saloons to run; Dorsey will take care of one and I'll look after the other. But we've got to have a traveling agent—a man of good appearance and more than ordinary intelligence. We've got to have a man who can keep the politicians lined up—politically and at the bar. He's got to go back and forth between the two towns, you know, and do the honors at the bar. He's to be the high exalted drink-buyer of the republic—a man who can do it and make an impression, and at the same time lead the natives into reckless spendthriftiness. A highly sociable man is what we want. And, if you'll pardon me, you struck Dorsey and myself as being intelligent, of good appearance, and sociable to a high degree. For money you need have no worry. At the end of three years you'll have a small fortune—and—and free drinks for three years."

"A continual round of pleasure for three years. eh?"

"That's it. Do you like the proposition?"

"I'll take a look at the country," Chester said. Breakfast being over, he reached for the bottle. "I might like it," he went on. "The job of custodian of a nation's conviviality rather appeals to me—providing I can talk all I want to. I guess I can pick up enough of their lingo to get by on. But first teach me to say, 'What 're you going to have?' That's a line that 'll get you by in any country."

But alas! The elements did not regard with favor this project to boozify a decadent nation. The Turtle Dove met her fate on a reef, and Chester Pickard, having got hopelessly drunk during the final tussle with the hurricane, slept blissfully and snoresomely; while his shipmates, sober, were tossed into the sea.

III.

ON the storm-wrecked deck of the Turtle Dove, Chester Pickard did not long debate whether to remain aboard the craft or to brave the unknown land that lay a hundred yards away. His only safety lay on land, as the small ship, or what was left of her, might break up at any moment.

The boats having been carried away, he spent the greater part of the day constructing a raft. Occasionally he stopped in his work of ripping away timbers from the structure of the ship to gaze into the green of the shore, but he saw nothing but bright-feathered birds.

His raft built, he brought up from the mess-galley all the provisions, and there was quite a stock. Very carefully he slid the raft overboard, holding it safe by a hawser-rope. It was a laborious task, but he got the provisions on the raft. He stripped the cabin of all clothing and tools. He found Britter's revolver and three boxes of cartridges. He found cigars, a pipe, and a good supply of tobacco. Also he found matches enough, with economy, to last him a year. Never was marooned mariner more kindly treated by fortune!

Armed with a long strip of scantling which he had pulled from the hulk of the Turtle Dove, Pickard poled ashore over the now smooth sea and dragged the provisions

high and dry. Then he poled back to the stranded craft, for she still held treasure in her shattered vitals.

He could not salvage much of the bottled goods from the cargo that had been destined for parched Caliana. The bottles had been smashed for the most part, although here and there he picked a sound flask—whisky, cordials, and liqueurs. But he trundled keg after keg of whisky to the deck. He found smaller kegs of port and sherry and brandy, and he brought them all up. Feverishly he worked, and it was getting dark before he got the last keg ashore. Then he sank exhausted on the beach, surrounded by a veritable kingdom of booze.

After a time he opened one of the whisky bottles and took a swig. It gagged him, but once down, it also stimulated. He rummaged among the provisions and found tinned meats and biscuits. He drew a dipper of port wine from one of the kegs that had been fitted with a spigot, and made a hearty meal.

He lay on the beach, just at the fringe of gently-nodding palm-fronds, and gazed through the smoke of a fragrant cigar at the crescent moon setting gemlike in the star-studded bowl of tropic sky. The wine and velvet-swish of the sea lulled his nerves. He fell asleep on the beach—well fed, half drunk—and dreamed serenely of his favorite saloon in far New York, and of being in convivial conversation with the bartender.

The island—for island it proved to be—was turned into a habitable spot. Before he had been there a week Pickard had fashioned a dwelling of rocks and boughs. He was fortified against privation for a considerable time. The island abounded in coconuts and berries. Being a good shot with the revolver, he added to his provisions by bringing down a few birds. He also obtained fish from the beach, having rigged up a few traps.

All men, whether their life has been amid the plenty of cities or the scantiness of deserts, become ingenious—conjure up the talents of primitive man—when cast on lonely shores. Their every move is directed at fulfilment of nature's first law, and they look more keenly to the future

than other men. Pickard was no exception, and he planned wisely and with an ingenuity that surprised even himself.

But, strange to say, since the second day on the island he had not taken a drink of the booze. He had moved it all into a cave that set well away from the beach, and as he worked to build a habitation, he told himself that he would celebrate when his comforts were assured. He would get drunk for a week—a wild, care-free drunk, in which he would roam and roister about the beach and groves, bottle in hand. He set great store by this contemplated orgy.

As he worked day after day, however, his nerves became steady, and he found himself enjoying a fulness of health that set his blood tingling. Wholesome food and fresh air, with no booze, and regenerating manual labor were bringing him far away from the life of a sodden broker's clerk, cooped up by day in an office and dissipating by night. He cared not in the least for a drink.

It was on the afternoon of his fourth day on the island, and he was softly whistling as he worked at the hut, when he turned, startled, at an unusual sound in the undergrowth near at hand. His hand instinctively went to the revolver which he always carried in his belt.

Pickard found himself staring into the face of an unusual species of ape—half baboon, half chimpanzee it seemed—with a fringe of red whiskers beneath an under-shot chin. The animal's face was covered by short, black hair, and this, in contrast to the reddish-gray of his pelt, gave him a funereal expression, the solemnity of which was enhanced by a pair of large, doleful eyes. He stood upright, one long arm hanging at his side and the other looped over a bough slightly above his head. The animal was about four feet tall.

"Well, thought Chester, "he doesn't seem to be afraid of me."

He soon procured a biscuit and tossed it toward the solemn-visaged caller. The biscuit fell near the latter's feet, but it did not frighten him. He regarded it very intently; profoundly, in fact, as though the matter called for all his wisdom. Finally he swung down to all-fours and picked the

biscuit from the ground. Then he sat back on his haunches and nibbled at the gift, regarding Chester in that somber manner of the small boy next door who has just lost his mother.

"I wonder what makes him so sad," thought Chester.

The biscuit proved to be the entering wedge for a warm friendship. The ape was cautious at first, as became an aristocrat, but he finally exhibited all the devotion of a dog for this strange creature who seemed to be engaged in altering the island. He followed Chester about the beach and groves, accepting the titbits offered him in the gravest of manner. He never lost his solemn and grief-stricken demeanor.

"*Robinson Crusoe* called his man *Friday* because he found him on Friday," thought Chester. "I think it was Sunday that this monkey-undertaker came to me. I'll call him Sunday."

After a time this name was contracted to "Sunny," which seemed to be a witticism on his personal cloudiness.

His habitation constructed, Pickard found time hanging heavily on his hands. After breakfast one morning he went into the booze-cave and drew off half a dipper of whisky from one of the kegs. He took a gulp and then hurled the dipper to the ground.

"It's all out of gear," said he. "There's no fun in drinking booze when you haven't got anybody to talk to."

Thereafter he spent his time roaming about the island, always in company with the doleful Sunny, and in pacing the beach, looking for a sail or the smoke of a steamer. He always kept a fire burning at night on the sand, and by day he carried a blanket which he could wave to attract attention.

For six months he scanned the horizon. Not a drink of booze had he taken since he had hurled the dipper to the floor of the cave. He yearned at times for the companionship of humans, and dreamed of the hilarious parties he could have if he had some one to talk to. He craved companionship—not the booze—and, lonely, his thoughts more and more reverted to the lost delights of his old haunts, the mellow conviviality.

Six months had passed when, in the dead of a starlit night, he was awakened by strange sounds and the scampering of many feet outside his hut. He grasped his revolver and cautiously peered out.

A half dozen dark forms were visible about the entrance to the booze-cave. They looked like the forms of midgets, but Pickard recognized the figure of Sunny towering six inches over his companions. He had caught glimpses of these figures at isolated points on the island, and he knew them to be brothers and sisters of Sunny.

Sunny seemed to be the center of attraction. One by one these curious creatures approached him, and when they stepped away Pickard observed that they frisked about and otherwise disported themselves. Then he saw Sunny lift the discarded dipper to his face. In a few minutes the apes were hilariously scampering about, and Sunny now was down on all-fours, leaping and cavorting about in a manner that shocked Pickard, when he remembered the usual solemn dignity of his companion.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Pickard exclaimed mentally. "The little devils are getting soused!"

He was indignant for a moment and had an impulse to go out and drive them away; and then he felt ashamed of himself.

"I'd be a nice one, wouldn't I?" he thought. "As many times as I got drunk in the States—think of me kicking on a gang of monkeys putting up a party!"

Of a sudden the scampering ceased, and the smaller animals fled behind Sunny. They had seen Pickard peering from the hut.

Sunny gazed upon Chester. He gazed brazenly, and even in the dim starlight Chester could see that Sunny's solemnity had faded and he seemed in a delightful ecstasy. Sunny boldly approached the hut and plucked with his drunken paw at Pickard's sleeve.

"*Tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck!*" chattered Sunny.

"Why, the little devil's talking Russian to me!" exclaimed Chester. "And I'm blamed if I don't think he wants me to take a drink!"

"*Tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck, tsck!*" rattled Sunny, frisking away and returning with the dipper.

The other apes were now scampering and chattering in a perfect bedlam of drunken hilarity. They grew bold and surrounded the dumfounded Pickard. Their chattering continued, and seemed like a call to his soul.

"At last, at last!" cried Chester, "I've got somebody to talk to!" He gulped at the dipper and drained it. "At last, at last!" he almost sobbed, as he felt the clouds of loneliness scurrying away.

Then, side by side with the dissolute Sunny, he went to the cave, surrounded by a merry party.

It was a wild night on the island.

MAGIC OINTMENT

AN ancient fable told of grace
 In magic salve of mystic leaven,
 Which, touching eyes, revealed the face
 Of brooding beauty that is heaven.

The fable is but deathless truth:
 Ask of love, faith, and age—and youth!

He Who has helped the blind to see;
 He Who has raised the halt and lame,
 Or served a wretch in Galilee
 A cup of water in His Name—

Lo, his love's look has pierced the skies—
 God's magic ointment clears his eyes!

Olin Lyman.

Isle of Drums

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Butterfly Orchid," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

RETURNING to his headquarters on Hope Island, in the South Seas, after an unsuccessful pearl-prospecting trip, Thad McKay, *kapitani* of the trading schooner, Mbelema, picked up Faroa, mate of Captain Parks, of the Huimanu, pearl king of Micronesia. Faroa bore a message from his master to the effect that he and his daughter Lenna were in the *tambu* house on the cannibal island of Aoba, six hundred miles away, and that Parks's store of pearls was hidden near by, in one of the lava stones or "demits" at the place of "sing-sing" or ritual.

Taking with him Frisco Fred Sime, a consumptive yegg and a dead shot whom Lenna had once befriended, and whom McKay had picked up on the beach at Suva, they set sail for Aoba, and, attacked by cannibals when stranded on a reef near the island of Araga who gathered to drum-beats, frightened them off by an exhibition of fancy, though harmless, shooting on the part of Sims, it being McKay's purpose to effect his ends by diplomacy, if possible.

Getting off the reef just in time to escape an overwhelming attack in force, McKay and Sime with Kekko, a bushman with a marvelous sense of smell and direction, and one other man, landed on Aoba, the "Isle of Drums," coming upon what was known as the sing-sing ground of the village of Motonui, after escaping various traps in the jungle-path through Nekko's skill. There, when they had witnessed a savage dance from a tall tree, they were startled to see Lenna Parks dancing in the moonlight, alone, then fall, swooning, to the ground. Just then, as they shrank back out of the betraying beams, a tall native stepped swiftly forward, reached the prostrate girl, and lifted her in his arms. McKay, now well back of the searching rays, suddenly saw projected into it, the long, blue muzzle of a revolver—Sime's!

CHAPTER V.

TERIKI.

CYLINDER and handle, gripped by the Californian's steady fingers, followed. McKay's own fingers clamped about Sime's wrist like a vise, tightening swiftly until Sime's tortured, bruised tendons were forced to relax, and the gun dropped into McKay's left palm.

He passed it on to Kekko, and in the flash that the situation demanded, wrapped both his legs, sailor-wise, about the banyan bough, flung one arm about Sime, constricting the latter's wasted arms to his narrow chest, and clapped his left hand over Sime's mouth, holding silent the Californian, who fought him with the frenzy of madness, while the bough pitched and all about them the jungle rustled in betrayal. But the circle was again deserted: the native had borne the girl away.

"You damned fool," McKay whispered fiercely. "Do you want to spill the beans?"

I'm handling this. Do you want to get the whole bunch of us killed — and worse — starting with the girl? Cool down and see sense, or I'll knock you out and pack you down to the boat on my back."

Sime suddenly collapsed and leaned weakly against McKay, who realized how roughly he had been handling the consumptive. But it was necessary. Even now he took the precaution to slide Sime's second gun from its holster and appropriate it. He motioned to Kekko and the other boy to slide down the upstanding root pillar of the banyan bough to the ground, and then handed down Sime, limp and unprotesting.

It was no use going any further that night. McKay was convinced that the girl was as yet unharmed and, for the time being, safe. There would be nothing gained, and only a tremendous risk taken by attempting to follow the vanished natives through their bush trails to the village. To-morrow, he knew, according to custom, there would be a big feast—an ap-

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appropriate time for him, as a prospective trader, to arrive and be made welcome.

Feast-times, with the meat provided, were peace-times, though at the next one he might be selected as a victim. At the one to-morrow the victims would probably be pigs. McKay was quite sure that the girl's life would not be sacrificed, since she had just taken part in the ceremonial dance. And the sanctity with which she was thus invested should likely extend to her father, if he was still alive.

They worked back to the trail and down that to the beach, stopping for Kekko to reset the traps. The soil of the path was packed too hard for the registry of any betraying footprints. Sime was able to walk, and trudged on, with a sullen stoop to his shoulders. In the boat he kept silence, staying in it, a dejected huddle, when McKay and the two Kanakas jumped out upon the reef, now uncovered at low tide, and hauled the whaleboat to deep water.

When he was facing Sime across the cabintable, McKay opened on him.

"You think I've done the wrong thing, Fred, and you're sore. But I was dead right. I've lived ten years out of my twenty-eight down here, and I know what I am doing in a case like that. There's no sense in you getting sore at me. Get it out of your system, and I'll show you where you're wrong."

Sime lifted a face gray despite its tan, his eyes smoldering.

"You're stronger than I am, Mac, when guns don't count," he said. "I'd have shot you, as it was, with my other gun if you hadn't picked me out of the grit on Suva Beach. You got a right to slam me—*once!*" His face suddenly worked with passion. "Why didn't you let me plug him? You know who that was? It was the priest who did the devil-dance. I saw his spotted feet. He didn't have time to take off all his make-up. And—you—you let him get away with her! He had her hypnotized.

"You don't suppose a girl like that would dance for a bunch of naked savages if she was in her right mind? She—she gave me a five-spot when I was down and out—gave it me like one pal to another. And you sit there and watch that dirty

beast carry her off—to what? What's he done with her already? What's he doing now? And you—you, *damn you*—you held me. I—"

He sat there with his face wrinkled with emotion, tears of baffled action streaming down his cheeks, shaking a fist at McKay, beside himself with rage.

"Give me back my guns and I'll go ashore now. I'll swim—sharks or no sharks! Call yourself a man, McKay? You're nothing but a dirty coward, afraid of your own skin! I ain't afraid of mine. Give me back my guns!"

"Now that's about enough, Fred," answered McKay in a voice that was compelling but friendly. "You listen to me, and I'll tell you a few things. Miss Parks is safe, so far as her body and honor are concerned. You don't have to teach me any lessons about defending either of them. I know these natives and you don't. Get this into your head: not even that Narak priest would have let her dance that way if he had any idea she wasn't—pure.

"And he didn't hypnotize her. I don't believe he could. I never heard of any of 'em who could do it, let alone with a girl like Miss Parks. I saw her eyes. They were not fixed, and her own soul was in 'em. A streak of moonlight got through the leaves and had me spot-lighted till Kekko tipped me off just before you started to run the show. Lenna Parks saw me. She saw a white man's face staring down at her out of a tree when she thought she was shut up in a cannibal village without a chance of help.

"What did she do? Fainted. I've got another idea about that, too, but it don't alter the main situation. If she hadn't fainted, that Narak, who must have been changing his duds over by the drums, would have spotted us—and we wouldn't be here. The tribe would have chivvied us down to the beach and chopped us to bits, for all your fancy shooting. Your ivory head would have been in an ant-heap to-morrow, being cleaned, and this time next week it ud have been in one of those skull-hutches, with mine beside it, grinning out to sea. Same thing would have happened if you'd potted the priest.

"When you haven't got strength, you've got to use strategy. We're under way now, taking a long tack out to sea. We'll show up early to-morrow morning, looking for a place to establish a trading station. We won't know a thing about Parks or his girl, and they won't tell us. We'll nose around till we find out something. I've got a few plans as to handling that. There'll be a reception committee come down to the beach to meet us. It's feast-day to-morrow, and while the pigs are baking in the oven, the tribe 'll be in just the humor to talk to strangers who've got trade-goods aboard.

"Faroa we'll keep out of sight. Which reminds me to go and see him. He's getting so he can talk right along now. Come with me, if you want to. But don't sulk. You've got to follow my lead in this thing, Fred. There can be only one skipper aboard this schooner. I called you about your qualifications — plural, mind you. You showed me one — that you could shoot. Now, pack your noddle with this:

"I'm just as anxious to get Miss Parks off that island the way she went on it as you are, and I'm a damned sight more capable. I'm not bragging. You're a *malahini*—a tenderfoot—as they say in Hawaii, and I'm an old-timer. I'm going to get the girl and her father, and the pearls. I've got no ambitions to have my dome exhibited on Aoba as the prize bonehead, either. When the time comes to shoot I'll give you all the chance in the world, and thank God you can shoot better than I can. But it's bluff, not bullets, that's going to count most in this mess; however it winds up.

"I'm not trying to rub it into you, Fred. We're in on this thing together, but it's got to be a one-ring circus, with me as ring-master. If I fall down — it's up to you. How about it? Will you shake?"

Sime reached out his hand. His shrewd face had smoothed out, and there was a smile on it.

"Surest thing you know," he said. "You be the king in this deal and I'll be the jack. Lambasted me from hell to high-water, didn't you? It's some long time since any guy talked that way to me and got away with it. Course you're bigger than I am," he grinned. "I had it coming to me, Mac.

I saw red, and my brain just naturally addled, froze from the eyes up. Let's go see Faroa."

They found the ex-mate of the Huimanu mending rapidly. His devotion to his *kapitani*, and the belief that he might help to save him, had conquered the racial trait of letting go all resistance once the body weakened far below normal. He had been oiled and massaged by his fellows until a transformation that was almost marvelous had taken place. His flesh was no longer flaccid, the hollows were disappearing, there was even a suggestion of fat on his ribs. And there was light in his eyes.

"Mighty fine you look, Faroa," said McKay. "Better you drink this."

He had brought a slug of gin for the patient, and it spurred him into animation and speech as nothing else could have done so swiftly, and, at the same time, bolster Faroa's self-confidence.

"I feel fine. Now can plenty talk," he said.

"Good. Faroa, what you know along this *demit* of Motonui?"

"Plenty. Motonui, he chief this tribe. Motonui, he *ma-te* (die) two, mebbe three day before Huimanu, she blow on reef. So they think we make good *kai-kai* (eating); think our *aitu* (spirit) mighty good walk along with Motonui *aitu* in *ka po-uli-uli* (outer darkness—spirit-world). My word, all our boy they kill! That night they *kai-kai* plenty. Kapitani Parkesi, Missy Parkesi, they keep fer nex' day. Me they keep, too, because I along of *kapitani* and missy. One *tindalo* (wizard) name Ponda, he boss along of Motonui *ma-te*. Kapitani Parkesi, he not afraid. That night he fix up for *teriki* (tricks) he always show along Kanaka; *teriki* he put along his pocket same time Huimanu, she go on reef. Too much smart that Kapitani Parkesi for man like that Ponda. You bet.

"Nex' day Ponda he come. Parkesi, he laugh. He take one-two-three *tala* (dollar) from one Kanaka nose, one hair, one mouth. From the air he take plenty more *tala*. All he give to Ponda. Plenty that Ponda know *tala*, you get. Parkesi, he take *ipu* (bowl). Plenty thing I tell you Parkesi take from that *ipu*. He tell Ponda he teach him all

this *teriki*. What for Ponda want kill man can tell him so much?

"Ponda, he grunt. He scratch under armpit—long time. Nothing he say, but he put Parkesi, missy, and me inside *tambu*-house. That *tambu*-house *tabu* along Motonui he *ma-te* there. Too much that *arii* (chief) eat that time. He go *moe-moe* (sleep), no can wake up. So they build um new *tambu*-house some time. Ponda, he put his *tabu* on that old *tambu*-house.

"Pondu, he speak Parkesi can he make *demit* for Motonui? Parkesi, he speak he can make very fine *demit*, but I mus' help. So we takeum head of Motonui and we scrapeum head. We take plenty small twig, and I twist to make body and leg. Parkesi, he take clay, take coco-hair, and mix. He make face of Motonui on skull, all same belong along Motonui same time he live. Very fine *demit* we begin to make. Parkesi, I think he finish. But he speak along me before that time: 'Faroa, you go down along beach; you steal *motu* (canoe); you paddle all same hell by *Maui-aitu* (the Spirit of Maui—the Southern Cross). Bimeby you find land where *papalangi* (white man) live. You give him this *tapa*.' So I come, Mak-kei (McKay). So you find my *motu* when Faroa, he almos' *ma-te*. Is there more *kinikini*?"

He got his "go" of gin and sank back to slumber, while McKay and Sime went aft. He knew it was the ghastly custom in the New Hebrides to memorialize a dead chief of sufficient importance by making an effigy of his body and surmounting it by the actual skull of the deceased after the skull had been used as the base for reproducing, in exaggeration that was emphasis, not caricature, the features of the late ruler.

Parks had been employed by Ponda, probably at his own suggestion, in making an image of Motonui that should surpass all other images. In the framework he had concealed his pearls, and he had saved Faroa's life long enough, by claiming him as a necessary assistant, to write the note, and procure for Faroa a chance of escape on an errand to find help. A forlorn hope, at best, but it had turned out all right.

All this he told to Sime.

"You see," said McKay, "this clears up the mystery of the *tambu*-house. Motonui overfed his gross stomach for once and died of apoplexy in the bucks' clubhouse. That made it *tabu* for the natives. Parks is safe for the present. He is teaching Ponda his *teriki*, and he is not being in any hurry to give out all he knows, at that. Ponda counts upon being the prime wizard of all Aoba, perhaps of all the Hebrides. Conjuring, parlor tricks, has turned many a deal in the islands. The natives are like kids in many ways. I've used *teriki* myself, and shall again. But you have to be careful.

"Never show 'em anything they've seen before—not too often, anyway. And don't make your magic too strong, or they'll set it down to the power of the spirits. Do something with your own hands under their own noses—that's the scheme. There is hardly a tribe that hasn't got a few men who have been over to Australian plantations, and you can't fool them with what they've seen and talked about.

"Rockets, now. They used to marvel at them. Now they take no more notice of them than of a shooting star. Phonographs and music-boxes, moving pictures, anything concealed—under cover—that is all god-stuff; it don't set you any higher individually. Parks is wise. He knows what to hand them. I've got a few *teriki* myself to show Ponda."

"Are all these natives raving heathen?" asked Sime. "Ain't there a civilized tribe on Aoba—Christianized, I suppose I mean?"

"Not so you could notice it. The missionaries have worked hard. Some of 'em have made mistakes, same as the traders. But they can't make much of a showing. They've renamed some of the islands. Merana is *Espiritu Santu*—Holy Ghost—and Araga is Pentecost Island. You know what the tribes are there. We just got a taste of it. Over on Malekula they claim converts, but their old men are still buried alive—at their own request—and on other islands the women are buried alive when a chief dies. Also, they launch a new chief's canoe over living bodies. They aren't living

after the heavy canoe passes over them and gets into the water.

"On Tanna the missionaries themselves only claim ten converts. Down in Vila Island, five days' sail from Sydney, there are plenty of so-called Christians, and all the natives of the group pride themselves on knowing some English. But the only mistake the missionaries had made is in coming too soon. Trade comes first, then the Bible. I don't mean the small traders. By and large, they've been a bad lot. And they've been killed off on account of it. But the islands are rich, and big firms, like Burns Phelps, with capital enough to last it out and insure government backing for reprisals and monthly steamers to their stations, are the thing that 'll civilize the groups. Clear the land first and then bring on your education for the native, if you like.

"It's going to eliminate the small trader in time, but there are plenty of pickings left for my lifetime, or my son's, if I ever have one. It is men like Bligh, of the Wave, who are holding things back."

"I've heard of him," said Sime. "Down at Suva. A smooth one, they tell me."

"Smooth and hard. I'll tell you one thing he pulled off, Sime, and then we'd better turn in. We'll need wits and energy to-morrow. Bligh, who's a handsome blond devil with a tongue like strained honey, got his eyes on a young girl on Matalu where he has, or had, a station. He offered to buy the girl, trader-style, with so many fathoms of turkey-twill and so many sticks of *tabaki*, so many tins of *samani*.

"The girl's in love with a young chief, and the chief has a following strong enough to make Bligh, who hasn't a very strong grip on Matalu, give way with a smile. He hands to the bride, as dowry, all the goods he had figured on buying her with. He throws in a kerosene lamp with a painted shade. An elegant gift. All the island admires it in the couple's new grass hut. Bligh is a fine, generous man, despite what they have heard to the contrary.

"Second night the oil gives out. No more lamp, no more admiration! Chief goes to store and offers to buy more stuff to make it burn. Bligh refuses payment,

gives him a can full—and skins out in his schooner before dark. The chief fills the lamp and lights it. That was the end of him and his bride and the new grass hut! Bligh had filled the can with gasoline!"

Sime perpetrated an epithet more quoted than printed.

"I agree with you," said McKay. "Better turn in, Fred."

"How about you?"

"I'll follow after a while. First I want to fix up one or two *teriki*."

The preparations made by McKay did not take him long; neither were they elaborate. He inspected a canister of white, granulated sugar, opened a tin box that had once contained tobacco but was now a third filled with a white powder, flaky and glittering, and rummaged through a rack full of bottles in his locked medicine-chest until he found one that was stocky and wide-mouthed and partly filled with pellets.

These he emptied into a pill-box, noting down the contents on the lid in pencil. He picked up another glass container, jar rather than bottle, glass-stoppered, which held a lump of silvery-blue substance. The label on the bottle bore the inscription, "Potassium."

McKay took the potassium jar and the empty bottle back to the cabin with him. There he emptied out the silvery lump on to a square of blotting-paper he took from the Mbelema's log-book.

The stuff immediately became filmed with brown, and he watched it for a moment carefully before he proceeded to cut a part of it into small pellets with his pocket-knife. It cut easily, like bee's-wax. Some of these pellets he placed as they were into the empty bottle; the rest he wrapped up in scraps of the blotting-paper before he put them in with the others, carefully closing the top with a flat cork.

The trimmed-down piece of pure potassium he restored to its own jar. The bottle with the pellets he slipped into the pocket of his little used duck coat, hanging on the wall, locking up the potassium again in the medicine-chest. With the sugar and the contents of the tin tobacco box he did nothing.

But he filled a tiny vial very carefully

with the liquid from a large blue bottle—liquid that smoked as he poured it into a funnel, drop by drop. This vial he also corked very carefully and put back on a lower shelf.

"I may be in a hurry later," he muttered, "but it will be better not to mix the chlorate and sugar right away. It ought to be fresh. To-night will do, if the play works right."

He stood scratching his head in perplexity for a minute or so, trying to bring something back to his recollection.

"I hid what was left of 'em somewhere," he said aloud, "some place where the boys wouldn't be likely to find 'em. Ah!" The perplexity vanished. He opened a panel on the port side of the companion-ladder and, with his electric torch, crawled into the smelly lazarette. Presently he came out triumphant with another tobacco tin that had been pressed into different service. This was almost full with twisted bits of tissue-paper colored red and green and blue. He took one of them and threw it sharply on the cabin floor. There was a crisp little explosion. The twists were children's "safety fireworks," filled with inflammable grit. He stuffed the other pocket of his coat with them.

"That's enough *teriki* for Ponda to play with," he announced aloud. "It's not the tricks so much, but the way you play them." He gave a prodigious yawn and disappeared in his own cabin.

CHAPTER VI.

PUALEIE.

IT was dawn at Hope Island. Little clouds floated high and roseate and motionless, like flamingo feathers. For once the restless plumes of the coco-palms were still. There was no air stirring. A breeze might come up with the sun, but, at the moment, it seemed as if everything in the world had slept with the fall of night—and was oversleeping.

Outside the lagoon, spread like shot-silk in emerald and chrysoprase, the ocean heaved to the ground swell like the bosom of a slumbering woman, clad in deep-blue

satin, merely murmuring to the reef. The tide was at the full, and there were hardly any breakers.

On the temporarily deserted island nothing moved but the land-crabs, which work on night-shift. The sun would see them scuttling to their sand-holes. On shack and copra-shed the notices of his departure left by McKay were still in place.

Over the windless sea a beautiful schooner came leisurely, under bare poles, her "kicker" engine sending her along at six knots. Painted white, with a gold stripe accenting the symmetry of her run, with polished brass here and there on deck, already giving off fiery flashes in the strengthening light, she seemed more yacht than the trading-vessel she was, though the Wave was the flag-ship of Captain Bligh's fleet and, as carrier of Bligh, had more money spent upon her than her profits fairly warranted.

The Wave was spoon-bowed and overhung of stern. On any point of sailing, at any angle, her lines of entry and of run were sweet, without friction. Heavily canvased, when winds were abroad, her sails had been carefully calculated to spill the wind if capsizing threatened. In storm or in light breezes the Wave ever carried more sail than her rivals, and outstripped the best of them, reaching or running. Her engine did not destroy her balance; its weight and position had been planned to keep the center of effort where it gave the best result under sail. The screw was a patent one, with blades that folded and a shaft that angled up beneath the overhang of the stern, when not in use.

As she glided over the smooth sea toward the reef-gate of McKay's lagoon she left little wake, but came on stately as a swan, her reflection breaking into kaleidoscopic patterns of prismatic color as her bows razored through the water.

She was the exquisite home of a cold-blooded blackguard.

Not that Bligh looked it. "Beauty" Bligh, the girls called him—before they knew him or of him. "Bluff" Bligh the men named him. That had something to do with his poker-play, but it also had something to do with an indefinable belief

in most masculine hearts, a belief seldom expressed—never when Bligh happened to be inside that particular reef—that somewhere under his unruffled exterior there lay hidden a streak of yellow. No one had ever ventured to go mining for it or banked upon its existence. There was no story current to support the theory, but it lurked, for all that.

A woman came out on the deck of the Wave, vacant save for a loin-clad helmsman. She was slim, and the silk folds of her loose gown displayed youth. Her black hair hung far below her waist in one great braid. Her face was ivory-white, though she was one-eighth Polynesian, born in Tahiti, known there as Pualele—Little Blossom. Since she had come away with Bligh she was not named at all.

She looked at Hope Island, and a ray of animation lit the glance that had been vacant of all expression save a dull, resigned despair. She half-lifted arms, from which the wide sleeves fell back, in a gesture of mechanical appeal, then let them fall. Her slender wrists were barred with purplish rings, bracelets of bruises given her by Bligh. Her eyes caught sight of a knife pendent from a belt that the Kanaka wore solely for that purpose. The sheath was old, and the knife fitted it loosely, kept in place by the length and weight of the blade. In steering, the man had shifted it well back of his hip.

The girl stepped out of her little slippers and tiptoed stealthily toward the native, who was humming a tune to the morning. Her fingers stretched out inch by inch, touched the handle, and with infinite precaution lifted the weapon in a final, swift movement. A slight lift of the schooner offset any sense the Kanaka might have felt in loss of weight from his buttock. Her face exultant, the girl turned, thrusting the knife into the bosom of her gown; then stopped, aghast.

Bligh had come up from the cabin and stood at the head of the companion, leaning on the coaming, looking at her mockingly. In his pajamas of Tussore silk, he made a fine figure of a man. But for his active life, he would been gross. There was a hint of it already in a fulness of the chin,

a lack of waist-line. But for all that, he was quick as a cat.

As the girl, fury and madness spoiling her beauty, brought out the knife and leaped at him with the swift, lithe rush of a she-panther, Bligh moved as quickly, catching her wrist in steel fingers that pressed cruelly on the bruises he had already made there, twisting back her arm until the knife dropped and stuck, quivering, in a plank. She shrank back, cradling her wrist with her hand.

"You brute! You beast!" she cried. "You've broken my wrist!"

"Just a sprain, I think, my fallen blossom," he said easily. "I warned you last night not to play your tricks on me. Now get below. I'm going to settle this thing."

"You slimy devil," she said gaspingly, "I wish that I was dead!"

"Meaning that you would prefer to substitute me," he retorted, stroking his blond mustache. "Easy enough to do it if you really mean it, my dear. There's the water, always handy. If you don't drown, there are always the sharks," he went on, leering maliciously as he saw her wince. "But you haven't got the nerve for that sort of thing. Rather stick a knife in me. Besides, you are still much too attractive to chuck it all. Because *our* little affair has petered out, don't get despondent. There's Larkin, you know. He's not so fussy as I am, and he's taken quite a fancy to you."

Her lip was bleeding where she had bitten it as she glanced past him to the second man who had come on deck and now stood back of Bligh, appraising her with coarse admiration. Her eyes held the look of a wild beast in a cage, prodded to the limits of endurance.

"You?" she said to the newcomer, Larkin, a swarthy toad of a man, squat in his creasy nightwear, soiled, ill-fitting to his shapeless body. "Rather the sharks than *you!*" She glanced wildly about her.

Bligh pointed outside.

"Three—no, four—of them scouting right now, Pualele," he said. "See their fins?" The girl cast one fearful glance to where the sea-wolves cut the still sea with their dorsals, then rushed by both the men

and fled down the ladder to the cabin. They heard a door slam, and both laughed.

"Don't seem to fancy you, Larkin," said Bligh. "Too bad. She's a nuisance. Had the nerve to tell me last night I promised to marry her. I admitted that I might have said so in the heat of the moment, but pressed upon her the main point of the argument, which was that I hadn't done it. She tried to brain me with a gin bottle across the table. We'll have to get rid of her," he added casually; "unless McKay wants her. I understand he has no woman. Apparently he's a lazy cuss in the mornings. I wonder how he came out in that pearling trip? By George—get me the glasses."

Larkin, supercargo and panderer for Bligh, cheap swindler and jackal, known best by his native name of Short-Fathom Larakini, on account of the cheating he was so proficient at across the trade-room counter, hurried to obey. Bligh focused them and swept the lagoon of Hope Island. At last they came to rest upon the white notices on the buildings.

"He's away again," he announced to Larkin. "May have struck a rich patch of shell. Schooner's gone, and I don't see any boat in the shed or on the beach. We'll go in, anyway. We can use some drinking nuts, and there's some sort of notices pasted up. Maybe the fool has left word where he's gone. If it's after pearls, we'll trail him. Just for luck."

He handed back the binoculars to Larkin and caught sight of the satin slippers on the deck. He fiddled again with his mustache and smiled. "Yes," he added softly, "we'll go ashore. Bili, head up for the opening. It's a straight channel and plenty of water. And after this, keep a lookout for your knife."

Bligh picked the weapon out of the plank, ran his finger meditatively along its razor-edge, shrugged, and tossed the knife at the startled Bili, who caught it with one hand dexterously, while with the other he shifted the wheel a spoke, and the Wave pointed her bow toward the gap in the coral.

Bligh took tobacco, papers, and matches from his pajamas pocket, rolled and lit a

cigarette, and sat on the rail, smoking it thoughtfully, oblivious of Larkin, who went below after a minute or so of uncertainty.

"That little devil," said Bligh, meditatively, to the ash of his cigarette, "is likely to get me some fair day or dark night. I know her kind. McKay, they say, is a lonely cuss, so far as the ladies are concerned. Now, if there is no one home—why not?" He flipped the ash overboard, rose as if he had disposed of an annoying question creditably, and went below.

Satisfied that there was no one ashore, Bligh, after the Wave had anchored, took his time about landing. Breakfast was served, and, not entirely to Bligh's surprise, Pualele appeared. He had found that even her fiercest outbursts rarely affected her healthy young appetite, and now, though sullen, she ate her share.

From time to time Bligh looked at her narrowly, though he tried to cover up his inspection. There was something different about her, he decided, an air of having arrived at a conclusion. And Bligh did not think that this decision was to make the best of present circumstances.

On the surface, he took her joining in the meal as a sign that the trouble between them had blown over. There had been other violent quarrels, too many of them for Bligh's easily ruffled comfort in such affairs. But he rallied her until he got a word or two from her, giving her little attentions, even playing the lover.

"Going ashore to get some fresh nuts," he said after they left the table and went on deck. "Want to come along? You might get some flowers."

She looked at him with a sidelong glance as if trying to gage his attitude. But he was more than a match for her at that game, as he had been from the first. She said nothing, but she went below and reappeared presently in white linen, with straw hat and *puggaree* veil, obviously dressed for the shore. In the boat she sat in the bow.

As the keel struck the sand and Bligh, barefooted, waded through the shallow water from the stern to carry her ashore, she turned from him to one of the Kanakas to do her the service, but she shot Bligh one

questioning, almost coquettish look, and he laughed back at her.

Bligh sent his boys after the fresh nuts, and Pualele wandered into the scrub in search of her namesakes, while Bligh walked up to inspect the notices. He had ordered Larkin to oversee the nut-picking.

**GONE TO AOBA, NEW HEBRIDES.
SAM PARKS AND DAUGHTER WRECKED
AND CAPTURED THERE.**

McKAY.

Bligh stood before them, thoughtfully inspecting them, twiddling his mustache, and then rolling a cigarette. At last he tore off both signs, deliberately reducing them to scraps that he spilled to the wind. He lounged down to watch the progress of getting the nuts, and sped up the work until the green husks were piled into the boat. He and Larkin were in the stern, the four natives ready for departure, two at their oars, two standing knee-deep, ready to thrust the boat into deep water, when Pualele appeared.

She had strung for herself a wreath of wild ginger and another of bush-jasmine. Both were about her neck. Her hands were filled with scarlet hibiscus bloom. There was color in her cheeks, and her parted lips mocked the softness and hue of the petals held in her fingers. She came out of a path in the scrub, and at sight of the waiting boat ran lightly down the slope of white sand. Bligh watched her coming with a little frown.

"She's surely a damned good-looking jade!" he muttered. Then his face hardened.

"You weren't going without me?" laughed the girl. All her ill-humor seemed to have vanished with the run ashore and the gathering of the flowers. Bligh sent up a last puff from his cigarette before he tossed it hissing into the water and grasped the handle of the steering oar. Pualele stood at the water's edge, the lace of it fretting at the tips of her shoes.

"That was the idea, Pualele," drawled Bligh. "It 'll be a change for you. I'm done with you, and you won't have Larkin, so we'll leave you for McKay. He may come back soon. And you may like him.

He's red-headed, and got a bit of a temper, I fancy."

The color went out of her face. Her eyes dulled, then they blazed like black opals. All the South Sea blood in her veins took dominance.

"Going to leave me here, are you? Like an old shoe?"

"Not old, my dear. Just doesn't fit any longer. Pinches a bit. Shove off there, Bili." The boat lunged into deeper water and rode with a clear keel. "It's the best I can do for you, Pualele. Unless," he added with a short laugh, "you want me to give you a letter of recommendation to McKay."

The hate in her boiled over. Her pretty teeth snarled, her lips were drawn back, twisted. She was all primeval savage. From her blouse she snatched out a nickeled, short-muzzled revolver, and fired at Bligh. The gun kicked, and the bullet went skipping across the lagoon. Bligh laughed out loud and snapped an order. The blades dipped smartly. Bligh swung the steering-oar, and the boat turned and raced for the schooner.

Pualele ran into the water, knee-deep, thigh-deep, blazing at her whilom lover. Four shots she fired in all, and the last hit Larkin high up in his left arm. Then the cheap firearm fouled and missed fire. Before she could pull trigger again her target was well beyond range.

Pualele stood in the water, her pistol lowered till the muzzle grazed the water. Then she turned and waded out, dragging wearily up the beach, past the scarlet blossoms she had dropped upon the sand, the spirit dead within her, the startled yell of Larkin and the laugh of Bligh the last sounds she heard before she went into the scrub and flung herself under the shade of the bush from which she had plucked the flowers fifteen minutes before. The boat was hauled up on the falls, the *putter* of the engine sounded, muffled, and the Wave glided out of the lagoon.

Once at sea, Bligh went through the same procedure as McKay when the latter last left Hope Island. He got out charts and directory, and mapped out a course for Aoba. Larkin sat cursing at his bandaged

arm and swilling gin. Bligh had told him about the notices, and announced that they were bound for Aoba.

"What's the idea of Aoba?" said Larkin when Bligh rolled up his charts. "*K'ai-kai* island, ain't it?"

"Human sharks, all of 'em," acquiesced Bligh cheerfully. He seemed in high good humor. "As for the idea, if you had one in that boozy noddle of yours, you'd understand. You know Parks? He always packs his pearls with him. And he's got a wad of beauties. Been saving them till the market revives after the war. Parks's luck has been a byword. He hits gems where others find seeds. Been doing it for years. But his luck's broken now.

"He must have got some sort of message to McKay. Showing he wasn't clubbed offhand. And he's got a great reputation for jollyng the natives, even the worst of 'em. He may be alive yet. That's McKay's idea, evidently. And it's mine. Mac's after the pearls, or a whack of 'em as a reward. So am I. Mac's doing the dirty work just now, I fancy. He hasn't been gone long. That paper hadn't started to yellow.

"We'll see what's doing on Aoba. Mac's gone alone, leaving the notice in case some one else came along and wanted to help. Like us. As he's alone, he can't carry them off with a high hand. He'll have to *palaver*. If he gets clear we'll meet him on the way back. Savvy?"

Larkin said nothing, but refilled his dirty tumbler. After he drained it he spoke thickly:

"What kind of a damn-fool notion is it for Parks to take his daughter round with him?"

"She's that kind of a girl. Only a kid. They didn't intend calling at Aoba. The islands are safe enough if you're careful as Parks is. She's been with him for four or five years, ever since she quit school in Sydney. Likes adventure. She'll get it before she leaves Aoba, I'm betting."

He caught Larkin looking at him, and certain words seemed to die on Larkin's lips. Bligh knew what he was thinking of, was almost drunk enough to allude to. Bligh had met Lenna Parks once, and, on

the dusky *lanai* of a Suva hotel, had attempted a familiarity of the sort he usually carried through. But he had mistaken the girl, and had received a stinging slap from a small but vigorous hand that had resounded along the *lanai* like a pistol-shot.

Lenna Parks had said nothing of it, even to her father. Bligh had sneaked into the hotel by a side-door, with the mark of the blow across his cheek like a bar-sinister. But the story got out, and Bligh left Suva sooner than he expected or wanted. And the memory of the slap still rankled.

"Larkin," said Bligh, "you're drinking too much again. You'll remember what I told you before. I'm going to let it go this time because you got clipped with a bullet from that little devil. Also, because the booze is going to raise hell with the wound before morning. But you don't want to forget what I'm going to say to you right now."

He leaned across the table, his elbow on it, his arm extended, and his finger tapping at Larkin's grimy undershirt.

"That gun of Pualele's! It was yours. I don't think you gave it to her. If I did, you wouldn't be here now. She stole it. But a mistake was made somewhere. Now, what we are going to do depends on circumstances, but whatever play we make we're going to do it cold sober. If you get drunk again—you can have your nips—or if you make any mistakes, I'll send a man overboard with a rope. He'll go off port-side and come up starboard—under the boat's bottom. And I'll keel-haul you until you're soggy. Don't forget it."

Larkin's swarthy face turned white, his jaw dropped. As Bligh rose and went on deck the supercargo's eyes followed the skipper's active figure with a look in which fear struggled with hate—and fear won.

CHAPTER VII.

PONDA, THE NARAK BURNER.

THE Mbelema came in from a long stretch seaward and headed up to Aoba, for the second time, in the gray of early morning. This time the schooner was not long unobserved. Thin twists of smoke rose

here and there from the bush, like threads of gray wool, not the brisk columns of signal fires, but indications that some part of the coming feast, at least, was in the stone ovens.

As soon as the binoculars could pick them out, groups of natives could be seen coming down to the beach and then vanishing. A few canoes appeared in the lagoon, coming out of a mass of verdure that McKay imagined to hide the entrance of a stream, probably heading far up in the bush, one of the few island thoroughfares.

No canoes attempted to pass the reef, and McKay waited somewhat anxiously for them to do so. He was not eager to land a whaleboat until he had estimated the temper of the islanders. He did not intend to allow them to come aboard. To do so would be a sign of weakness or ignorance upon the part of a white man, and would be undoubtedly taken advantage of, even to an attempt to capture the schooner. His fence of barbed wire above the rail was a usual trading precaution at places with Aoba's grisly reputation, and the natives would take it both as a tribute to their own prowess and to the *kapitani's* wisdom.

The canoes were not war-canoes, though McKay did not doubt that Aoba and the village of Motonui had such craft drawn up in the thatched boat-sheds, ready for occasion.

Meantime he made his preparations. He dressed himself, and made Sime dress, in white ducks, coats, Panama hats, and white canvas shoes, with silk shirts, silk socks, silk scarves, and silk sashes. This was to show caste, despite discomfort. Ordinarily the coats would have been omitted, but McKay had things in his pocket that could not so well be carried otherwise. The silk sashes served as background for leather belts filled with clips for McKay's two holstered automatics, and with cartridges for Sime's cylinder-rigged revolvers. Each boy of the landing party was given plenty of rounds for his rifle. Most of them carried sheath-knives, as a matter of course.

Sime watched curiously while the half-white mate, Tahiti Tom, supervised the careful packing of a wooden case with half a dozen Winchesters, four automatics, and

many boxes of cartridges. This was placed in the bottom of the whaleboat as it hung in the davits and covered with a boat-rug. A box of trade-goods, beads, cheap knives, curtain rings, cans of salmon, sticks of tobacco, and separate fathoms of cloth, planned for gifts and samples to mask their real purpose, followed.

"You ain't going to trade off those rifles, are you?" he asked McKay, who kept scanning the beach with the glasses.

"I should say not. That is a trick I learned from Parks, or rather copied from him. He didn't have a chance to pull it off this last trip of his, though, I imagine. You see that high point of rocks that shuts off Motonui to the east? There's a trickle of water falling over them. The place would make a good fortress to hold off an offense.

"As soon as we go up-bush, providing the natives are agreeable, Tom 'll row along shore till he gets up to that point. He'll do it aimlessly, as if killing time. There won't be any one to watch him, but he'll do it just the same, loaf along and give the natives time to crowd up to the 'sing-sing' ground or the new *tambu-house*, if it's built, and give the *papalangi* (foreigners) the once over. Whereupon Tom will plant the box of rifles in a handy place. If everything comes out all right, we'll dig 'em up after it's all over, last thing. If we should get in trouble and are cut off, it's a darn nice thing to know where you can get guns and rocks and water."

"I'll say that's some *teriki*," said Sime.

"Parks' own idea, according to the man I got it from. But it's a good one. Hello—here comes the first canoe over the reef! Down foresail, Tom, and jib."

The schooner leisurely coasted up and down outside the reef under mainsail and staysail with just enough headway to bring her about without missing stays. The wind that had blown strongly all night, necessitating a one-point reef, had died down, and the sea was barely wrinkled, heaving under the long rolls of the ground-swell.

Four other canoes followed the first, paddled up to within a hundred yards, and held off, the islanders dividing their attention between the schooner and the shore.

"Waiting for Ponda, I think," said McKay. "He seems to be the whole works, since Motonui died. And those priest-chiefs are the nastiest to handle. There he is. Some outfit!"

Out of the screen or rushes came a catamaran, two dugouts joined by a platform strewn with mats and bearing a sort of throne. In each hull ten paddlers dug furiously. Half a dozen single canoes accompanied this barge of state, buzzing about it, shooting backward and forward, shuttling like so many water-striders. These were the necromancers, at once the assistants, dupes, and body-guard of Ponda the Magnificent.

There was a great display of fluttering tassels, of plumes, of twinkling ornaments as the catamaran came over the reef on the blue-green neck of a roller, the attendant dugouts bobbing and gliding like so many corks. The canoes that had first come out, filled with mere commoners, black-skinned natives with bracelets of fiber-braid and shell, tow-headed from the use of lime, opened up a lane for their head man.

"I don't see a sign of a weapon," said McKay. "They may have 'em under the mats. It's a favorite trick, but I think they are playing good. After having grabbed Parks's outfit they may be nice to us as a sort of *alibi*."

He was closely studying Ponda through the lenses as he spoke. The wizard-chieftain was a grotesque figure. His costume was a mixture of the barbaric and the ridiculous. A lesser personage would have looked like a clown in the trappings that merely made Ponda bizarre, savagely menacing.

Much of this was due to the man's face. His features were aquiline and quite clearly carved, much like a North American Indian in type, with a high, sloping forehead that betokened brains, eyes suggesting some Chinese admixture with Malay blood, and a cruel, sensual mouth.

On his head was a silk hat from which the crown had been cut and the edges trimmed with a multitude of vermilion and orange feathers that ruffled with the breeze set up by the speed of the catamaran. Triple necklaces of dogs' teeth were supplemented by one of sharks' fangs and one

of human knuckle-bones. The flesh of his chest was strangely tattooed into the conventional form of the schooner's namesake, Mbelema, the Frigate Bird, made by deft shell-cuts never allowed to heal until the design was permanently pitted.

He wore a pair of linen drawers, belted by a broad strip of South Sea *wampum*, from which hung strips of fiber. On one foot was a plaid sock, brilliant with a tartan conceived only in nightmare. Copper wire covered both forearms from wrist to elbow, highly polished on the outer edges of the coils, the inner deep-sunken so that, above and below, the flesh bulged.

Back and front he wore gorgets of pearl. There were rings of ivory above his anklets, tufted with scarlet. His knee-caps and elbows were painted white, and, from the bridge of his nose up, his face was coated with scarlet. Ears and nose-cartilage were unutilated.

Withal he was terrible, invested with barbaric dignity.

His assistants in their dancing dugouts were much less impressive. Their canoes were too narrow to admit of their buttocks, and they sat on a little slab perched astern, with barely room enough for their feet to be placed together. In their humble way they copied Ponda, but they were like two-colored prints beside a gorgeous oil-painting.

Ponda's barge slashed through the water, slowed down even with the progress of the schooner, and drifted along.

McKay shouted a greeting, and Ponda threw up one long-fingered hand.

"What you want along Aoba, along Motonui?" he asked with a remarkably good accent.

"We come along trade, O chief," answered McKay. "Mak-kei my name, Mbelema my *motu* (canoe or ship) name. Plenty presents we bring for Ponda."

There was a noticeable stir among the single canoes, but Ponda did not even lift his eyes.

"Who tell you my name Ponda?" he demanded.

"*Hei-la!* Every one, from Futuna to Vatu Rhandi, they speak of Ponda," replied McKay. "Ponda, the Narak, the

Mighty Ponda!" This was a patent but expected lie from the visiting white man. It approved the chief to his followers as a man of real consequence. McKay thought there was a certain suspicion back of Ponda's conventional request, but his answer had evidently lulled it.

"*Hei!* It is true. I am Ponda! To-day we make a big feast to Motonui. You come. You bring presents. Next day we talk along trade."

He signaled to his peddlers, and they spurned the water with their crescent-handled paddles. After him went the priest-lets and the commoners, sidling and spurling over the rollers to the lagoon and back behind the greenery that screened the little river.

"In a hurry to get back to the feast? They've got to kill the sacred pigs yet," commented McKay. "We'll get there in time for that. They'll have the girl stowed away out of sight. And her father. But I am sure she saw me last night and recognized me for a white man. Our best bet is that she'll find some means of communicating with her father. They may both be together in the *tabu tambu*-house, but I doubt it. If she does get in touch with him, Parks will be waiting to line up with whatever move we start, or lead something of his own for us to play up to. We've got to keep our eyes open."

Kekko was left aboard desolate. Not even the gift of a can of salmon and three short sticks of *tabaki* appeased him until McKay produced a can-opener and removed the top, whereupon Kekko, squatting in the shadow of the sail, dipped his finger in the juice about the roll of firm, red flesh, and stuck its smelly wetness into his mouth with the ecstasy of a child sampling molasses.

"Why didn't you take him along?" asked Sime.

"Nothing like keeping a card or two up your sleeve when you don't have to play 'em," said McKay. "They'd get on to him in jig-time. He's too useful to be shown off. You've seen how he can smell out a trail after dark. Daytimes he can spy it out from the tree-tops. Travel miles and never touch ground or make the leaves

rustle. If they ever meant mischief Kekko would be one of the first to be among the missing. His face gives him away for a New Guinea tracker. And they don't love Papuans up in the Hebrides."

Sime nodded his understanding with a new sense of McKay's ability to play in this savage lottery.

"How about traps in the paths to-day?" he asked.

"That 'll have been fixed already," answered McKay. And, landing and leaving Tahiti Tom with two men in the boat to cache the rifles and wait for them to return, they found a tall green frond of coco-palm either side of the narrow, rifted entrance to a bush-trail, announcing the way was open and free from devilment.

This patch also debouched upon the *sing-sing* ground, only a little less weird by day than by night, with the malevolent-faced drum logs and the carved stones back of them, the peeled boughs stuck about them in a circle. Two more green fronds showed them the way through the farther bush to the village, whence they could already hear the tattoo of quickly pounded drums.

The village of Motonui was set in a clearing, partly sandy, shut in by the bush. Here and there breadfruits showed their glossy leaves and paler fruit. A great banyan was in the center of all. The houses were low but well thatched, resting on the ground, without doors, but with the front half-closed with bamboos to keep out the wandering dogs and pigs. The dwellings stood in groups of four or five, with a dry-stone coral wall about each little community and bamboos sprouting from the coral, where they had been planted while the sea-stone was still soft.

Natives were walking about in gala attire, with feathers and streamers in their hair, paint daubed on their faces, and all the family jewelry of shell and ivory, of brass and braided fiber, displayed to the best advantage. The cooks were all by the ovens, squatting while the provender automatically steamed itself to tenderness.

It was a dress parade, with clothes absent. A stringy apron for the unmarried women, a *tapa* skirt for the dames, and a strip of cloth for the men—nothing at all

for the children—hid their unashamed nakedness.

All the time a group of half-grown hobledehoys beat on their individual drums, made by themselves in the secret, mystic ceremonies of puberty, tall blocks of wood hollowed out by red-hot cinders, topped with sharkskin tied so it frilled, a great handle carved on one side, looking like great wooden *steins*.

They beat them without reference to what was going on, without apparent direction, booming away—from the ancient custom of making a noise whenever anything was forward in the way of excitement.

One big house had a platform in front. The whole wall was filled in, and from the peak dangled a skull, sign of the death *tabu*. McKay nudged Sime as they stood waiting for recognition, their body-guard of four boys, armed with rifles, at their backs, the gifts set down between them.

"That's the *tambu-house* where Motonui died, Fred. Where Parks was when he wrote that note. Where his girl is now, I'm fairly sure."

"What's that thing?" questioned Sime, nodding toward an effigy that stood up brilliant among the boughs and roots of the central banyan. "Looks like the Judas-dummies they hang down in Mexico."

It was an uncanny image, over six feet high, mounted on short stilts driven into the ground. The body was all out of proportion to the human model it was supposed to imitate. Down the overlong trunk ran stripes of white on a background of brilliant red. Round the legs bands of white and black alternated on the vivid scarlet. The shoulders and knees were capped with grotesquely carved faces, topped by tufts of fiber with a cane of bamboo surmounted by a boar's tusk, rising from each tuft.

The hands were made from the roots of a sapling, chosen for its mandrakelike propensities of suggesting fingers. Bracelets of boars' tusks were on the apish arms. The head was the most ghastly thing about it. The skull of the monumental effigy's original had been painted with a broad band of red across the forehead. A nose had been modeled on, the cheeks filled in,

and pieces of black obsidian filled the eye-sockets. Tufts of black wool were stuck on the gleaming whiteness of the poll, and black hair was glued about the grinning teeth in semblance of beard and mustache.

At its feet lay a rubble of broken axes, of cans, small stones, shells, and bright feathers, votive offerings to appease the departed spirit. Before it hunkered the glistening body of Ponda, without his hat, but with all the rest of his trappings, his head between his palms, elbows on knees, seemingly in rapt meditation. In his left palm was a small mirror in which he covertly watched the demeanor of the visitors.

"That, I take it," said McKay, "is the *demit* of the late, lamented Motonui."

Sime whistled softly.

"Gee," he said softly, just above his breath, "and a fortune in pearls tucked away inside of that! Some safe!"

"Don't move," ordered McKay to Sime and to the boys. "Make Ponda come through."

They stood there motionless with the sweat trickling down them under the pitiless sun. At last McKay lit his pipe, and Sime followed suit. The four guards remained frozen, rifles ported. The drums droned on.

"They'll have to start the feast presently," said McKay. "Wait 'em out."

Finally Ponda, without raising his head, trying to create the impression that his spirit, and not his sight, had recognized the presence of the strangers, called out in his own dialect.

"Greeting to Kapitani Mak-kei and his friend! Greeting and welcome to the feast!"

McKay answered in good Hebridean:

"Greeting to Ponda, wizard and chief! We come to the feast, bearing gifts for the mighty one." And he directed two of the boys to carry the box of presents to Ponda's feet.

The wizard affected not to look as Kalu removed the bright handkerchief that covered the present, but McKay had seen to it that a coil of copper and another of brass wire should be on the top of the little heap. They caught the sun, and their glitter was

reflected in Ponda's greedy eyes, though he merely directed, with a slight gesture, one of his assistant priests to bear it to his house. McKay marked the direction in which the man went. It might be handy later to know the principal locations of Motonui Village. Ponda came leisurely toward them, making no thanks for the gifts. His acceptance was a favorable step.

McKay had worked out a scheme in which he thought he could interest Ponda. The amount of *copra* they would dry at Motonui or shell that they would provide from turtle or oyster, seemed likely to be negligible. Coco-palms are gregarious but spasmodic things on the larger islands, and the thick bush about Motonui had smothered all but a few groves. The lagoon was not of the right bottom or depth for oysters at that point, nor was it suitable for *bêche-de-mer*.

It would not do for McKay to present a proposition that would show him a foolish trader to expect much where little was available. As a wise man he might be supposed to see that there was not enough business in sight to warrant the establishment of a store and agent.

He had hit upon a better plan, one calculated to appeal personally to Ponda. And the more he saw of the wizard, the better McKay thought of his scheme.

This was to propose a partnership with Ponda, to suggest that Ponda act as an intermediary with all the tribes and use Motonui as a clearing-house. At first sight this seemed impractical. In Micronesia the women do all the work because the men are forced to be warriors. Internecine trouble starts on the slightest of excuses, or on none at all. The penalty for living and prospering in a favored community is the cost of perpetual vigilance. The skull-houses of one tribe were always yawning for more trophies from another.

The death of an important man was the signal for a sacrifice of propitiation to his spirit, and the sacrifice meant the placing of the victim's skull in a grisly museum, the wrapping of his bones in a mat for exhibition purposes as evidence of strength and supremacy in fighting, providing the victim was deemed to have the blood of a chief

in his veins; the body of the sacrificial offering always furnished the baked meats of its own person for the feast.

But the warriors, as ever, were less powerful than the priests. And here was Ponda both priest and warrior. He had evidently suppressed or murdered the heirs of Motonui and usurped the chieftainship. There might be some kinship to back his usurpation, but principally it proved he was ambitious, a lean man who slept not well of nights.

The late Motonui, if the caricaturing *demit* could be accepted, was a glutton. He had died of gluttony in the *tambu*-house, and there again McKay fancied he saw the fine hand of Ponda. It is quite usual at feasts for a native to become so gorged and puffed with overeating and overbolting that his friends have to lay him on the ground and knead his back to save his life. To be a mighty fighter and eater also is a fine thing in Micronesia. Ponda had seen to it that Motonui's *masseurs* lost out to the gastritis.

Ponda was ambitious as wizard and chief. Seemingly, he had so far saved the lives of Parks and his daughter by learning certain tricks from Parks that would increase his prestige. Parks, doubtless, was doling out his lore as negligently as he could.

Ponda was a Narak, a Narak-Burner. He was, or claimed to be, in possession of certain carefully buried stones filled with all the vices of black magic. Over these he would build fires and consume therein any scraps of a man that the man's enemy would give him. Nail parings, spittle, hair, even a footprint, if the man was overcautious as to the rest. As the slow fire consumed the stuff so the man wasted away.

Such was the theory, and so strong the power of suggestion that dissolution often occurred. If it did not go speedily enough it is to be imagined that Ponda used other means as accessory. Such devil-rites were done for pay, and if the proposed victim could outbid his enemy his life might be spared and he might turn the tables by more Narak-Burning.

The main point was that fire was the magic element. The South Seas are full

of tales of spirits who make witch-fires on the beach and so show their mastery over terrible secrets. The Hebrides, with their two active volcanoes and with everywhere the evidence of dead or dormant fires, foster the belief.

If McKay could convince Ponda that he could show him, not just *teriki*, but dark mastery over fire, produced in unexpected ways, this, plus the *teriki* of Parks, might stimulate the ambition of Ponda to become the head ruler over all Aoba, even over other islands of the group. Whether he did or not McKay did not greatly care. Advancing civilization would keep Ponda in bounds. Burns, Phelps & Co. would attend to him if he interfered with their trade progress. But it would give McKay time to get Ponda's confidence, to spy out the whereabouts of Parks and his daughter, perhaps even to bargain for them.

McKay did not think the last thing likely. Ponda would not be willing to tell a white man that he had killed the crew of another and held him and his girl a prisoner. He would rather kill them and conceal all evidence. So McKay must go lightly. But the project did not show any holes. He watched Ponda's every word and gesture very carefully.

The wizard led the way to the *sing-sing* grounds, explaining that the pigs had yet to be sacrificed.

"Don't you eat any of that pork," McKay warned Sime as they followed. "It won't be cooled or bled properly, and it'll knock our digestions. It won't be wasted, though, I'll promise you that. And, keep your eyes skinned inside and out. We mustn't miss anything, but we mustn't let them think we are suspicious of *anything*."

"I got that idea ever since I spotted that *demit*," said Sime. "That thing is going to haunt me. I'm not stuck on this place, by a long shot."

It was fearfully hot. Heat seemed to beat down from the cloudless vault of blue above them as if reflected from the walls of a furnace that was lined with sapphire. It appeared to come up at them through the earth, as if an incipient volcano lay beneath their feet. The air was stagnant.

As they took their place to one side of the

sing-sing grounds the reek of the dancing natives, smeared with palm-oil against sun-burn, stank in their nostrils. The violent rays of the sun struck at them with tearing force on nerve and tissue. In the bush not a frond or leaf stirred. The glimpses of the sea looked like stretches of blue satin, un-wrinkled.

McKay had never known such heat, such windlessness. All nature seemed breathless, watching the antics of the naked savages as they sprang and whirled and postured, with the *boom-boom* of the big drums suggesting the troubled pulse of the world in a fever.

McKay stole a glance at Sime. The Californian's face was gray as if powdered with dust, his lips were gray, his eyes McKay could not see, for the lids were very close together and the mouth was also gripped to a line. Sime stood rigidly erect, and McKay longed to slip an arm about the little man's shoulders. He knew what he was suffering, nausea, dizziness, a dull but ever growing pain at the nape of the neck, fighting sunstroke, fighting those smashing tropic sun-rays, playing the man—the white man! And his heart went out to him. Sime seemed to sense his friend's regard. The lids opened and a flash came from the pale-blue eyes.

"Don't worry about me. I can stick it out."

Motionless as they were, the sweat dripped from their faces, broke through their ducks in great patches over the shoulders and under the arms, ran down legs and bodies, and left them prickly, jabbed at by a myriad needle-points of irritating heat. Sime seemed almost to visibly melt. His cheeks hollowed until the bones of his skull protruded sharply.

Their purple body shadows mocked them from the ground. To look at those of the dancers was to invite vertigo. The throb of the drums beat through and through them as the drummers, imperturbable, their faces wooden, sweat shining on their black bodies, pounded away with closed eyes, squatting on their haunches.

McKay wondered what the thermometer would say. He had never known such weather, he told himself once more. The

world—the bowl of the sea, the islands, seemed to be held down under a curving forcing-frame of blue glass through which heat poured from eternal, frightful fires, aggravated by the blazing sun suspended above them. His veins seemed shriveling. He thought of the girl sweltering in the forbidden *tambu-house*, of her father tucked away in some close confinement, and got a fresh grip on himself.

The preliminary dancers had finished. Ponda and his priestlings, carrying spears, had capered round the ground, a wild song had been chanted, and now the girls, highly plumed and their faces stained blood-red, with swirling skirts of fiber-strips, gaily colored, swung their bodies to best display their charms, and sang their song in parrot-like unison, with arms writhing in snaky gestures.

They finished, and a group of men came forward, carrying a pig, its feet bound, squealing in premonition of a bloody death. The drumbeats quickened to a tattoo that was as painful as blows. The pig-bearers advanced and retreated to the measure with shuffling feet—then flung the pig at the feet of Ponda, who thrust a spear through the shrieking thing and flung the spear from him, crying:

“Here is a pig, a pig for Motonui!”

The carcass was taken to where the spear had fallen, and its throat cut. Another pig was brought in, another spear handed to Ponda, and this continued until each spirit-stone back of its drum had received its sacrifice. The smell of blood was everywhere. It seemed to be flowing to the pulsing of the drum-logs.

With his final spearing Ponda walked away, leaving the butchery and hasty preparation of the now sacred pigs for the ovens. McKay put his hand under Sime's elbow and pretended to talk with him as they followed Ponda. But the worst of it had passed for Sime. Somehow he had braced himself. Like McKay, he had thought of the captives. And he managed to croak back at McKay from his swollen throat:

“What's the chance for a drink of something really wet and cold, Mac? What would you give for a pitcher of ice-water?

You know—the clink of the ice in the pitcher as the boy brings it up in the hall.”

“Shut up, damn you,” replied McKay amiably. “They don't use fresh water in the Hebrides, for drinking, washing, or cooking. We'll get some nuts in a minute. This has been a try-out, though it wasn't staged. But Ponda has been looking for us to cave-in for the last twenty minutes.”

“You mean twenty hours,” groaned Sime, and tried to find saliva enough to moisten his lips. But Ponda himself seemed to be suffering from desiccating membranes. He stopped under the inadequate, spidery shade of a clump of coco-palms and called for a boy to climb for young nuts. One came forward, a little unwillingly, for all his dread of the wizard. Sime waved him aside.

McKay thought the Californian had suddenly gone crazed from the heat, but Sime moved too swiftly for him to interfere. His guns came out and were fired upward in doubled, joint discharge, fairly into the stems of a nut cluster.

The gathering natives leaped back at the blending discharge of the ten cartridges. The boy gaped, palsied, and Ponda flinched. McKay noted the quiver of his diaphragm and the twitter of his eyelids.

Three nuts came tumbling down from twenty-five feet above them. One bounded on the curving bole of a palm, leaped clumsily into the air, and fell with its green shell fairly impaled upon a pointed stake driven into the ground under the palms for husking the nuts.

It was a *tour-de-force*. A hint of miracle, with that last lucky touch added. The boy stared at the nut stuck on the husking stick, afraid to touch it until Ponda snapped an order at him. Then he completed the stripping of the three nuts, beheaded them with quick strokes of a machetelike knife, and handed them to Ponda, to Mak-kei, and to the straight-shooting-little-one-who coughs. There was almost a pint of clear, slightly effervescent and cool liquor in each nut, and to McKay and Sime the draft was like a match to a faltering fire.

Ponda left them, without apology, under the grateful shade of the banyan that at least seemed cool in comparison with the

coral grit outside its *umbra*, and stalked off in the direction taken by the native who had borne away his gifts. McKay and Sime looked up at the scarlet and black and white monstrosity beside them, topped with the grinning skull of Motonui, plastered with clay to a caricature of his life-likeness, and wondered where the pearls were hidden in the framework. They could see that the *demit* was soundly anchored to the stilts of its pedestal.

"I suppose you think that was a grandstand play of mine, Mac?" asked Sime with a tongue made lithe by the coco-liquor.

"I'm glad you didn't miss," said McKay simply.

"Couldn't miss that target. I wasn't dizzy just then. Thinking about our business here pulled me together. You see, I've figured that this Ponda person is the main guy. I wanted to let him know I could shoot straight and quick. To give him an idea of what might happen to him, first and *muy pronto*, if he started any monkey tricks. He got it, all right, and, believe me, I'm going to stick to him like his shadow while we're ashore. He'll know now if he starts a break what he'll look like before the fun fairly gets going. And he'll be careful. Savvy?"

McKay nodded.

"Good dope, Fred. It won't do a bit of harm. They'll respect you and your guns after this. Here he comes back again. The feast won't be on until those pigs are half-baked, anyway. I'm going to try and get a palaver with Ponda. You'll come along with the boys. Your guns and their rifles are our best passports."

He took Ponda aside when the wizard came up, presenting an outline of his proposition, just enough to influence Ponda's ambition, though those Chinese eyes showed neither dilation nor contraction nor any change of their reddish light centered in the black pupils and deep-brown irises. But he suggested that McKay should come to his private place, and McKay's brain flushed with hope.

The lava ridges, weathered remnants of the ancient flows from the central cone of Aoba, had to a great extent moldered enough to let their surface blend with the

rich volcanic dust that had showered on them, and the bush had flourished on the soil, covering the scars. But here and there a stubborn dyke thrust out above the verdure, or emerged from it at the shore-line. A core of white-hot mineral had once crawled like a fiery snake down the mountain in a later eruption, and, cooling slowly on the exterior, let the molten pith of it flow on, leaving a hollow tube, a long cavern of flinty rock.

There were many of these on Aoba. In one of them, that had halted its march where Motonui Village now stood, Ponda had made his devil-house, his secret, tabued haunt. And to this he led McKay.

The entrance was wreathed in vines, masked by mats. Bundles of tusks from the sacred pig stood each side of the door-curtains, a skull, sign of forbidden ground, swung from a bamboo staff above them. Inside it was black as a mine pit, save for a flicker of fire. And it was cool, blessedly cool, with a draft blowing down the lava pipe from mountain sources.

By virtue of his white skin, no demur was made by Ponda to the entrance of Sime, but the latter, after one glimpse into the dark interior, only partly illumined by the light let in by the parted mats, backed out again, sensing that possibly McKay and the wizard would get along better by themselves.

"I'll play Tyler to this lodge," he said to McKay, "and if you ain't the first to come out, no one 'll come out alive," he added, for the benefit of Ponda.

The mat-curtain fell, and Ponda walked over and squatted down by the fire.

"Can you find your way, white man?" he asked. "Do your eyes see in the dark?"

"I have an eye I use in dark places, Ponda," replied McKay, flashing on his electric torch and fixing the wizard's face in the glare. Ponda did not blink. But for his color, his face was eminently Oriental, McKay thought. Without doubt a junk from Cathay had once cruised in the Hebrides. He could not tell whether Ponda had seen a torch of this kind before or not. He knew that Ponda might have been to the lower and more settled islands or might have learned of many such wonders.

Traders often found their surprises falling flat. He let the ray travel round the place for a few seconds.

Over the smoldering fire, suspended from a tripod, hung the lower shell of a giant clam, and in it simmered a potion that smelled of ambergris, pungent, powerful, almost soporific. To offset this, McKay filled and lit his pipe. All about the floor were calabashes. There was a dried alligator brought over from New Guinea, and there were many bundles that showed the dull gleam of bones through the wrappings. Above them the cavern roof was crossed with poles, and these held strings upon strings of skulls, hundreds of them, the loot of more than one generation, trophies of the days when the great *tomakos* (war-canoes) went regularly out from Motonui in flotillas of five or six, and came back with enough heads to form a ghastly pyramid on the home beach. The swiftly passing beam showed their eye-holes, vacant yet seemingly watchful, and the teeth gleaming in the down-hanging lower jaws, teeth sound and perfect and in full number.

One brief glimpse only he got of the upper end of the tube, not daring to linger over the inspection. It seemed to him that it angled abruptly and shut off the view. McKay felt positive that, somewhere in this tunnel, Parks was prisoner. Doubtless he was guarded. To attempt a sudden rescue would be foolish, would only jeopardize his daughter. He resolved to speak for a while in English, and fairly loud, in the hope that Parks might hear him, since his daughter might not have been able to get communication.

"Your *tumbu*-house is *tabu*!" he said with just the right inflection of a stranger's natural interest.

"The king died there," said Ponda, speaking native, "after a feast. He could not ease his stomach; so he died." The wizard spoke meditatively, with a suggestion of relish in the recollection of Motonui's manner of demise. "After this feast we shall build a new one. What is it you wish with me, Mak-kei?"

McKay did not answer for a moment or two. He seemed to be warming his hands at the fire, without being conscious of the

action, as he peered into the few embers that glowed out of the ashes. In reality he was making sure his hands were absolutely dry before he touched the potassium in the wide-mouthed bottle in his right-hand pocket. His safety-fireworks were in the left.

"Fire is great," he said presently. "There is nothing greater than fire!" *Shaman, kahuna, juju man*, and *voodoo* doctor, *tindalo*, wizards of all latitudes, love to talk in the abstract. To speak semi-oracularly, to spout apocalyptic phrases in a cataleptic trance, that is much of their stock in trade, to twist words that are little known, to utter sentences that work both ways from the middle. Ponda replied in kind.

"Fire is great," he assented. "But water puts out fire. From the cloud to the mountain torrent, from the stream to the sea, from sea to cloud again. It is the circle of life, and water is the symbol."

"Life cannot be without fire," said McKay. "Water you can hold in the hand; fire you cannot. Water dances with the fire under it. Not all the seas can drown the fires of Tanna and of Ambryn. Fire is the greater. And he who is master of fire masters the world."

"I am a fire-master," said Ponda. "Are you, Mak-kei?"

"It may be. Without heat, which is the soul of fire, all things must die. The sun is fire; the sun rules the heavens that are over the earth. Before fire, when fire wishes to summon its forces, water turns to clouds, to vapors and mists that are lost in the sky-bowl."

"Yet water puts out fire," said Ponda. And he reached back of him, found a calabash of water, and poured some on the embers, that gave up their life with hisses and with steam.

"That fire is gone," said McKay. "But the water is gone also. Can you bring fire from rocks, Ponda? Can you make it leap from the sand of the beach at your calling? Can you make fire spring from water?"

"I can make water boil without fire," said Ponda, "if I have the powders." He had seen the apparent conjuring caused by seidnitz powders, McKay noted. "And

there are certain seeming waters that will burn like fire," added Ponda craftily.

McKay laughed.

"These are but *teiti-teriki* (children's tricks)," he said. "Not for men like you and me, O Ponda!" He flung some of the colored papers hard against the walls of the tube and on its obsidian floor, where they exploded with bursts of flame. "Take your calabash of water and set it apart. Now watch."

He passed his hand across it and dropped a bit of the pure potassium. A violet flame sprang up. Then he dropped two morsels wrapped in the blotting-paper, and they flared and crackled. He dropped a larger pellet that fizzed about the surface, burning furiously with deep, purple bursts of the potassium vapor, the high temperature protecting the metal and defending it till the last remnant was wetted, when the final combustion of the hydrogen ceased, and, with explosive violence, the water was flung upward in a tiny flaming geyser.

Ponda was startled and impressed beyond entire reserve. "Eyah!" he cried. "That must be the very spittle of Tere (the goddess of the volcano) herself!"

"These are but simple things, Ponda," said McKay, "and shown in darkness. To-morrow you shall choose a stone that is nearly buried. I will but walk thrice around it, with you and all your people watching, and flame shall leap from the sand and circle it, at my calling. This will I do. This can I teach thee to do. Let us have some light, Ponda, that we may talk like friends who do not fear to see each other's faces."

Ponda reached out and tugged at a sennit cord. A mat slid aside from a jagged rent in the roof of the tube where gases had broken it, and a shaft of sunlight slid in and mellowed the blackness. Ponda sat gazing at McKay, and McKay knew that Ponda was wondering what the price of that knowledge might be, wondering whether this white man had heard of his prisoners, wondering whether the one native who had run off while the demit was being built had escaped after all.

"You can do this thing and teach it to me?" he asked. "Why should you show such love to me, Mak-kei?"

"It is not for love, but trade, Ponda. If I can help to make you very wise, so that all Aoba fears you and does your bidding, you can bring me such trade so that I need not fear this company of Burns, Phelps & Co. with their steamers.

"We can talk bargains together, Ponda. But first you shall see me make the fire leap from the sand. And I will show you how to make fire dance on the water and crackle on the rocks. Then we will talk of trade."

He thought he saw a glint of satisfaction soften Ponda's hard-bitten features. Ponda could understand and despise the white man's lust for *tala*. He himself knew the value of currency, the cowries and tiny shells of Micronesian treasures.

But these *papalangi* were mad over money. Ready to barter such secrets. If it was true—and the man had done much, the fizzing pellets of burning, exploding potassium had deeply impressed Ponda, opening up vast avenues of wild-wood magic and the casting out of devils—if it was true that this man could make the sand take fire about a Narak stone, then the name of Ponda, the fame of Ponda, the wealth of Ponda, but most of all the power of Ponda, should have no rival! He set himself to still the excitement that inwardly shook him.

"The feast is ready, Mak-kei," he said carelessly. "As you say, we have but done simple things in the dark. To-morrow—not with the common people, but before me and my helpers—you shall test this thing. Then we can talk."

McKay shifted deliberately into English, raising his voice as if indignant, hoping that somewhere in the recesses of the lava tube Parks might hear him.

"To-morrow, Ponda, before you and your priests. At exactly noon, though the thing may be done at any hour, but is hardest when the sun is high, I will set the sand on fire."

They went out to where Sime and the four riflemen were on guard. Ponda pointed to where the fire-pits were being uncovered. They followed him to where a bower of green thatch had been erected for the distinguished guests and the higher na-

tives. The way led past the *tambu*-house. McKay dropped back from the side of Ponda and whispered to Sime:

"Strike up a whistle as you go past this place. I think Miss Parks is there. In any case it can do no harm. It is better for me not to do it."

Sime thrust his tongue in his cheek, and McKay caught up with the wizard. As he went by the house where the *tabu* sign hung threatening, he chuckled internally as he heard the clear, shrill pipe of Sime, timed to their progress, in a tune that sounded perhaps incongruous, but mightily invigorating; the clean, jubilant spirit of America bugled through pursed lips, vibrant, defiant in that cannibal stronghold. It did not need the words. They sang themselves in McKay's mind, as Sime fluted bravely:

Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early
light,
What so proudly we bailed at the twilight's
last gleaming?

He chuckled again, almost aloud this time, as he looked at the Malaysian beside him, blend of forgotten civilizations, listening unconsciously to the pæan of progress, even quickening his steps to suit the rhythm, all unknowing that the soul of America undaunted, unafraid and confident, was marching through Motonui.

And, behind thatched walls and roofs,

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

behind close-drawn mats, Lenna Parks, in the *tambu*-house, dauntless herself and proudly serene, thrilled to the slogan of her countrymen. Back in the lava tube, bound hand and foot with sennit lines, Parks himself could not hear the piping melody, but he had heard the tones of McKay talking to the wizard, and they had given him revived strength of heart and brain to join these fellows who had come up from the sea, unknown as they were to him, but swift to the rescue.

Had Faraa won through? He had willing, capable allies close by. To-morrow they would come again. This man, *Mak-kei*—he had heard of a Thaddeus McKay as a trader who was making good.

There was already the glimmering, more than the glimmering, of a plan in the mind of Sam Parks, but, unassisted, it would have come to naught. Now—it was different! He hunched himself across the rocky floor of the blow-out chamber in the lava where he was confined, found a sharp edge of obsidian, and started to rub the cords that bound his wrists against the edge.


The sennit was tough and tightly drawn. Blood came from his wrists, and he was forced to go carefully lest Ponda might see the wounds too soon; but he persisted, and at last the fastening was loose.

A N U N

IF you become a nun, dear,
A friar I will be;
In any cell you run, dear,
Pray look behind for me!
The roses all turn pale, too;
The doves all take the veil, too;
The blind will see the show.
What! You become a nun? My dear,
I'll not believe it. No!

If you become a nun, dear,
The bishop love will be;
The cupids, every one, dear,
Will chant "We trust in thee!"
The incense will be sighing;
The candles will go a dying;
The water turn to wine.
What! You go take the vows? My dear,
You may—but they'll be mine.

Leigh Hunt.



A Hunt for Happiness

By Marie B. Schrader

I.

"PLEASE tell me the truth, doctor." There was a ring of sincerity in the pleading voice of his patient that caused Dr. Newton to knit his brows and hesitate.

It was difficult to know just what to do in such cases. Sometimes it proved the best thing to tell the truth to a person as seriously ill as Miss Myra Ellerson, and then again such frankness had been known to bring about fatal results.

Judge of human nature he thought himself, but the longer he lived to practise upon the ills of humanity the more he felt compelled to acknowledge that he was no judge of character. Patients of apparently iron wills had at times shown themselves wofully weak when the moment arrived to tell them the truth they had begged for; then again some, from whom he had expected moans and tears, had borne ominous news with surprising fortitude. Consequently, in his later years, Dr. Newman had made it a rule never to tell the truth, if it were disagreeable, unless he was convinced that there was some great cause for telling it.

He had known Miss Ellerson for years, and had frequently attended the little, pale-faced lady in her attacks of heart-trouble which had gradually been growing more severe until it became merely a matter of one more violent than the rest which

would weaken her so that she would have no more strength to resist.

Dr. Newton looked down at the face on the pillow. Even with the bluish rings around the eyes and the pinched expression, there were traces of a former delicate beauty. He recalled the charm of her manner on days when she was apparently well.

How strange that a woman like that should have remained unmarried when she could have graced a home of her own. The ways of women were certainly peculiar. She was such a woman as Dr. Newton himself might have chosen. There must have been others of like opinion. Yet, here she was, practically at the end of her life—dying with heart trouble, too.

"Well, of course," he began, avoiding her blue eyes which looked steadily into his own, "while there's life, there's always hope, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied the invalid impatiently. "That's the usual way of saying that one's chances of recovery are very small. I want to know the truth, doctor, the plain, unvarnished truth. I must know it, for if you tell me that I can't get well—" Her voice began to waver at the thought, for life was still worth living, even with attacks of heart disease. "There's something that must be done—before I die," she finished bravely. "It has been worrying me for a long time, only I didn't know how to manage it."

"Something important, eh?" asked the doctor.

"Very. I can't die without settling up everything."

"Oh! Some property?" inquired the doctor, catching the drift of her thoughts.

"The most valuable possessions I own. So, now you understand, don't you, that I must know."

The doctor hesitated no longer.

"Very well, then," he answered gravely. "Since you insist upon the truth, I must tell you that your condition is very serious."

"As I thought," said Miss Ellerson sadly as a tear trickled down her face.

"There is always a chance, of course—"

"Oh, please don't, doctor. It is necessary. And I have never had a miracle happen to me, so I suppose it won't this time."

"I am so sorry to tell you this painful news," said the doctor.

"It isn't pleasant," replied Miss Ellerson, "but I thank you, for now I shall lose no more time."

Once more the doctor mused upon the contrariness of humankind, for Miss Ellerson was known to be a very wealthy woman. She had an expert lawyer, the well-known Richard Martin, and yet, she had just said that she was worried about her most valuable possessions.

Why did people put off until too late things they should have attended to years before? Somehow, to the majority, death was much nearer others than to themselves.

"Try to be cheerful," advised the doctor as he prepared to leave. "At least you are a brave, little woman. Miraculous recoveries do happen—occasionally."

"Thank you, doctor, for all your kindness," said Miss Ellerson, "and, on your way out, would you be good enough to ask my niece to come to me?"

Dr. Newton went quietly out of the room with his head bowed.

"Oh, how is she, doctor?" asked an anxious voice while a pair of lovely, blue eyes, looking much like Miss Ellerson's must have looked some thirty years before, gazed searchingly into his own.

The doctor shook his head.

"Almost no chance, Miss Hunt," he answered in low tones. "She wants to see you at once. There's something on her mind. Try to do anything she asks you to do."

"Why, of course I will," replied Alice with a sob in her voice.

"There's a fortunate young woman," thought the doctor as he found his hat and cane. "She will inherit her aunt's immense fortune."

But Alice wasn't thinking of money. She was thinking of the sad-faced little woman who had been so sweet and patient with her childish impulses and bounding spirits, and who had filled the place of both father and mother to her for nearly all of her own care-free eighteen years.

"Aunt Myra, dear," she said softly as she placed a cool hand on the sick woman's brow, "what can I do for you? Is there anything you want. Just tell me."

Miss Ellerson looked up at the pretty face with a tender expression. Alice had always been such a devoted niece, and she was glad that she was to leave her wealth to this girl, who would use it not only for enjoyment, but for good to humanity as well.

"I must see Mr. Martin at once, dear. Call him on the phone and tell him how very important it is. Say he must come at once, for to-morrow—"

The thought that to-morrow she might be no more was too painful for them both.

"There, there, don't cry, Alice dear. I know how you will grieve, but you mustn't. Go, now, and call Mr. Martin."

A half-hour later the lawyer's limousine drew up in front of the big house and he walked briskly up the steps.

"I can't imagine what she is worrying about," he said as he shook hands with Alice. "Everything is in perfect condition so far as her affairs are concerned. She doesn't want to make any changes in her will, does she? For, in that event, I should have brought along a notary."

"She didn't mention the will," said Alice. "She didn't tell me why she wanted you to come here, only that it was very, very important."

"Sick people have curious notions,"

commented the lawyer. "Well, take me to her and let's find out what the trouble is."

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, Mr. Martin," began Miss Ellerson. "I was afraid you might be out of town. Alice, dear, please leave us alone for a few minutes. I wish to speak to Mr. Martin privately."

This struck Alice as somewhat strange, for hitherto her aunt had taken her into her confidence in regard to the smallest details of her personal affairs. However, she merely replied, "Very well, Aunt Myra," and left them together.

The lawyer remained in the sick-room for a long time. When he left it, he hastily glanced at his watch, uttered an exclamation of impatience at the lateness of the hour, then glanced up inquiringly, breathing a sigh of relief as he caught sight of Alice in the hall where she had been patiently waiting for him.

"I hope everything is all right and she won't worry any more," she began.

"Well—that depends," he replied. "It depends on you," he added. "I had no idea it was so late. I have an important business appointment, something that can't be postponed. I must talk with you. That will be impossible now, at this time, but, if you can call at my office in—say an hour and a half, I shall be at liberty and we can talk things over."

"I will be there promptly," said Alice.

"In the mean time Miss Ellerson is going to try to get a little rest. Her visit from the doctor and my own have been very taxing. I told her she might rely upon you."

"But, really, I don't quite understand."

"Of course you don't," observed Mr. Martin, "but that isn't necessary."

"Oh!"

In another moment he was half-way down the steps, and when Alice had recovered sufficiently from her surprise over his words she saw his car just about to turn the corner.

What did it all mean?

She did not know Mr. Martin very well, but he had always impressed her as a man who disliked mystery, yet only a few min-

utes before he had spoken in such a way as to arouse her curiosity to the utmost. Evidently she was to be given some tremendous responsibility, and she became extremely nervous at the very idea, especially since it was of such great importance to her dying aunt.

"It depends upon you," Mr. Martin had said. What depended upon her?

It was with the greatest impatience she waited for the time for her call at the law office. She was unable to see her aunt during the interim, for the nurse said she was still trying to rest between the paroxysms of pain.

Finally, Alice could stand the suspense no longer. She knew that she would arrive ahead of time for her appointment, yet she hurried to Mr. Martin's place just as though she were late instead of early.

His confidential secretary, John Bradley, an ambitious young man whom she knew very well, since he called frequently, and for some time past had been saying little things that unmistakably suggested that he loved her, was in the outer room and came forward to meet her.

"I am glad that Mr. Martin is engaged for a few minutes," he began as he took her hand in greeting.

"Why?" asked Alice innocently, her heart and mind busy with thoughts of her aunt and how she could help her.

"Because," went on Bradley in low tones, after glancing about to see that the blond stenographer was not within hearing, "because, somehow I have never had a chance to say what I wanted to—there was always some one around."

"But, really, Mr. Bradley," rejoined Alice, very much astonished, "I have very little time just now. I came to see Mr. Martin about something very serious."

"I know," said Bradley sympathetically, "and I was certainly deeply grieved to hear of Miss Ellerson's illness. At the same time, I feel that the rules of conventional society should not restrain me from offering my sympathy and"—he hesitated, then plunged boldly forward—"and—my love."

"Your—" Alice's amazement was emphatic.

"My—love," repeated Bradley softly.

"Really, Mr. Bradley!"

Alice's face turned crimson at the thought of this young man actually saying such a thing to her while her beloved aunt lay dying, and she herself had called on some unknown but very important mission concerning her.

"If I didn't love you so deeply I would not speak at this time," continued the secretary; "but I feel that now is the moment when you need genuine love and a sympathetic support. I have always wanted to ask you to be my wife, but the time was not opportune. I could not say the words now if it were not for the fact that I realize how helpless you will be in this big world without a man of experience to guide you. The world is full of pitfalls for the unwary, the innocent. I love you, and I would protect you from harm. I am finishing my law course in another month, and then I expect to start out for myself. Mr. Martin says I have a future—so—"

Alice at first felt a wave of indignation come over her, but on second thoughts she realized that much she had just listened to was true. But she hadn't contemplated marriage as a bulwark against such possibilities as might threaten an unprotected girl. She liked Bradley well enough, since he was good-looking, entertaining, and no doubt would make a success in the legal profession, but, as a husband, that was another thing altogether.

He spoke of love. What was love?

Alice had never been in love in her life. Why had it been so difficult? Other girls fell in love and out of love often, according to their own accounts, but she was different.

While thus reflecting, she completely forgot the presence of Bradley.

Suddenly she saw that he was waiting for some sort of answer.

"I am sorry, Mr. Bradley," she said then. "You see—I don't love you—but I like you, and appreciate your kindness in wishing to protect me—but, for the present, I shall just trust to luck and a good lawyer."

Bradley's face fell, and he was about to say something else when the inner door opened and Mr. Martin came forward.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he said; "but now I am free. Please come right in."

So Alice left Bradley a prey to his disappointed hopes.

She would not have felt so sorry for him, however, if she had seen the expression that came over his face the moment Mr. Martin closed the door. The quiet, well-bred secretary flung himself down in a chair and stared fixedly into space. Humiliation and anger were raging within him.

"I wonder what it's all about," he muttered to himself as the sound of the voices of Mr. Martin and his caller came to him through a near-by open window. "It must be something of unusual importance or Miss Hunt would not leave her dying aunt."

He moved nearer the window, which brought him within distinct hearing. Whatever the matter under discussion was, no doubt Mr. Martin would tell him about it later, anyhow, so he had no compunctions about playing eavesdropper. Besides, the open window might be blamed, not himself.

In the mean time, Mr. Martin lost no time in explaining the meaning of his hurried words of an hour and a half previous.

"You love your aunt very devotedly, do you not, Miss Hunt?" he inquired by way of preliminary.

"Oh, indeed I do?" answered Alice.

"And am I right in thinking that you would do almost anything for her happiness?"

"Oh, yes. Only tell me what it is."

"You must be ready to leave New York at nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said Mr. Martin without further ado.

"To leave New York!"

Amazement was written all over the girl's face.

"You must go to Greenwood, Georgia."

"Greenwood!" exclaimed Alice. "Why, that's Aunt Myra's old home, where she lived as a girl. I have often wondered why she never went back there, for she seemed to love it so, though she has always insisted that she preferred New York. I have always thought I would like to see

the town and the big, old house she has so often described to me."

"Well, you will now have an opportunity to do so," remarked the lawyer. "But the conditions of your visit will not be as you may have pictured them; in fact, your trip must be a secret one—that is, almost a secret, for one other person besides ourselves will know about it. However, I will come to that later. The main thing is your readiness to go. No other person could possibly undertake the responsibility, for the case is an unusual one."

Alice's eyes opened wide at his words, but she discreetly refrained from comment.

"I cannot take you fully into my confidence, for I am merely carrying out the instructions of your aunt. This is probably her last request, and it means more to her than anything else in the world. If Miss Ellerson had only told me of the existence of the black box when she was able to be up and about, I could have had the entire matter attended to with little difficulty, but I knew nothing about it until this afternoon, and now she will worry until she has it in her possession."

"A black box?" said Alice wonderingly.

"Now, my dear young lady, you must ask me no questions, for I can tell you nothing, except that Miss Ellerson has said that it contains her most valued possessions, things that are priceless. Therefore, after thinking over the whole matter very carefully, I decided, not to risk sending any one but yourself on this delicate mission. At first Miss Ellerson would not hear of your undertaking the trip, but later agreed that you were the one person who could be trusted. She does not wish it known in Greenwood that a member of her family is in the town, for you know how inquisitive such places are. Too much explanation would have to be forthcoming. Therefore it is better that you go there under an assumed name."

"An assumed name!" exclaimed Alice, whose surprise increased with every new statement made by the lawyer.

"Exactly. No one knows you in Greenwood, since you have never been there, but in towns of that kind there are always

persons who never forget the names of even cousins of people of prominence. As the niece of Miss Ellerson, your name would be inquired into, once it appeared on the hotel register."

"Am I going to a hotel?"

"Yes. The Central, I believe your aunt said it is called. Suppose you call yourself Miss Graham—Miss Elsie Graham. The Central Hotel is on Main Street, a short distance from the station. You will have no difficulty in finding it. Now the two chief points of your trip are revealed—first that you are going after a box, and that you must call yourself Miss Elsie Graham."

"I understand," said the girl.

"One other person, whom I mentioned a moment ago, is to be a party in the proceedings, a young man, with a very uncommon name, Xerxes Woodward Clarkson. He is to help you carry out my instructions."

"Xerxes Woodward Clarkson," repeated Alice. "That is the oddest name I ever heard."

"Be sure you don't forget it," cautioned Mr. Martin.

"Oh, that would be impossible!" declared Alice.

"Mr. Clarkson is absolutely reliable, and the soul of honor. You can trust him implicitly. No young lawyer in that part of the country has a finer reputation."

The lawyer thought a moment.

"Miss Hunt," he went on then, "you are called upon to do a very daring thing—one more reason for keeping your identity unknown. You are to go alone with Mr. Clarkson to the old home of your aunt and stand beside him while he digs in a certain spot for the black box. Your aunt was very particular on the point. She doesn't want the box to be out of your sight from the moment it is removed from the place where it has been buried for thirty years."

"Oh, Mr. Martin!" exclaimed Alice, her face flushed with excitement. "Am I really here, in your office? Are you really asking me to go to a deserted house and watch the digging up of a box that has been buried for thirty years?"

"I know it must sound like a plot for a novel," said Mr. Martin, "but that is just what you are to do."

"I think I must be dreaming," declared Alice. "Since my aunt is so particular about it, I have an idea it must contain that diamond necklace she has mentioned as 'safe somewhere,' but which I have never seen. Why, it's worth a fortune." But how will I know where to dig for the box?"

"The house is the only one in the block between Spring and Moody Streets, with its front looking toward King Street. It sets well back, and—"

"And has large magnolia and myrtle trees near the porch," added Alice. "Oh, I feel I know it as well as though I had played in that big garden among the gardenias—Aunt Myra calls them jasmine—and all the sweet, old-fashioned flowers she loved so. Under the porch is a door between spiral stairs with iron railings which lead to the big entrance doors."

"Exactly. You have a splendid idea of the place. It is through the ground-floor door that you must gain entrance to the house. The main door would be too conspicuous. Also, you must choose a time when there will be little danger of your being observed, say about dusk, at supper-time, when few people are liable to be on the streets."

"But how am I to get in the house?"

"Here is the key which your aunt gave me. Be sure you do not lose it."

Alice took the clumsy, old-fashioned iron key and placed it in her bag.

"You aren't superstitious, are you?" inquired Mr. Martin as a sudden thought came to him.

"I hope I am far too sensible for that," replied Alice.

"Because," the lawyer continued, "your aunt's old home has somehow acquired the reputation of being haunted."

"Well," said Alice, "I must confess that the idea of ghosts isn't exactly pleasant. If I were going to be alone I might feel rather shivery, but there's Mr. Xerxes Woodward Clarkson. Is he superstitious?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the lawyer. "How could such a man be?"

"I don't know," said Alice dubiously. "Anyhow, I am glad to know he isn't that kind."

"As I told you," said Mr. Martin, "Mr. Clarkson is absolutely reliable in every way, even in regard to ghosts."

"Then it would be impossible for me to be afraid," declared the girl. "By the way, you haven't told me what Mr. Clarkson is like. I mean, is he dark or fair? Has he blue eyes or brown, with a mustache or clean shaven?"

"It's a good thing you mentioned that," said Mr. Martin. "As a matter of fact, I only know Mr. Clarkson by reputation and correspondence."

"But my aunt must know him."

"No. She hasn't lived in Greenwood for thirty years, and he is only twenty-four. His uncle looked after the occasional business necessary in regard to your aunt's property until his death, when, quite naturally, his nephew, Xerxes, took up the work."

"I see," said Alice. "But how, then, am I to know Mr. Clarkson when I meet him?"

"I will attend to that right now," and the lawyer pushed a button summoning his stenographer.

But no one answered his ring.

Again he pushed the button. This time the door was opened by Bradley.

"Is there anything I can do, Mr. Martin?" he inquired in his most obliging tones. "Miss Smith is out on an office errand."

Mr. Martin seemed annoyed. He didn't want Bradley at all, for this time he had no intention of taking his secretary into his confidence.

"Thank you, Bradley. It doesn't matter. I have changed my mind."

The secretary bowed politely and left the room.

"I will write the letter myself," said Mr. Martin to Alice. "That's the safest plan anyhow."

In a few minutes he had finished it and handed it to Alice for approval. It contained directions for Mr. Clarkson to accompany Miss Hunt to the Ellerson house at dusk, and to dig in the earth floor under

an old chest which stood at the end of the big storage room under the parlor. In case the chest had been removed, he could locate the spot by taking two steps from the right wall and three from the other one. He was informed that this must be done in the presence of Miss Hunt, to whom he was to give the box immediately.

"That covers the ground pretty thoroughly, I believe," said Mr. Martin.

"But how am I to locate Mr. Clarkson?"

"I will send him a wire."

Again Mr. Martin pushed the button, and once more Bradley answered.

"Kindly send this telegram for me at once, Bradley," said the lawyer:

"TO XERXES WOODWARD CLARKSON,

"151 Broad Street,

"Greenwood, Georgia.

"Please call on Miss Elsie Graham at Central Hotel, Greenwood, Thursday, between three and six. Important communication of legal nature."

"I wish you would go right over to the telegraph-office, Bradley, and see that this is rushed to Mr. Clarkson."

"I will attend to it immediately," Bradley assured him as he withdrew.

"And now, Miss Hunt, nothing more remains in the shape of instructions. It's up to you and Clarkson to carry out your aunt's wishes. You should reach your destination by one o'clock day after to-morrow if you take the morning train, and you should lose no time. The sooner you return the better. I leave that to you to arrange when you get there. This letter," and he held out the one he had just written to Clarkson, "is to be given by you in person to Mr. Clarkson."

"I understand," said Alice. "And you may trust me to give it to no one but Mr. Clarkson."

"In the mean time, the best of luck, and may you find your aunt still alive on your return. Assure her that she need not worry, since you will carry out all instructions."

"I will," and she hurried from the office.

It required some little time to buy her ticket and sleeper and attend to a few details necessary for her trip, so she did not

see her aunt that evening, but the nurse permitted a hasty good-by the next morning.

"Everything is going to be all right, aunty dear, and your precious box will soon be here; but keep up your strength until I get back. I hope to find you much better."

The sick woman smiled a sad, grateful smile.

"I will try, dear," she said. "I can't die without that box."

But nothing in regard to the box's contents did she divulge, nor did Alice ask questions.

An hour later found her comfortably seated in the through express which would take her to Greenwood. Her only baggage, a suit-case, in which reposed the letter of instructions, was right beside her.

Alice tried to read, but she couldn't concentrate her thoughts on anything but this astonishing trip. She couldn't realize even then that she was actually on her way to Greenwood, but the flying landscape assured her that she was living an actuality.

She tried to picture what Mr. Clarkson would be like. She couldn't think of him as handsome, for usually the handsome men sought the big cities and were not content to jog along in easy comfort in the small towns. However, of course, there was always a chance that the rule would prove the exception.

It would be so much more interesting if Mr. Clarkson should really be good-looking. After all, she concluded, what difference could it make?

"This strange man," she mused, "is to help me carry out some important instructions. When that is done, I shall probably never lay eyes on him again. Maybe I won't want to."

It annoyed her to know that Mr. Clarkson was assuming such a prominent position in her thoughts, but then the circumstances of the case were so decidedly unusual. Three subjects kept running through her mind—her aunt, the black box, and Xerxes Woodward Clarkson, the man with the most curious name she had ever heard for a plain American to bear. Southern men, she had noticed, were more

likely to possess quaint names than Northerners. Their mothers seemed oftener to choose from the poetic and heroic rather than from the practical and simple-sounding.

That night Alice retired early. She didn't sleep very well, but when she did manage to get a little rest, she always awoke with a start from some thrilling adventure in which Xerxes Woodward Clarkson was the principal figure, and invariably she saw him with fair hair and blue eyes.

The car had not been well filled on leaving New York, but the next morning Alice discovered more people had got on during the night. None of them was particularly interesting as to type, and Alice decided that her book was the best entertainment she could find.

The train stopped at Atlanta for a while, and among the newcomers was a handsome young man, well dressed, and evidently of refinement.

Everything about him bespoke an assured position in life, and Alice soon found herself wondering who and what he was; whether he were a Southerner or a Northerner; whether he happened to be single or married.

His seat was across the aisle and not far from hers, and it was not long before she found the brown eyes of the stranger fixed upon her in undisguised admiration, though he hastened to busy himself with the morning paper as soon as he found his glance discovered. Alice noticed, however, some minutes later, that he was still reading in the same spot, and she knew that he was not interested in the news. She was satisfied, however, that he had not meant his glance to be impertinent, as he took good care not to be caught again.

"That man is a keen judge of human nature," she decided after studying his face when she thought he would not see her.

At luncheon, when Alice made her appearance in the diner, the head waiter said he was sorry, but he would have to keep her waiting, unless she didn't mind sitting at the same table with a gentleman. If she did mind she would probably have to wait a long time, so "Come this way, please, miss."

Before Alice had time to think whether she really minded sitting with a strange man or not, she was facing him as the waiter pulled out the vacant chair at a table for two only.

And the gentleman proved to be the good-looking young man with the soft but penetrating brown eyes.

She sat for some moments with her own intent upon the *menu*.

She decided to have broiled chicken, and was looking about for the waiter when a well-modulated voice remarked:

"I beg pardon, but let me offer a suggestion—do not take broiled chicken. Lamb chops would be much better. And I should advise eliminating the mayonnaise dressing with your salad."

Alice glanced at his plate as he spoke, and saw that he had had both chicken and salad with mayonnaise, and his suggestion was therefore made from experience.

"Oh, thank you," she said, when she had recovered from her surprise.

"I know that the chops must be good, for I have overheard comments in that direction; also the grapefruit is 'delicious,' according to the young girl who sat across the way a moment ago."

Alice smiled, the ice was broken, and she soon found herself chatting quite comfortably with the man across the table.

When they returned to the Pullman they became still better acquainted. Alice was right about the stranger's keen powers of observation, and she enjoyed his reading of the types of people in the car and his comments on the passing scenery.

"What curious names some of these little towns have," said Alice as the train flew past a little station bearing the name Xenophon. "I shouldn't like to live in a town called Xenophon. It would be too imposing to pronounce. Some people, also, are burdened with the most impossible names. I have just heard a new one. How would you like to go through life with a name like Xerxes?"

The young man didn't answer for a moment, and appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"I shouldn't like it at all," he replied finally with a little laugh. "Unfortunately—"

ly, however, none of us has a say in the choice of our names."

"But of all the names, fancy Xerxes," continued Alice. "It is all right for a mythological hero, but applied to an up-to-date young man, it seems too—too—However, I suppose the young man calls himself by one of his other names," she finished.

"I have a confession to make," said the stranger. "Please do not laugh, but, extraordinary as it may seem, my own name happens to be Xerxes."

Alice was so astonished she did not know what to say, and an awkward silence fell.

She blushed, and was quite upset.

"Now, please don't feel badly about it," continued the stranger. "How could you know that my name was Xerxes? I don't mind at all, for I agree with you that it is an awful handicap for any parent to bestow upon a child."

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Alice. "I do hope you will forgive me. I wouldn't for the world have said such a thing if I had known. But how could I know?"

"Please think no more about it," rejoined the young man. "Besides, wait until you hear the rest of my names. Worse and more of them. My dear mother, no doubt, meant well, but it's an awful thing to try to live up to such a combination as Xerxes Woodward Clarkson, especially in a small place like my home town, Greenwood, Georgia." He smiled as he spoke.

But Alice did not smile in return. Instead, she almost jumped from her seat. Claspng the young man's arm impulsively with both hands, she exclaimed: "Oh, no, it can't be! You aren't Mr. Xerxes Woodward Clarkson, of Greenwood, Georgia?"

"And why not?" The young man seemed rather annoyed.

"Oh, I beg pardon," said Alice. "I didn't mean really that I thought you weren't Mr. Clarkson, only it has happened so strangely. It all seems like a novel or a dream."

Alice still stared at him. She was on her way to meet this very man who sat there beside her. Where, but in fiction, could such a thing have happened?

"It's a funny thing," she said later,

when she had recovered a bit from her surprise. "Somehow, I had imagined you as having blue eyes and fair hair."

"Well, I am sorry, but I happen to be anything but a blond. But, tell me—how did you come to have any ideas regarding me anyhow—that's what you said, didn't you? How could you imagine me with 'blue eyes and fair hair,' when you never heard of me until just this minute?"

"That's the strangest part of it all," said Alice. "Mr. Clarkson, I left New York yesterday morning, and my destination is Greenwood, Georgia. I am the niece of Miss Myra Ellerson, formerly of Greenwood."

"Miss Myra Ellerson," repeated the young man. "Why, I know the Ellerson family well—that is, I know all about them. I happen to have been looking after some property interests for Miss Ellerson through Mr. Andrew Martin, the lawyer of 52 Park Row."

"Oh!" exclaimed Alice, as the last doubt in regard to her companion's identity vanished with this information. "Mr. Clarkson, I am Elsie Graham (alias Alice Hunt), the niece of Miss Myra Ellerson, and you must have received a wire from Mr. Martin asking you to call on me at the Central Hotel this afternoon."

"Delighted to meet you, Miss Hunt," said Clarkson gallantly. "I must confess, however, that I received no telegram from Mr. Martin since I haven't been in Greenwood for the past two days, having had to run up to Atlanta on business."

"I believe Mr. Martin never thought of the possibility of your being out of town when he sent that wire," remarked Alice thoughtfully. "However, it doesn't matter now, for I will telegraph as soon as we reach Greenwood that everything is all right."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Martin had thought of just such a possibility, that very morning, too, so had taken the precaution, before going to his office, to call up Clarkson's office on the long-distance telephone. He could not get Clarkson himself, but his assistant gave the information that Mr. Clarkson was out of town, but would be back that afternoon without fail.

Mr. Martin asked whether his telegram had been delivered, and learned that it had not. Thereupon he congratulated himself upon having telephoned, and left directions for Mr. Clarkson to call on Miss Elsie Graham that afternoon between three and six at the Central Hotel.

"That was luck!" he murmured as he hung up the receiver, little dreaming that almost at that moment Alice was looking in her suit-case for the letter of instructions with which he had entrusted her.

"And can you tell me if the matter about which Mr. Martin telegraphed was important?" inquired her companion.

"I should say it is," replied the girl; "so important that I have come all the way from New York to Greenwood to see you about it."

"Oh, come, now, quit your kidding," said Clarkson.

Alice looked up at him quickly.

"You said that just like a New Yorker," she said. "But you are a Southerner, aren't you?"

"Why, of course. No place like the South, and so far as Greenwood is concerned—you are welcome to your Fifth Avenue and your Broadway. Main and Broad Streets are good enough for me. But, you said just now, you were on your way to Greenwood to see me."

"So I am. And here is a letter to you from Mr. Martin. It's a good thing he gave me the letter instead of mailing it."

Clarkson read the letter through in silence.

"This will be quite an adventure," he observed as he folded it up, returned it to the envelope, and started to hand it back to Alice. "On second thought, perhaps it would be better for me to keep these instructions."

The train was drawing into Greenwood, and Clarkson busied himself with Alice's suit-case and his own. He offered to escort her to her hotel, but she preferred to get a taxi and go alone.

"Then I shall call for you at six promptly," he said as he gave the driver his instructions. "And let us trust we shall have no difficulty in getting the box. Shall I take care of the key for you?"

Alice started to give him the key, but decided it was too big and clumsy for him to bother with. "Besides, you will not need it until we meet," she said.

II.

THE big clock in the post-office tower was sounding the hour when a porter announced that a gentleman was waiting for Miss Graham in the parlor.

Five minutes later the two were on their way.

They had hardly left the hotel and were still in sight when a young man hurried up to the hotel desk and asked for Miss Elsie Graham. Before the clerk had an opportunity to reply, the same porter who had announced Alice's first caller, interrupted with:

"Miss Graham's jes' gone out, suh. Yes, suh, wif anudder gemman—not one minute ago, suh. Yes, suh. I specs ef you hurry up yuh ken ketch up wid 'em." And he ran to the door where he pointed to the retreating forms of Alice and her guide.

"Another gentleman!" exclaimed the caller, who seemed much disappointed, "What was his name, porter?"

"I never heahed it, suh. He nebber done gib it. Dey jes' walked away together."

"Dat Miss Graham mus' done be a terrible attractive lady," he remarked to the clerk, "wif two gemmans already scrappin' ober her."

Darkness was descending upon the quiet little town of Greenwood as Alice and Clarkson entered the big grounds of the Ellerson home. There was nothing rickety in the appearance of the fence and gate, which were of iron, and intended to outlast the ravages of time, nor in the solidly built mansion with its two winding flights of stone steps leading to the front door. But any one could know that the place had not been inhabited for many years because of the luxuriant growth of the hedges, the shrubs and trees and the tangle of old-fashioned flowers, now surrendering to the onslaughts of the autumn sun and cool nights.

They had arrived entirely unobserved, for Greenwood seemed to be taking its eve-

ning meal on the stroke of the hour, as Mr. Martin had suggested it would. That is, they were unobserved save for the presence of the young man who had called for Miss Graham at the hotel and had followed the pair to the old house. He concealed himself at a safe distance while Elsie's protector inserted the big key in the lower door. In another instant the pair entered the mansion.

But the unsuspected member of the trio was not far from them. In fact, nothing had escaped his notice. He had seen Clarkson take a pick from behind one of the bushes near the porch, had watched him turn on the electric lamp which he took from his pocket, and now the sound of digging fell upon his listening ears as having slipped in behind them, he crouched hidden behind a pile of old furniture covered with dust and cobwebs.

"I do hope we have the exact spot," said Alice anxiously.

"How can we miss it?" asked her companion. "Here is the place right under the old chest, and it is two steps from the right wall and three from the other one. We are following instructions."

So the sound of the pick continued until suddenly a different noise told that it had come in contact with something more unyielding than the earth.

"It was the box.

"At last!" exclaimed the digger as he rested his pick for a moment and wiped his forehead, which was covered with perspiration caused by such unusual exertion.

"I fear you are not very athletic," said Alice in disappointed tones.

"I must admit I am not fond of strenuous physical labor," returned the digger, who felt her words as a spur to his efforts.

"Hurrah! Now we have it!"

He leaned over and brought up in triumph a dirt-incrusted, rusted, black, metal box, while the watcher behind the old furniture ran the risk of being discovered as he strained his sight in the darkness to catch a closer view of the mysterious object.

"Funny looking old-fashioned thing, isn't it?" asked the man who didn't like hard work.

"Yes; but then it's been there for thirty years," said Alice.

"I wonder what it contains?"

"I don't know; but whatever it is, is more valuable to my aunt than anything else she owns, she says, so it must be priceless."

"It must be. Too bad we haven't a key to it—just to see what the contents are."

"I wouldn't open it if I had a key," said Alice. "My aunt would have told me if she had wished me to know."

"Is isn't very heavy?"

"If it is the diamond necklace I think it is, it wouldn't weigh much, would it? Of course there are other things in it, too."

Clarkson hastily pushed the loose dirt back in the hole, shoved the old chest into its former position, and one would never have known that the place had been disturbed at all. He threw the pick behind a bush on their way to the front gate. Then, taking the arm of the girl to whom he had given the box as soon as he had dug it up, he hurried with her back to the hotel.

"We did that very successfully, I should say," he remarked, glancing about. "Nobody anywhere. The place might as well be a cemetery."

They neglected, however, to notice the man a block behind them who was gradually moving nearer and nearer.

Just then a sudden gust of wind swept around the corner and almost took Alice's hat off. The pin fell to the sidewalk and her hat hung over one ear.

"Oh, dear! How annoying!"

Clarkson picked up the pin.

"Can I help?" he asked. "Let me hold the box while you fix it."

Of course Alice couldn't pin her hat on and hold the box at the same time, so she gave it to him.

For a second only her head was bent as she fixed her hat.

But the sound of running caused her to pause and look quickly around.

Mr. Clarkson was running down the street and the black box was in his hand. Alice was so dumfounded she could not call. She stood quite still, looking helplessly around.

Not a man anywhere. Yes, there was one. He, too, was running, but in her direction.

Alice waited as if rooted to the spot.

"I saw it all," were the words with which the stranger greeted her.

"Oh, run, run, please. Catch him. He has my black box. Please get it for me. Oh, run, please. Hurry!"

The young man dashed off in pursuit only to return presently with the news that the man and the box had disappeared completely.

Alice was heartbroken.

"But I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You did your best to catch him. I can't understand why he should do such a thing."

"How long had you known this man?"

"Why, I only met him this morning on the train; but I was going to meet him anyhow, for I had an important letter to give him. Do you live in Greenwood?"

"I have lived here all my life."

"Then surely you must have heard of Mr. Xerxes Woodward Clarkson. It is such an unusual name."

"I should say I have heard of him," replied the young man. "But you don't mean to tell me that that thief is Xerxes Clarkson?"

"That's his name," said Alice.

"And he lives in Greenwood?"

"Yes. He is a prominent young lawyer here, with offices at 151 Broad Street."

"Who told you that? Did he?"

"Why, yes."

"Pardon me, Miss Graham, but that man is a liar."

"Miss Graham!" exclaimed Alice in surprise. "How do you know that name?"

"Miss Graham, I am the only Xerxes Woodward Clarkson living in Greenwood. I was born and raised here; everybody in town knows me, and I know everybody. It is my office which is at 151 Broad Street. And, I give you my word, that man who has just treated you in such dastardly fashion has never been seen in this town before. Now, come, let us go back to your hotel and you can tell me the whole story. And to make sure that you are not being imposed upon a second time by a scoun-

drel, I will have myself identified several times."

As he spoke they passed a solitary policeman. The officer touched his hat.

"I see you are back, Mr. Clarkson," he said. "I heard you were out of town."

"Only up the line for a day; a little business trip," replied the young man pleasantly as they walked on. As they neared the hotel several persons greeted him as "Mr. Clarkson."

There could be no doubt as to his identity, and Alice then realized how easily she had been deceived by her plausible companion of the train.

"Did you receive a wire from Mr. Martin?" she inquired.

"No, but he rang up long-distance, and my assistant got the message that I was to call on you at your hotel. I did so as soon as I could after getting back to town. You were just going down the street with that man, and I followed, thinking at first to catch up with you and make another appointment, since I knew nothing of the nature of your business with me. Then, to my amazement, I saw you enter the Ellerson house and go into the basement. It was all so mysterious that I hope you will forgive me for following. I hid behind some old furniture and saw and heard everything. I determined to keep a sharp lookout and to follow you back to the hotel. So long as you were determined not to let the box out of your hands, I knew there was nothing to fear, though I suspected the man the moment I had a good look at him. There was something about those eyes of his—"

"You have blue eyes, haven't you?"

"You can see for yourself."

"And fair hair—"

He lifted his hat and let her see for herself.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Alice.

"How did you know it?"

"I think I must have dreamed it."

"Oh!"

There was a moment of embarrassment for both.

"But what am I to do?" asked Alice.

"My aunt, Miss Ellerson, is dying, and there are things of great value in that box."

"Your aunt, did you say? But I thought I knew of all the members of the Ellerson family, and I never heard of a Miss Elsie Graham as being the niece of Miss Ellerson. I understood that she had only one niece, her heiress, and her name I am sure is Miss Alice Hunt."

"I am Alice Hunt, Mr. Clarkson?" said Alice. "It was Mr. Martin's idea for me to use the name of Graham."

"I see," said Clarkson. "He didn't want any one to know that one of the Ellersons was in town after all these years."

"Exactly."

"I must get Mr. Martin on long distance right away," said Clarkson, "and ask him what to do."

He had hardly spoken when the wind blew with such violence that they were almost swept off their feet, while such a rain-storm as had seldom been chronicled in that section came down upon them just as they reached the hotel piazza.

"Please come in and wait until the storm is over," insisted Alice.

"Oh, I wouldn't leave you just yet for anything," Clarkson assured her. "You have had such a fright you must be dreadfully nervous and unstrung."

"I am," and Alice burst into tears.

"There! There! I understand how you feel. It was an awful shock. Never mind. I will do everything that can be done to find the thief. Neither your name, nor Miss Ellerson's can be mentioned in this affair, but I can make inquiries of the police, at the railroad station, and everywhere, claiming the box stolen as my own."

"Oh, that is exactly the right way to do it," said Alice gratefully.

Just then the hotel clerk passed by.

"An awful storm, Mr. Clarkson. All the telegraph and telephone wires are down. This is the equinoctial. According to the weather warnings it will last twenty-four hours."

"That settles the telephone call to Mr. Martin," said Clarkson. "By the way, I wonder how the man who took the black box knew my name. You say you never saw him before?"

"Never in my life."

"My name is such an odd one, that he couldn't have imagined it. Tom Brown or John Smith would have been easy, but not Xerxes Clarkson. He must have known about it somehow. How many people knew of your proposed trip?"

"Only my aunt, Mr. Martin, and myself."

"How about his stenographer?"

"She was out."

"His private secretary?"

"No. Mr. Martin didn't say a word to him—in fact, he said he preferred not to."

"Well, it's a great mystery."

"That man knew all about your business, and about Mr. Martin and my aunt. It's positively uncanny."

"Like most difficult problems, we will laugh at its simplicity when we find the answer."

"I wish we knew the answer now," said Alice, "and that we could get the box. How can I tell my aunt that it was stolen?"

"Let's hope something will turn up before you have to do that."

"A messenger done brought a package fur you, miss," announced a porter, his white teeth showing.

"How funny!" exclaimed Alice. "Who could be sending me a package in Greenwood? Bring it here, porter."

When the bulky wrapping, bearing the address, "Miss Elsie Graham," had been removed, the black box was revealed.

Astonishment was written on the faces of both the lawyer and the girl.

Evidently the box had been opened because of scratches around the lock, but it had been relocked.

"It seems as heavy as before," said Alice, "but no doubt the thief has substituted something to take the place of the valuables he stole."

She then explained to Clarkson that she could not and would not open the box without the permission of her aunt—not even at that moment.

Now that she had the box again in her possession, Alice decided that the best thing to do would be to go home on the first train possible, since there was no other way of communicating immediately with New York. And it was useless for Clark-

son to report the robbery to the police since Alice had no idea what was missing from the box. The only solution would be to hurry back to Mr. Martin and tell him all that had happened.

Clarkson assured her that he could not think of letting her go alone. There was a train leaving for the North in an hour, and, much to the astonishment of the hotel clerk, Miss Elsie Graham, who had been there only a few hours, asked for her bill.

"These Northern women are certainly peculiar," he observed to his assistant. "Here's this one, got here from New York at two and is leaving at ten. What do you make of it? She must like to travel."

III.

ALICE and Clarkson went direct from the train to Mr. Martin's office the morning of their arrival. The lawyer had just come down. It was nine o'clock. Alice had phoned her aunt's house, and was relieved to know that she was better.

Mr. Martin was alone, and Alice wondered where the stenographer and secretary were.

It did not take her long to tell her story and the part the false and the true Clarkson had played in it.

"Here is the box, Mr. Martin," she said, "though I know you will find that the valuables are gone."

"I can soon tell," Mr. Martin assured her, "for your aunt has described them all to me."

He inserted the key and lifted the lid.

To the astonishment of Alice and Clarkson, the contents proved to be a bundle of faded letters, a crumbling rose, a miniature and a lock of hair.

The lawyer shook his head as he touched the things.

"Romance never dies," he observed. "These are her valuables more precious than rubies and diamonds."

"But the diamond necklace?" asked Alice.

"That was never in the black box. It is in the safe deposit, and will be yours, together with all her other valuables. Isn't it strange that she should have kept these things a secret all these years? She

has told me the whole story. When a girl she loved a young man whose one fault was that he had not made his mark in the world. Her parents disapproved of the match and ordered him to stay away. They also demanded that their daughter surrender all the trinkets he had given her. Instead she bribed an old negro servant to help her bury them under the chest where they have lain undisturbed all these years. Feeling that some day strange eyes might look upon these sentimental belongings, letters addressed to her, she decided to destroy them."

"Poor Aunt Myra," said Alice. "That explains why she never married, and why she would never go back to the old home, though she loved it so."

"That, too, is to be yours," said Mr. Martin. "But the story you have told me about the man calling himself by Mr. Clarkson's name is simply astounding."

A sudden thought came to him.

"I wonder if—"

He did not complete the sentence, for a sound from the outer room told them that some one was there.

"I wonder if that's Bradley," he said. "I can't understand what is keeping him so late. He is usually very punctual."

He opened wide the door and invited the caller, a man, to enter.

"Mr. Andrew Martin?" inquired the man.

"Yes, I am Mr. Martin."

"I suppose you have been looking for your confidential secretary this morning?"

"I certainly have. He is usually very prompt."

"Well, I am afraid he will have to disappoint you this morning. I am Detective Weedon, from the central office. We have your secretary in custody, I am sorry to say."

"What's that? In custody? I can't believe it. Why, what's he done?"

"Stole a diamond necklace and other stuff from a box. Oh, he didn't do it himself, but he put a pal of his on the scent, a slick, good-looking fellow, polite enough to move in the best society—the kind that could take any woman in, even the smartest of them, by his easy ways. This secre-

tary of yours, somehow, got information in your office, through an open window, he says in his confession, in regard to a black box full of valuables and a diamond necklace worth a ton of money. He sicked his partner onto the job. A jealous woman let out on him, in revenge, and give the snap away. His confederate met the girl on the train to Greenwood all right, but when we caught the crook in Atlanta on his way back North, he didn't have a five-dollar bill on him. Here's his picture. Oh, we know him well up at our place. He says he got fooled as to the diamond necklace, though I suppose he's stowed it away safe enough."

The detective produced a photograph, which Alice, looking over the lawyer's shoulder, recognized at once as her former traveling companion.

She was about to say, "That's the man," when a look from Mr. Martin restrained her.

"I am looking for evidence," said the sleuth.

"I am afraid I can't help you, officer," answered the lawyer, "for the reason that the thief was right in saying he was mistaken in regard to the contents of the box, which are all safe. There were no jewels in the box."

"Too bad, for I'd like to land the slick one, and the fellow Bradley, who is trying to get rich quick, according to his own excuse. Making an honest salary ain't good

enough for him. Maybe this will teach him a lesson, however. These amateurs don't get away with it so easy as they think. Good day. Sorry to bother you."

Just then the telephone rang.

Miss Ellerson's nurse wanted to tell Miss Alice the good news that the doctor had said that Miss Ellerson had passed the crisis in the battle with her heart, and that, while she could not recover from this chronic trouble, the end was not to be this time."

"Oh, I am so glad," said Alice.

"So am I," said Clarkson. "Of course if your aunt had no chance of getting well, I should have had to return to Greenwood immediately, but since she is better—why, that makes a difference."

"Why?" asked Alice innocently.

"Because, now, perhaps you will have a little time to spare," said Clarkson.

"Oh, yes, I shall have time," said Alice with a blush. Then, haphazard, she remarked: "Greenwood is such a romantic-looking place."

"Yes, it is," agreed Xerxes Woodward Clarkson. "Romance is in the very air there. But the romance is found wherever the only girl is."

"You mean the 'only man,'" said Alice.

"As a matter of fact," said Clarkson, with his blue eyes looking ardently into hers, "romance is found wherever the right girl and the right man are."

And she could argue the case no further.

SUMMER MORN

MYRIAD are the charms of morning
 As the sun peeps o'er the hill,
 And the thrush salutes the dawning
 With his rapturous strain and trill;
 Earth is beamy in her gladness
 When the great awakening light,
 Dissipating gloom and sadness,
 Wrests the scepter from the night.

There upon the dew-decked altar
 Pour the passion of the soul;
 Be not niggardly nor palter,
 Lest you offer not the whole;
 There amid the regnant beauty,
 There upon the jeweled sward,
 In acknowledgment and duty
 Breathe your thankfulness to God!

Reuben Goldsmith.

Tracing the Shadow by Carolyn Wells

Author of "Vicky Van," etc.

CHAPTER X.

PENNY WISE AND ZIZI.

AND so it was at this stage of affairs that Pennington Wise got into the game. He willingly agreed to take up the case, for the mystery of it appealed to him strongly, and by a stroke of good luck he was not otherwise engaged.

He had promised to call at Miss Raynor's, and as she had asked me to be present also, I went up there, reaching the house before Wise did.

"What's he like?" Olive inquired of me.

"Good-looking sort of chap, without being handsome," I told her. "You'll like his personality, I'm sure."

"I don't care a fig for his personality," she returned, "but I do want him to solve our two mysteries. I suppose you'll think I'm dreadful—but I'd rather Mr. Wise would find Amory Manning for me than to discover Uncle Amos's murderer."

"I don't blame you at all for that. Of course, we want to find the criminal, but even more, I, too, want to find Mr. Manning for you."

"And, anyway, I suppose the police think now that Mr. Rodman did it."

"They don't go so far as to say that, but they're hunting up the evidence, and they've got hold of some pretty damaging information. It seems Rodman was mixed up in some wrong-doing, and it begins to look as if Mr. Gately was in some way connected with it—at least, to a degree."

"If he was, then he didn't know it was wrong." Olive spoke with deep conviction, and I didn't try to disabuse her mind concerning it.

And then Pennington Wise was announced.

As he entered the room his manner showed no trace of self-consciousness, and as I had anticipated, Olive was greatly pleased with her first glimpse of him. But to her surprise, and mine also, he was accompanied, or, rather, followed by a young woman, a mere slip of a girl, who paused and stood quietly by.

As Olive smiled at her inquiringly, Wise said:

"That's Zizi. She's part of my working paraphernalia, and will just sit and listen while we talk."

The girl was fascinating to look at. Slight of build, she had a lithe suppleness that made her every motion a gesture of grace, and her pretty smile was appreciative and responsive. She had black hair, and very black eyes, which sparkled and danced as she took in her surroundings. But she said no word, acknowledging her brief introduction only by a slight bow, and accepting the chair that Olive offered, she sat quietly, her small, gloved hands resting in her lap.

She wore a black suit with a fine set of black-fox furs. Unfastening the fur collar, she disclosed a black blouse of soft, thin material which fell away from her slender white throat in becoming fashion.

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 19.

Her manner was correct in every particular, and she sat in an unembarrassed silence as Wise proceeded to talk.

"I know all that has been in the papers," he said, a little abruptly; "now, I'd like you to tell me the rest. I can't help feeling there must be more in the way of evidence or clues than has been made public. First of all, do *you* think Mr. Rodman the guilty man?"

He addressed himself mainly to Olive, though including me in his inquiring glance.

"I'm sure I don't know," Olive returned. "I won't believe, however, that Amos Gately was involved in any sort of wrong. His honor and integrity were of the highest type; I knew him intimately enough to certify to that."

"What sort of wrong-doing is this Rodman accused of?" asked Wise.

"Nobody seems willing to tell that," I answered, as Olive shook her head. "I've inquired of the police, and they decline to reveal just what they do suspect him of. But I think it's something pretty serious, and they're tracking it down as fast as they can."

"You see," Olive put in, "if Mr. Rodman is such a bad man, he may have hoodwinked Mr. Gately, and made him believe something was all right, when it was all wrong."

"Of course he might," said Wise, sympathetically. "Did people come here to the house to see Mr. Gately on business?"

"No; never. Uncle had few visitors, but they were always just his friends, not business callers."

"Then most of our search must be in his offices. You noticed nothing there, Mr. Brice, that seemed indicative?"

Then I told him about the hatpin and the carriage check; and I also related how Norah had found and kept the "powder paper" that she picked out of the wastebasket.

Zizi's eyes flashed at this, and she said: "Has she traced it?"

It was the first time the girl had spoken, and I was charmed with her voice. Low and soft, it had also a bell-like quality, and seemed to leave a ringing echo in the air after she ceased speaking.

"Yes; to the shop where it was bought," I replied. "As Norah guessed, it came from a very high-class perfumer's on Fifth Avenue. But of course, he could not tell us to whom he had sold that particular paper."

"I'd like to see it," said Zizi simply, and again relapsed into silence.

"Norah must be a bright girl," observed Wise, "and she has made a good start by finding the shop. Perhaps we can carry the trail further. It wasn't yours, Miss Raynor?"

"No; I use a paler tint. This one, I have seen it, is quite a deep pink."

"Indicating a brunette, possibly. Now, it's not likely it belonged to that old Mrs. Driggs, so we must assume another woman in the office that day. And we must discover who she is."

"There is the hatpin, you know," said Olive. "I have it here, if you care to see it. But the police decided it meant nothing."

"Nothing means nothing," said Zizi, with a funny little smile. "Please let us see the hatpin."

Olive took it from a desk drawer, and handed it to the girl, who immediately passed it over to Penny Wise.

He looked at it with interest, for a silent minute.

"There couldn't be a better *portrait parlé!*" he exclaimed. "This pin belongs to a lady with dark, straight hair—coarse, and lots of it. She has good teeth, and she is proud of them. Her tastes incline to the flashy, and she is fond of strong perfumes. She is of somewhat untidy habits, and given to sentiment. She is intellectual and efficient and, if not wealthy, she has at least, a competence."

"For gracious goodness' sake!" gasped Olive. "And I've studied that hatpin for hours and never could deduce a thing!"

"What I have read from it may be of no use to us," said Wise indifferently; "I think it will be sufficient indication which way to look to find the lady in question, but that doesn't necessarily mean the finding of her will do any good."

"But she may know something to tell us that will do good," Olive suggested; "at

any rate, let's find her. How will you go about it?"

"Why, I think it will be a good plan to ask the stenographer, Jenny Boyd, if she ever saw any one there who fits our description."

"She's the lady of the powder-paper, maybe," murmured Zizi, and Penny Wise said: "Of course" in a preoccupied way, and then went on:

"That Jenny person must be further grilled. She hasn't told all she knows. She was in Mr. Gately's employ but a short time, and yet she picked up a lot of information. But she hasn't divulged it all, not by a long shot!"

"How do you know all this?" asked Olive, wonderingly.

"I've read the papers. I have an unbreakable habit of reading between the lines and I think Miss Jenny has been persuaded by somebody to suppress certain interesting bits of evidence that would fit right into our picture puzzle."

"May I come in?" said a gentle voice, and Mrs. Vail appeared in the doorway.

As we rose to greet her, Olive presented Mr. Wise, and then Mrs. Vail permitted herself the luxury of a stare of genuine curiosity.

His whimsical smile charmed her, and she was most cordial of speech and manner. Indeed, so absorbed was she in this new acquaintance that she didn't even see Zizi, who, sat, as always, back and in the shadow.

"Don't let me interrupt," said Mrs. Vail, fluttering into a chair. "Just go on as if I were not here. I'm so interested—just let me listen! I won't say a word. Oh, Olive, dear, did you show Mr. Wise the letter?"

"No; it's unimportant," replied the girl.

"But I don't think it is, my dear," Mrs. Vail persisted. "You know it might be a—what do they call it—a clue. Why, I know a lady once—"

"A letter is always important," said Zizi, from her corner, and Mrs. Vail jumped and gave a startled exclamation.

"Who's that?" she cried, peering through her *lorgnon* in the direction of the voice.

"Show yourself, Zizi," directed Wise. "This is my assistant, Mrs. Vail. She is in our council but not of it. I can't ex-

plain her, exactly, but you'll come to understand her."

Zizi leaned forward and gave Mrs. Vail a pleasant if indifferent smile; then sank back to her usual obscurity.

The girl was, according to Wise, a negligible personality, and yet whenever she spoke she said something!

Mrs. Vail looked bewildered, but apparently she was prepared to accept anything, however strange, in connection with detective work.

"Well," she observed, "as that pretty little thing says, a letter is always important, and I think you ought to show it, Olive. I had a letter once that changed the whole current of my life!"

"What is this letter, Miss Raynor?" asked Wise, in a matter-of-fact way.

"One I received in this morning's mail," Olive replied; "I paid no attention to it, because it was anonymous. Uncle Amos told me once, never to notice an anonymous letter—always to burn and forget it."

"Good enough advice, in general," said Wise; "but in such serious matters as we have before us, any letter is of interest."

"Is the letter written by a woman, and signed 'A Friend'?" asked Zizi.

"Did you write it?" cried Olive, turning to the wraithlike girl who sat so quietly behind her.

"Oh—no, no, no! I didn't write it," and the demure little face showed a fleeting smile.

"Then how did you know? For it is signed 'A Friend,' but I don't know whether it was a woman who wrote it or not."

"It was," and Zizi nodded her sleek, little, black head. She had removed her hat and placed it on a near-by chair, and as she nestled into her furs which formed a dark background, her small white face looked more eery than ever. "You see, ninety per cent of all anonymous letters are written by women, and ninety per cent of these, are signed: 'A Friend.' Though usually that is a misstatement."

"May I see the letter?" asked Wise.

"Sure; I'll get it."

It was Zizi who spoke! And rising, she went swiftly across the room, to a desk, and

from a pigeonhole took an opened letter, which she carried to Wise, and then dropped back into her seat again.

Mrs. Vail gave a surprised gasp, and Olive looked her amazement.

"How did you know where to find that?" she exclaimed, her great brown eyes wide with wonder.

"Dead easy," said Zizi nonchalantly; "you've scarcely taken your eyes off that spot, Miss Raynor, since the letter was mentioned!"

"But, even though I looked at the desk, how could you pick out the very letter, at once?"

"Oh, I looked at the desk, too. And I saw your morning's mail, pretty well sorted out. There's a pile of bills, a pile of what are unmistakably social notes, and, up above, in a pigeonhole, all by itself, was this letter. You glanced at it a dozen times or more, so I couldn't help knowing."

Olive laughed. One couldn't help liking the strange girl, whose expression was so earnest, even while her black eyes were dancing.

Meanwhile Penny Wise examined the missive.

"I'll read it aloud?" and he glanced at Olive, who acquiesced by a nod.

MISS RAYNOR:

Quit looking for slayer of A. G. or you'll be railroaded in yourself. This is straight goods. Call off all tecs, or beware of consequences. Will not warn twice!

A FRIEND.

"A woman," Pennington Wise said, in a musing voice, after he read it.

"A business woman," added Zizi, from her corner.

"A stenographer, maybe," Wise went on, and Olive cried:

"Do you mean Jenny?"

"Oh, no; this is written by a woman with more brains than Jenny ever dreamed of. A very clever woman, in fact."

"Who?" breathed Olive, her eager face flushing in her interest and anxiety to know more.

"I don't know that, Miss Raynor, but—"

"Oh, Mr. Wise," broke in Mrs. Vail,

"you are so wonderful! Won't you explain how you do it, as you go along?"

She spoke as if he were a conjuror.

"Anything to oblige," Wise assented. "Well, here's how it looks to me. The writer of this letter is a business woman, not only because she uses this large, single sheet of bond paper, but because she knows how to use it. She is a stenographer—by that I do not necessarily mean that is her business—she may have a knowledge of stenography, and be in some much more important line of work. But she is an accomplished typist, and a rapid one. This, I know, of course, from the neat and uniform typing. She is clever, because she has used this non-committal paper, which is in no way especial or individual. She is a business woman, again, because she uses such expressions as 'quit,' 'railroaded,' 'tecs,' 'straight goods'—"

"Which she might do by way of being misleading," murmured Zizi.

"Too many of 'em, and too casually used, Zizi. A society girl trying to pose as a business woman never would have rolled those words in so easily. I should have said a newspaper woman, but for a certain peculiarity of style, which indicates—what, Zizi?"

"You've got it; a telegraph operator."

"Exactly. Do you know any telegrapher, Miss Raynor?"

"No, indeed!" and Olive looked astounded at the suggestion that she should number such among her acquaintances. "Are you sure?"

"Looks mighty like it. The short sentences and the elimination of personal pronouns seem to me to denote a telegraph girl's diction. And she is very clever! She has sent the carbon copy of the letter and not the outside typing."

"Why?" I asked.

"To make it less traceable. You know, typewriting is very nearly as individual as pen-writing. The differentiations of the machine as well as of the user's technique are almost invariably so pronounced as to make the writing recognizable. Now, these peculiarities, while often clear on the first paper, are blurred, more or less, on the carbon copy. So 'A Friend,' thinking to be

very canny, has sent the carbon. This is a new trick, though I've seen it done several times of late.

"But it isn't so misleading as it is thought to be. For all the individual peculiarities of the typewriter—I mean, the machine, are almost as visible on this as on the other. I've noted them in this case, easily. And, moreover, the would-be clever writer has overreached herself! For a carbon copy smudges so easily that it is almost impossible to touch it, even to fold the sheet, without leaving a tell-tale thumb or finger-print! And this correspondent has most obligingly done so!"

"Really!" breathed Zizi, with a note of satisfaction in her low voice.

"And the peculiarities—what are they?" asked Olive.

"The one that jumps out and hits me first is the elevated *s*. Look—and you have to look closely, Miss Raynor—in every instance the letter *s* is a tiny speck higher than the other letters."

"Why, so it is," and Olive examined the letter with deep interest; "but how can you find a machine with an elevated *s*?"

"It isn't a sign-board, it's a proof. When we think we have the right machine, the *s* will prove it—not lead us to it."

"Let me see," begged Mrs. Vail, reaching for the paper. "A friend of mine is a stenographer; maybe she—"

"Excuse me," and Penny Wise folded the letter most carefully. "We can't get any more finger-prints on this paper, or we shall render it useless. Now, Miss Raynor, I'm going. I'll take the letter, and I've little doubt it will be a great help to me in my work. I will report to you from time to time, but it may be a few days before I learn anything of importance. Zizi?"

"Yes; I'll stay here," and the girl sat quietly in her chair.

"That means she'll take up her abode with you for the present, Miss Raynor," and Wise smiled at Olive.

"Live here?"

"Yes, please. It is necessary, or she wouldn't do it."

"Oh, let her stay!" cried Mrs. Vail; "she's so interesting—and queer!"

The object of her comment gave her an

engaging smile, but said nothing, and beckoning me to go with him, Wise rose to take leave.

But I wanted to have a little further talk with Olive on several matters and I told Wise I'd join him a little later.

"Be goody-girl, Zizi," he adjured, as he went off, and she nodded her head, but with a saucy grimace, at the detective.

"My room?" she asked inquiringly, with a pretty, shy glance at Olive. "I'm no trouble—not a bit. Any little old room, you know."

"You shall have it in a few moments," and Olive went away to see the housemaids about it.

Mrs. Vail snatched at a chance to talk uninterruptedly to the strange girl.

"What is your work?" she inquired; "do you help Mr. Wise? Isn't he wonderful! How you must admire him. I knew a detective once—or, at least, a man who was going to be a detective, but—oh, *do* tell me what your part of the work is!"

"I sit by," returned Zizi, with a dear little grin that took off all edge of curtness.

"Sit by! Is that some technical term? I don't quite understand."

"I don't always understand myself," and the girl shook her head slowly; "but I just remain silent until Mr. Wise wants me to speak—to tell him something, you know. Then I tell him."

"But how do *you* know it?" I put in, fascinated by this strange child, for she looked little more than a child.

"Oh!" Zizi shuddered, and drew her small self together, her black eyes, round and uncanny looking. "Oh! I dunno how I know; I guess the bogy man tells me!"

Mrs. Vail shuddered too, and gave a little shriek.

"You're a witch," she cried; "own up, now, aren't you a witch?"

"Yes, lady, lady! I *am* a witch—a poor little witch girl!" And Zizi laughed outright at her own little joke.

If her smile had been charming, her laugh was more so. It was not only of a silvery trill, but it was infectious, and Mrs. Vail and I laughed in sympathy.

"What are you all laughing at?" said Olive, reappearing.

"At me," and Zizi spoke humbly now; "I made 'em laugh. Sorry!"

"Come along with me, you funny child," and Olive led her away, leaving me to be the victim of Mrs. Vail's incessant stream of chatter.

The good lady volubly discussed the detective and his assistant and detailed many accounts of people she had known. Her acquaintance was seemingly a wide one!

At last Olive returned, smiling.

"I never saw anything like her!" she exclaimed. "I gave her a pretty little room, not far from mine. I don't know, I'm sure, why she's staying here, but I like to have her. Well, in about two minutes she had the furniture all changed about. Not the heavy pieces, of course, but she moved a small table and all the chairs, and finally unscrewed an electric light bulb from one place and put it on another, and then after looking all about, she said: 'Just one thing more!' And if she didn't spring up onto a table with one jump, and take down quite a large picture! 'There,' she said, and she set it out in the hall, 'I can't bear that thing! Now this is a lovely room, and I thank you, Miss Raynor. The pink one we passed is yours, isn't it?'"

"'Yes; how did you know?'" I asked her. And she said: 'I saw a photograph of Mr. Manning on your bureau.' Little rascal! I can't help liking her!"

CHAPTER XI.

CASE RIVERS.

SO absorbed was I in the new interests that had come into my life, so anxious to be of assistance to Olive Raynor, and so curious to watch the procedure of Pennington Wise, that I confess I forgot all about the poor chap I had seen at Bellevue Hospital—the man who "fell through the earth"! And I'm not sure I should ever have thought of him again, save as a fleeting memory, if I hadn't received a letter from him:

MY DEAR BRICE:

I've no right to pilfer your time, but if you have a few minutes to squander, I wish you'd give them to me. I'm about to be dis-

charged from the hospital, with a clean bill of health, but with no hint or clue as to my cherished identity. The doctors—drat 'em—say that some day my memory will spring, full-armed, back at me, but meanwhile I must just sit tight and wait. Not being of a patient disposition, I'm going to get busy at acquiring a new identity; then, if the old one ever does spring a come-back, I'll have two—and can lead a double life! No, I'm not flippant—I'm philosophical. Well, if your offer didn't have a string tried to it, come in to see me, please.

Sincerely yours,

CASE RIVERS.

P. S.—The doctors look upon me as a very important and interesting case—hence my name.

I smiled at the note, and as I had taken a liking to the man from the start, I went at once to see him.

"No," I assured him, after receiving his cordial welcome, "my offer had no string attached. I'm more than ready to help you in any way I can, to find a niche for you in this old town, and fit you into it. It doesn't matter where you hail from, or how you got here; New York is an all-comers' race, and the devil take the hindmost."

"He won't get me, then," and Rivers nodded his head determinedly; "I may not be in the van, just at first, but give me half a chance, and I'll make good!"

This was not bumptiousness or braggadocio, I could see, but an earnest determination. The man was sincere, and he had a certain doggedness of purpose, which was evident in his looks and manner as well as in his words.

Rivers was up and dressed now, and I saw he was a good-looking chap. His light brown hair was carefully parted and brushed; his smooth-shaven face was thin and pale, but showed strong lines of character. He had been fitted with glasses—a *pince-nez*, held by a tiny gold chain over one ear—and this corrected the vacant look in his eyes. His clothes were inexpensive and quite unmistakably ready-made.

He was apologetic. "I'd rather have better duds," he said, "but as I had to borrow money to clothe myself at all, I didn't want to splurge. One doctor here is a brick! He's going to follow up my 'case,' and so I accepted his loans. It's a fearful

predicament to be a live, grown-up man, without a cent to your name!"

"Let me be your banker," I offered, in all sincerity; "I—"

"No; I don't want coin so much as I want a way to earn some. Now, if you'll put me in the way of getting work—anything that pays pretty well—I'll be obliged, sir, and I'll be on my way."

His smile was of that frank, chummy sort that makes for sympathy, and I agreed to help in any way I could think of.

"What can you do?" I asked preliminarily.

"Dunno. Have to investigate myself, and learn what are my latent talents. Doubtless their name is legion. But I've nailed one of them. I can draw! Witness these masterpieces!"

He held up some sheets of scribble paper on which I saw several careful and well done mechanical drawings.

"You were a draftsman," I exclaimed, "in that lost life of yours!"

"I don't know. I may have been. Anyway, these things are all right."

"What are they?"

"Not much of anything. They're sort of designs for wall-paper or oilcloth. See? Merely suggestions, you know, but this one, repeated, would make a ripping study for a two-toned paper."

"You're right," I exclaimed, in admiration of the pattern. "You must have been a designer of such things."

"No matter what I *was*—the thing is what can I be *now*, to take my place in the economic world. These are, do you see, adaptations from snow crystals."

"So they are! It takes me back to my school days."

"Perhaps I'm harking back to those, too. I remember the pictures of snow crystals in 'Steele's Fourteen Weeks In Natural Science.' Did you study that?"

"I did," I replied, grinning, "in high school! But, is your memory returning?"

"Not so's you'd notice it! I have recollection of all I learned in an educational way, but I can't see any individual picture of *me*, personally—oh, never mind! How can I get a position as master designer in some great factory?"

"That's a big order," I laughed. "But you can begin in a small way and rise to a proud eminence—"

"No, thanky! I'm not as young as I once was—my favorite doctor puts me down at thirty—plus or minus—but I feel about sixty."

"Really, Rivers, do you feel like an old man?"

"Not physically—that's the queer part. But I feel as if my life was all behind me—"

"Oh, that's because of your temporary mental—"

"I know it. And I'm going to conquer it—or get around it some way. Now, if you'll introduce me—and, yes, act as my guarantee, my reference—I know it's asking a lot, but if you'll do that, I'll make good, I promise you!"

"I believe you will, and I'm only too glad to do it. I'll take you, whenever you say, around to a firm I know of, that I believe will be jolly glad to get you. You see, so many men of your gifts have gone to war—"

"Yes, I know, and I'd like to enlist, myself, but doc says I can't, being a—a defective."

"I wish you were a detective, instead," I said, partly to turn the current of his thoughts from his condition and partly because my mind was so full of my own interests that he was a secondary consideration.

"I'd like to be. I've been reading a bunch of detective stories since I've been here in hospital, and I don't see as that deduction business is such a great stunt. *Sherlock Holmes* is all right, but most of his imitators are stuff and nonsense."

And then, unable to hold it back any longer, I told him all about the Gately case and about Pennington Wise.

He was deeply interested, and his eyes sparkled when I related Wise's deductions from the hatpin.

"Has he proved it yet?" he asked; "have you checked him up?"

"No, but there hasn't been time. He's only just started his work. And he has another task; to find Amory Manning."

"Who's he?"

"A man who has disappeared, and there is a fear of foul play."

"Is he suspected of killing Gately?"

"Oh, no, not that; but he was suspected of hiding to shield Miss Raynor—"

"Pshaw! a girl wouldn't commit a murder like that."

"I don't think this girl did, anyway. And, in fact, they—the police, I mean, have a new suspect. There's a man named Rodman, who is being looked up."

"Oh, it's all a great game! I wish I could get out into the world and take part in such things!"

"You will, old man. Once you're fairly started, the world will be—"

"My cellar-door! You bet it will. I'm going to slide right down it."

"What about your falling through it? Do you remember any more details of that somewhat—er—unusual performance?"

"Yes, I do! And you can laugh all you like. That's no hallucination—it's a clear, true memory—the only memory I have."

"Just what do you remember?"

"That journey through the earth—"

"You been reading Jules Verne, lately?"

"Never read it. But that long journey, down, down—miles and miles—I can never forget it! I've had a globe to look at, and I suppose I must have started thousands of miles from here—"

"Oh, now, come off—"

"Well, it's no use. I can't make anybody believe it, but it's the truth!"

"Write it up for the movies. 'The Man Who Fell Through the Earth' would be a stunning title!"

"Now you're guying me again. Guess I'll shut up on that subject. But I'll stick you for one more helping-hand act. Where can I get a room to live in for a short time?"

"Why a short time?"

"Because I must take a dinky little cheap place, at first; then, soon, I'll be on my feet, financially speaking, and I can move to decenter quarters. You see, I'm going to ask you to trust me for a few shekels, right now, and I'll return the loan, with interest, at no far distant date."

His calm assumption of success in a business way impressed me favorably. Un-

doubtedly, he had been one accustomed to making and spending money in his previous life, and he took it as a matter of course. But his common sense, which had by no means deserted him, made him aware that he could get no satisfactory position without some sort of credentials.

As he talked, he was idly, it seemed, unconsciously, drawing on the paper pad that lay on the table at his elbow. Delicate penciled marks, that resolved themselves into six-sided figures, whose radii blossomed out into beautiful tendrils or spikes until they formed a perfect, harmonious whole; each section alike, just as in a snow crystal.

They were so exquisitely done that I marveled at his peculiar gift.

"You ought to design lace," I observed; "those designs are too fine for papers or carpets."

"Perhaps so," he returned, seriously gazing at his drawings. "Anyway, I'll design something—and it'll be something worth while!"

"Maybe you were an engraver," I hazarded, "before you—"

"Before I fell through the earth? Maybe I was. Well, then, suppose, to-morrow I so far encroach on your good offices, as to go with you, to see the firm you mentioned. Or, if you'll give me a letter of introduction—"

"Do you know your way around New York?"

"I'm not sure. I have a feeling I was in New York once—a long time ago, but I can't say for certain."

"I'll go with you, then. I'll call for you to-morrow, and escort you to the office I have in mind, and also, look up a home and fireside that appeals to you."

"The sort that appeals to me is out of the question at present," he said, firmly determined to put himself under no greater obligation to me than need be. "I'll choose a room like the old gentleman in the Bible had; with a bed and a table and a stool and a candlestick."

"You remember your literature, all right."

"I do, mostly; though I'll confess I read of that ascetic individual since I've been here. The hospital is long on Bibles and

detective stories, and short on *belles-lettres*. Well, so long, old man!"

I went away, pondering. It was a strange case, this of Case Rivers. I smiled at the name he had chosen.

He was, positively, a well-educated and well-read man. His speech gave me a slight impression of an Englishman, and I wondered if he might be Canadian. Of course, I didn't believe an atom of his yarn about coming from Canada to our fair city, *via* the interior of the globe, but he may have had a lapse of memory that included his railroad journey, and dreamed that he came in some fantastic way.

And then, as is usual, when leaving one scene for another, my thoughts flew ahead to my next errand, which was a visit to police headquarters.

Here Chief Martin gave me a lot of new information. It seemed they had unearthed damaging evidence in the case of George Rodman, and he was, without doubt, a malefactor—but in what particular branch of evil, the chief omitted to state. Nor could my rather broad hints produce any result. At last, I said:

"Why don't you arrest Rodman, then?"

"Not enough definite evidence. I'm just about sure that he killed Gately, and I think I know why, but I can't prove it—yet. Your statement that his head shadowed on that glass door was the same head you saw the day of the murder is our strongest point—"

"Oh, I didn't say that!" I cried aghast; "I do say it looked like the same head, but I wouldn't swear that it was!"

"Well, I think it was, and though we can't connect up the pistol with Rodman—"

"Did you get the pistol from the Boston man?"

"Yes; Scanlon brought home that bacon. But careful grilling failed to get any more information from Lusk, the man who found the pistol. He tells a straight tale of his visit to the Puritan Building, and his business there, all corroborated by the people he called on. He found that pistol, just as he says he did. And, of course, I knew he told the truth in his letter. If he were involved, or had any guilty knowledge of the crime, he surely wouldn't write to tell us of it! So,

now, we have the pistol, and we know it was picked up in the tenth floor hall near Rodman's door—but that proves nothing, since we can't claim it is Rodman's weapon. It may be, of course, but there's nothing to show it."

"What does Rodman say for himself?"

"Denies everything. Says he had the merest nodding acquaintance with Gately—this, we know is a lie—says he knew there was an elevator door in his room, but he had never used it, nor even opened it. Said he hung a big war map over it, because it was a good place for a map. We've no living witness to give a shred of evidence against Rodman, except your statement about his shadow—and that is uncertain at best."

"Yes, it is. I do say it looked like Rodman's head—that is, I mean, Rodman's head looked like the one I saw that day. But other heads might look as much like it."

"That's the trouble. George Rodman is a slick chap, and what he does that he doesn't want known doesn't get known! But I'm onto him! And I'll bet I'll get him yet. He's so confoundedly cool that all I say to him rolls off like water off a duck's back. He knows I've got no proof, and he's banking on that to get through."

"What about Jenny? Can't she tell you anything?"

"She knows nothing about Rodman. And that very point proves that if he visited Gately often, as I think he did, he came and went by that private elevator which connected their two offices, as well as made a street exit for either or both of them."

"Did old man Boyd ever see Rodman leave the Matteawan by way of that elevator?"

"He says he never did, but sometimes I think Rodman has fixed him."

"And Jenny, too, maybe."

"Maybe. And here's another thing. There's somebody called the 'Link,' who figures largely in the whole affair, but figures secretly. I won't say how I found this little joker, but if I can dig up who the Link is, I've made a great stride toward success."

Naturally, I said nothing about Penning-

ten Wise to the chief of police, but I made a mental note of the Link to report to the detective.

"Reward's offered," we were suddenly informed, as Foxy Jim Hudson burst into the room.

"For what?" asked the chief, a little absent-mindedly.

"For information leading to the whereabouts of Amory Manning."

Martin wheeled round in his chair to look at his subordinate. "Who offered it? How much?"

"That's the queer part, chief. Not the amount—that's five thousand dollars—but it's a person or persons unknown who will put up the kale. It's done through the firm of Kellogg & Keillogg—about the whitest bunch of lawyers in town. I mean, whoever offers that reward is somebody worth while. No shyster business. I'm for it—the money, I mean. Do you know, chief, the disappearance of that Manning chap is in some way connected with the Gately murder? I've got a hunch on that. And here's how I dope it out: Manning saw Rodman—well, perhaps he didn't see him shoot, but he saw something that incriminated Rodman, and so he—Rodman—had to get Manning out of the way. And did! You see, Friend Rodman is not only a deep-dyed scoundrel—but the dye was 'made in Germany'!"

"Well, I'm glad the reward is offered," commented the chief. "Now maybe some rank outsider 'll pipe up and speak his little piece."

"Meaning anybody in particular?" I asked.

With that peculiarly irritating trick of his, Chief Martin not only made no reply, but gave no evidence of having heard my question. He went on:

"That makes two rewards. The Puritan Trust Company has offered five thousand for the apprehension of Gately's murderer. This other five thousand adds to the excitement, and ought to produce a good result."

"I'm out for both," announced Hudson. "Can't say I expect to get 'em, but I'll make a fierce stab at it. Rodman has an awful big income, and no visible means of support. That fact ought to help."

"How?" I asked.

"Oh, it proves to my mind that he was mixed up in a lucrative business that he didn't—well—advertise. The Link was mixed in, too. That is—I suppose—the Link was a sort of go-between, and allowed Rodman to transact his nefarious deals—secretly."

"Well, Foxy, you know a lot," and the chief laughed, good-humoredly.

I felt that I now knew a bit, too, and as I went away, I determined to see Penny Wise at once, and report all I had learned. I dropped in first at my own office, and found Norah in a brown study, her hands behind her head, and a half-written letter in her typewriter.

She gazed at me, absently, and then, noting my air of excitement, she became alert, and exclaimed: "What's happened? What do you know new?"

"Heaps," I vouchsafed, and then I told her, briefly, of Rodman's probable guilt and also of the offered rewards.

"Jenny's your trump-card," she said after a thoughtful silence. "That girl knows a good deal that she hasn't told. I shouldn't be surprised if she's in Rodman's employ."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, she's too glib. She admits so many things that she has seen or heard, and then when you ask her about others, she is a blank wall. Now, she does know about them, but she won't tell. Why? Because she's paid not to."

"Then how can we get around her?"

"Pay her more." And Norah returned to her typing. But she looked up again to say: "Mrs. Russell called here about an hour ago."

"She did! What for?"

"I don't know. She wanted to see you. She was a bit forlorn, so I talked to her a little."

"I'm glad you did. Poor lady, she feels her brother's absence terribly."

"Yes; we discussed it. She thinks he has been killed."

"Has she any reason to think that?"

"No, except that she dreamed it."

"A most natural dream for a nervous, worried woman."

"Of course. I wonder if she knows there's a reward offered for Mr. Manning?"

"Maybe she offered it—through the Kellogg people."

"No, she didn't."

"Pray, how do you know, oh, modern Cassandra?"

"I don't know your old friend, Cassandra, but I do know Mrs. Russell isn't offering any five thousand dollars. She can't afford it."

"Why, she's a rich woman."

"She passes for one, and, of course, she isn't suffering for food or clothes. But she is economizing. She was wearing her last year's hat and muff, and she maids herself."

"Perhaps she wore her old clothes because she was merely out to call on my unworthy self."

"No. She was on her way to a reception. They're her best clothes just now. And a tiny rip in one glove and a missing snap-fastener on her bodice proves she keeps no personal lady's-maid, as people in her position usually do. So, I'm sure she isn't offering big reward money, though she loves her brother."

"You're a born detective, Norah. You'll beat Penny Wise at his own game, if he doesn't watch out!"

"Maybe," said Norah, and she laid her finger-tips gracefully back on her typewriter keys.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LINK.

IT was the next afternoon that Penny Wise came into my office. It was his first visit there, and I gave him a hearty welcome. Norah looked so eagerly expectant that I introduced him to her, for I couldn't bear to disappoint the girl by ignoring her.

Wise was delightfully cordial toward her, and indeed Norah's winsome personality always made people friendly.

I had tried to get in touch with the detective the day before, but he was out on various errands, and I missed him here and there, nor could we get together until he found this leisure.

I told him all I had learned from the police, but part of it was already known to him. He was greatly interested in the news, which he had not heard before, that there was somebody implicated, who was called the Link.

"That's the one we want!" he cried. "I suspected some such person."

"Man or woman?" asked Norah, briefly, and Wise glanced at her.

"Which do you think?"

"Woman," she replied, and Penny Wise nodded his head. "Yes, I've no doubt the Link is a woman, and a mighty important factor in the case."

"But I don't understand," I put in. "What does she link?"

"Whom—not what," said Wise, and he looked very serious. "Of course you must realize, Brice, there's a great big motive behind this Gately murder, and there's also a big reason for Amory Manning's disappearance. The two are connected—there's no doubt of that—but that doesn't argue Manning the murderer, of course. No, this Link is a woman of parts—a woman who is of highest value to the principals in this crime, and who must be found, and that at once!"

"Did she have to do with Mr. Gately?" asked Norah, her gray eyes burning with interest.

"I—don't—know." Wise's hesitating answer was by no means because of disinclination to admit his ignorance, but because he was thinking deeply himself. "Look here, Brice, can't we go over Gately's rooms now? I don't want to ask permission of the police, but if the Trust Company people would let us in—"

"Of course," I responded, and I went at once to ask the vice-president for the desired permission.

"It's all right," I announced, returning with the keys, "come ahead."

We went into the beautiful rooms of the late bank president.

Pennington Wise was impressed with their rich and harmonious effects, and his quick eyes darted here and there, taking in details. With marvelous swiftness he went through the three rooms of the suite, nodding his head as he noted the special

points of which he had been told. In the third room—the blue room—he glanced about, raised the map from the wall and dropped it back in place, opened the door to the hall, and closed it again, and then turned back to the middle room, the office of Amos Gately, and apparently, to the detective's mind, the principal place of interest.

He sat down in the fine, big swivel chair, whose velvet cushioning deprived it of all look of an ordinary desk-chair, and mused deeply as his eyes fairly devoured the desk fittings. Nothing had been disturbed, that I noticed, except that the telephone had been set up in its right position, as also the chair which I had found overturned.

Wise fingered only a few things. He picked up the penholder, a thick, magnificent affair, made of gold.

"Probably a gift from his clerks," said I, smiling at the ornate and ostentatious-looking thing. "All the other gimcracks are in better taste."

Pennington Wise opened the desk-drawers. There was little to see, for all financial papers had been taken away by Mr. Gately's executors.

"Here's a queer bunch," Wise observed as he picked up a packet of papers held together by a rubber band. He sorted them out on the desk.

They were sheets of paper of various styles, each bearing the address or escutcheon of some big city hotel. Many of the principal hostelries of New York were represented among them. Each sheet bore a date stamped on it with an ordinary rubber dating-stamp.

"Important, if true," commented Wise.

"If what's true?" asked Norah bluntly.

"My deductions," he returned. "These letters, if we can call them letters, doubtless were sent to Mr. Gately at separate times and in separate envelopes."

"They were," I informed him. "One came the morning after his death."

"It did! Which one?"

"It isn't here. All the new mail went to his lawyer."

"We must get hold of it!"

"But—do tell me what's the import of a blank sheet of paper?"

"These aren't blank," and he pointed to the stamped dates. "They are very far from blank!"

"Only a date—on a plain sheet of paper—what does that mean?"

"Perhaps nothing—perhaps everything."

"It wasn't like Penny Wise to be cryptic, and I gathered that the papers were really of value as evidence. "Has the writing been erased?" I hazarded.

"Probably not. No. I don't think so." He scrutinized more closely.

"No," he concluded, "nothing like that. The message is all told on the surface, and he who runs may read."

"Read: 'The Spitz-Charlton, December 7,'" I scoffed. "And is the reader greatly enlightened?"

"Not yet, but soon," Wise murmured as he kept up his investigation. "Ha!" he went on—"as the actor hath it—what have we here?"

He was now scrutinizing the ends of two burnt cigarettes, left on the ash-tray of the smoking-set.

"The lady has left her initials! How kind of her!"

"Why Hudson studied those and couldn't make out any letters, I exclaimed.

"Blind Hudson! These very dainty and expensive cigarettes belonged to a fair one, whose names began with K and S—or S and K. Be careful how you touch it, but surely you can see that the tops of the letters, though scorched, show definitely enough for us to know they must be K. and S."

"They are!" Norah cried. "I can see it, now."

"Couldn't that S be an O?" I caviled.

"Nope," and Wise shook his head. "The two, though both nearly burned away, show for certain that the letters are K and S. Here's a find! Does Miss Raynor smoke?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "I've never seen her do so, and she doesn't seem that type. And then—the initials—"

"Oh, well, she might have had some of her friends' cigarettes with her. I was only thinking it must have been a pretty intimate caller who would sit here and smoke with Mr. Gately—here are his own cigar-

stubs, you see—and, of course, Miss Raynor came into my mind. Eliminating her, we have, maybe, the lady of the hatpin."

"And the powder-paper!" cried Norah.

"Yes; they all seem to point to a very friendly caller, who smoked, who took off her hat, and who powdered her nose, all in this room, and all on the day Mr. Gately was killed. For, of course, the whole place was cleaned and put in order every day."

"And there was the carriage check," I mused; "perhaps she left that."

"Carriage check?" asked Wise.

"Yes, a card like a piece of Swiss cheese—you know those perforated carriage-call checks?"

"I do. Where is it?"

"Hudson took it. But he won't get anything out of it, and you might."

"Perhaps. I must see it, anyway. Also, I want to see Jenny—the young stenographer who was here."

"Shall I get her here?" offered Norah.

"Yes," Wise began, but I cut him short.

"I've got to go home," I said. "I promised Rivers I'd see him this afternoon, and take him on some errands. Suppose I go now, and you go with me, Mr. Wise, and suppose Norah gets Jenny and brings her round to my rooms? We can have the interview there. Rivers may not come till later, but I must be there to receive him."

So Penny Wise and I went down to my pleasant vine and fig-tree, and as we went, I told him about Case Rivers.

He was interested at once, as he always was in anything mysterious, and he said: "I'm glad I'm to see him. What a strange case! Can he be the missing Manning?"

"Not a chance," I replied. "The two men are totally dissimilar in looks and in build. Manning is heavy—almost stocky. Rivers is gaunt, and lean. Also, Manning is dark-haired and full-blooded, while Rivers is pale and has very light hair. I tried to make out a resemblance, but it can't be done. However, Case Rivers is interesting on his own account." And I told Wise the story of his journey through the earth.

He laughed. "Hallucination, of course," he said; "but it might easily lead to the discovery of his identity. That amnesia-aphasia business always fascinates me.

That is, if I'm convinced it's the real thing. For, you know, it's a fine opportunity to fake loss of memory."

"There's no fake in this case, I'm positive," I hastened to assure him; "I've taken a decided liking to Rivers, and I mean to keep in touch with him, for when he regains his memory I want to know about it."

"Pulled out of the river, you say?"

"Yes, a tugboat picked him up, drowned and frozen, it was supposed. He was taken to the morgue, and, bless you, if he didn't show signs of life when he thawed out a little— So they went to work on him and revived him and sent him over to Bellevue, where he became a celebrated case."

"I should think so. No clothes or any identification?"

"Not a rag. Or, rather, only a few rags of underwear—but nothing that was the slightest clue."

"What became of his clothes?"

"Nobody knows. He was found drifting, unconscious, apparently dead, and entirely nude save for the fragments of underclothing."

"Those fragments have been kept?"

"Oh, yes; but they mean nothing. Just ordinary material—good—but nothing individual about them."

"Where was he picked up?"

"I don't know exactly, but not far from the Morgue, I believe. It was the same day as the Gately murder, that's why I remember the date. It was a vicious cold snap, the river was full of ice—and it's a wonder he wasn't killed, as well as knocked senseless."

"Was he knocked senseless?"

"I'm not sure, but he was unconscious from cold and exposure and very nearly frozen to death."

"And his memory now?"

"Is perfect in all respects, except he doesn't know who he is."

"A fishy tale!"

"No; you won't say so after you've seen him. When I say his memory is perfect, I mean regarding what he has read or has studied. But it is his personal recollections that have gone from him. He has no remembrance of his home or his friends or his own identity."

"Can't you deduce his previous occupation?"

"I can't. Perhaps you can. He can draw, and he is well read, that's all I know."

We were at my rooms by that time, and going up, we found Case Rivers already there awaiting us. I lamented my lack of promptness, but he gracefully waived my apology.

"It's all right," he smiled, in his good-humored way. "I've been browsing among your books and having the time of my life."

I introduced the two men, and told Rivers that Wise was the famous detective I had mentioned to him.

"I'm downright glad to know you," Rivers said, earnestly; "if you can do a bit of deduction as to who I am, I'll be under deepest obligation. I give you myself as a clue."

"Got a picture of Amory Manning?" asked Wise, abruptly.

I handed him a folded newspaper, whose front page bore a cut of Manning, and the story of his mysterious disappearance.

Wise studied the picture and compared it with the man before him.

"Totally unlike," he said, disappointedly.

"Not a chance," laughed Rivers; "I wish I could step into that chap's shoes; but you see, I came from far away."

"Tell me about that trip of yours," asked Wise.

"Don't know much to tell," returned Rivers; "but what I do know, I know positively, so I'll warn you beforehand not to chuckle at me, for I won't stand it!"

Rivers showed a determination that I liked. It proved that I was right in ascribing a strong character to him. He would stand chaffing as well as any one I knew, but not in that subject of his fall through the earth.

"I don't know when or where I started on my memorable journey, but I distinctly remember my long, dark fall straight down through the earth. Now it would seem impossible, but I can aver that I entered in some very cold, arctic sort of country, and I came on down, feet first, till I made exit in New York. I was found, but how I got into the river, I don't know."

"You were clothed when you started?"

"I can only say that I assume I was. I'm a normal, decent sort of man, and I can't think I'd consciously set out on a trip of any sort, undressed! But I've no doubt my swashing around in the ice-filled river did for my clothes. Probably, as related by the *Ancient Mariner*, 'the ice was here, the ice was there, the ice was all around; it cracked and growled, and—something or other—and howled, like noises in a swound.' You see, I still know my 'poetical quotations' by heart."

"That's a queer phase," and Wise shook his head; "it may be you are a poet—"

"Well, I haven't poetized any, since my recrudescence."

"And that's another queer thing," pursued the detective. "Most victims of aphasia can't remember words. You are exceptionally fluent and apparently have a wide vocabulary."

"I admit it all," and Rivers looked a little weary, as if he were tired of speculating on his own case. "Now, to change the subject, how are you progressing, Mr. Wise, with your present work? How goes the stalking of the murderer?"

"Haven't got him yet, Mr. Rivers, but we've made a good start. You know the details?"

"Only the newspaper accounts, and such additional information as Mr. Brice has given me. I'm greatly interested—for—tell it not to the Gath detectives—I fancy I've a bent toward sleuthing myself."

Pennington Wise smiled. "You're not alone in that," he said, chaffingly, but so good-naturedly that Rivers took no offense.

"I suppose it's your reflected light that makes everybody who talks with you feel that way," he came back. "Well, if you get up a stump, lean on me, gran'pa—I'm 'most seven."

And then we all three discussed the case, in all its phrase, and though Rivers said nothing of great importance, he showed such an intellectual grasp of it all, and responded so intelligently to Wise's theories and opinions that the two soon became most friendly.

The announcement of the rewards stirred Rivers to enthusiasm.

"I'm going to get 'em!" he cried.

"Both of 'em! With all due respect to you, Mr. Wise, I'm going to cut under and win out! Don't say I didn't warn you, and hereafter, all you say will be used against you! If there's one thing I need more than another, it's ten thousand dollars—I could even do with twenty! So, here goes for Rivers, the swift-sure detective!"

Not a bit offended, Penny Wise laughed outright.

"Go ahead, my boy," he cried; "here's a bargain; you work with me, and I'll work with you. If we get either Manning or the murderer, or both, then either or both rewards shall be yours. I'll be content with what else I can get out of it."

"Done!" And Case Rivers was jubilant. "Perhaps Manning is the murderer," he said thoughtfully.

"No," I put in. "That won't do. Manning is in love with Miss Raynor, and he wouldn't queer his cause by killing her guardian."

"But Guardy didn't approve of Suitor Manning," Rivers said.

"No; but I know Manning, and you don't—well, that is, I know him only slightly. But I'm sure he's not the man to shoot a financial magnate and a first-class citizen just because he frowned on his suit. Try again, Rivers."

"All right; what you say goes. But I'm just starting in, you know. And, by the way, I'm to get a job of some sort to-day—yes?"

He looked at me inquiringly, but Wise answered: "Wait a bit, Rivers, as to that. If you'll agree, I'll grubstake you for a fortnight or so, and you can help me. Really, I mean it, for as a stranger you can go to places, and see people where I can't show my familiar face. Then, when you get the two rewards, you can repay me my investment in you. And if you fail to nail the ten thousand, I'll take your note."

"I'll go you!" said Rivers, after a moment's thought. "You're a brick, Penny Wise!"

A tap at the door announced Norah, and with her came Jenny Boyd. Nor was Jenny dragged unwillingly—she seemed eager to enter—but her absurd little painted face

wore a look of stubbornness and her red lips were shut in a determined pout.

"Jenny knows who the Link is, and she won't tell," Norah declared, as a first bit of information.

"Oh, yes, she will," and Penny Wise winked at the girl. He really gave a very knowing wink, as one who should say: "We understand each other."

As they had never met before, I watched to see just how Jenny would take it, and to my surprise she looked decidedly frightened.

Wise saw this, too—doubtless he brought about the effect purposely—but in a moment Jenny regained her poise and was her saucy self again.

"I don't know for sure," she said, "and so I don't want to get nobody into trouble by suspicioning them."

"You won't get anybody into trouble," Wise assured her, "unless she has made the trouble for herself. Let's play a game, Jenny—let's talk in riddles."

Jenny eyed him curiously, and then, as he smiled infectiously, she did, too.

"Now," went on Wise; "this is the game. I don't know, of course, whom you have in mind, and you don't know whom I have in mind, so we'll play the game this way: I'll say, 'I know she is a clever woman.' Now you make a truthful statement about her."

Enthralled by his manner, Jenny said, almost involuntarily, "I know she is a wrong one!"

"I know she's pretty," said Wise.

"I know she isn't!" snapped Jenny.

"I know she is dark, black-haired, and dresses well and owns a scarab hatpin."

"I know that, too," and Jenny was breathless with interest.

"No; that won't do. You must know something different from my know."

"Well, I know she's a friend of Mr. Rodman."

"And of Mr. Gately," added Wise.

"Oh, no, sir, I don't think so!" Jenny's surprise was unfeigned.

"Well, I know she's a telegraph girl."

"Yes; and I know she has more money to spend than she gets for a salary."

"I know she's a good girl."

"Oh, yes, sir—that way. But she—"

"She smokes cigarettes."

"Yes; she does. Oh, I think that's awful."

"Well, it's your turn. You know she's the Link?"

"I know she's been called that, but it isn't a regular nickname and I don't know what it means."

"Where is she?"

"Her work, you mean?"

"Yes; she's in the company's office"—here Jenny whispered the address to Wise.

"Good girl," he commented. "Keep it dark. No use in telling all these people!"

"He turned to my telephone, then said: 'No, Brice, you do it. Call headquarters and tell the chief to arrest—what's her name, Jenny?'"

"I—I didn't say, sir." The girl's caution was returning.

"Say, now, then," commanded Wise. "I know, anyway. It begins with S."

"Her first name—yes, sir."

"And the last name with K. You see I know! So, out with it!"

"Sadie Kent," whispered Jenny, her nerves beginning to go to pieces at realization of what she had done.

"Yes, of course. Sadie Kent. Go ahead, Brice. Fix it all up and go to the telegraph office yourself. Meet the officers there. Scoot!"

I scooted. The strong arm of the law works swiftly when it wills to do so. Within half an hour, Sadie Kent was arrested at her key in the telegraph office, on a charge of stealing confidential telegrams sent by officials in Washington to munition plants and steamship companies and delivering them to persons whom she knew would transmit them to the German Foreign Office.

When approached, the girl—the woman, rather, put up a bold bluff, but it was of no avail. She was taken into custody, and all her appeals for mercy denied. All but one. She begged so hard to be allowed to telephone to her mother, that Hudson, who was present, softened.

"You can't, my lady," he said, "but I'll have it done for you. Mr. Brice, now, maybe he'll do it."

"Oh, if you would be so kind," and the beautiful brunette, for she was that, gave me a grateful look. "Just call 83649 Greenwich Square, and ask for Mrs. Kent. Then tell her, please, that—that I won't be home to-night. That's all."

Her voice broke and she sobbed softly in her handkerchief.

They took her away, to be detained pending developments. I made the call and gave the message exactly as she had asked me. A pleasant voice responded, saying she was Mrs. Kent, and she thanked me for sending the word.

I hurried back to my rooms. Wise and Rivers were still there, but Norah and Jenny had left. I had no sooner got my coat off, than Zizi came flying in.

"Oh, everybody," she cried, in a whirl of excitement, "Olive's gone! She's kidnaped or abducted or something. A telephone message came, and she flew off, telling nobody but Mrs. Vail, and telling her not to tell."

"Where's she gone?" I cried, flinging back into my coat.

"Nobody knows. I only got it out of Mrs. Vail, this minute, and then only by threatening her with all sorts of horrors if she didn't tell me. She doesn't know where Olive's gone—nobody knows, but whoever telephoned said he had Amory Manning with him, just for a few moments and for her to come at once if she wanted to see him. A car would come for her at four o'clock, exactly, and she was to get in and ask no questions. And she did—and she told Mrs. Vail that as soon as she got to Mr. Manning she would telephone back in about fifteen minutes. And now, it's over an hour and no word from her! That stupid old woman just walks up and down and wrings her hands!"

"I should think she would! Which way shall we look, Wise?"

"I don't know, I'm sure!" and for once, the resourceful detective was absolutely at a loss.

"Oh, Penny Wise," and Zizi burst into tears, "if *you* don't know what to do, nobody does! Olive will be killed or held for ransom or some dreadful thing! What *can* we do?"

But the dull silence that fell on us all proved that no one present was able to offer any suggestion.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLIVE'S ADVENTURE.

"GIVE me a handkerchief, somebody!" commanded Zizi, and not without reason, for her own tiny wisp of cambric was nothing but a wet ball, which she was futilely dabbing into her big black eyes.

I hurried into my bedroom and hastily grabbed a fresh handkerchief from a drawer, which I brought to the excited girl.

"Thanks," she said, as she grasped it and plied it diligently; "now, men, we must get busy! It's after five o'clock; Olive went away before four—anything may have happened to her—we *must* rescue her!"

"We will!" exclaimed Case Rivers, showing more energy than I knew he possessed. "What about the Link, Mr. Brice?"

As quickly as I could, I detailed what had happened at the telegraph office, where Sadie Kent had been taken into custody by Hudson's men.

"Did she go quietly?" asked Penny Wise.

"She did not!" I returned; "she put up a fearful fight, tore up a lot of papers from a desk drawer, and lit into the policemen like a tiger cat! She tried to bite Hudson, and yet, he was the one who kindheartedly let her telephone to her mother."

"What!" cried Rivers, "he let her do that!"

"I did it myself, really," I said; and I told how Sadie had begged for the privilege.

"There you are!" said Rivers. "That telephone message was not to her mother!"

"But I called her up," I explained, "and she said she was Mrs. Kent."

"That may be," and Rivers shook his head; "but, don't you see, that was a code call—a warning. The person who received it, mother or grandmother, caught on to the state of things and set machinery in motion that resulted in the kidnaping of Miss Raynor."

"What for?" I asked blankly.

"Revenge, probably, but there may be other villianies afoot. Am I right, Mr. Wise?"

"Yes, and mighty quick-witted. Then the next step is to go to the 'mother's' house."

"Yes, if we can trace it. It may be a call within a call; I mean, the number Mr. Brice got may be merely a go-between—a link."

"Try it anyway," implored Zizi; "every minute is precious. I'm so afraid for Miss Olive. You know, she's spunky—she won't submit easily to restraint, and you don't know what they may do to her!"

"Get information first," directed Wise, as I started for the telephone. "Find the address of the number you called. You remember it?"

"Yes, of course." And in a few moments I learned that the house was down in Washington Square.

"Get a taxi," said Zizi, already putting on her long black cape, which swirled round the slender figure as she slung one end over her shoulder.

She flew to a mirror, and was dabbing her straight little nose with a powder-puff as she talked.

"We'll all go down there, and I don't think we'll have to look any further. Miss Olive is there—I'm dead sure! Held by the enemy! But she's game, and I don't believe we'll be too late, if we hustle like a house afire!"

And so, with the greatest speed, consistent with safety, we taxied down to the house in Washington Square.

The Kent apartment was on the third floor, and as Zizi dashed up the stairs, not waiting for the elevator, we three men followed her.

Zizi's ring at the bell brought a middle-aged woman to the door, who looked at us rather blankly.

I was about to speak, when Zizi, insinuating her small self through the partly opened door, said softly:

"We've a message from the Link."

It acted like magic, and the woman's face changed to an expression of welcome and serious anxiety, as we all went in.

It was rather a pretentious apartment, with fine furnishings in ornate taste. We saw no one save the woman who admitted us, and heard not a sound from the other rooms.

"You expected it?" and Zizi's air of secret understanding was perfect.

"Expected what?" said Mrs. Kent sharply, for she was apparently on her guard.

"Sadie's arrest," and Zizi's black eyes narrowed as she looked keenly at the other.

But the woman was not to be trapped. She glanced at us each in turn, and seemed to conclude we were not friendly visitors, for all Zizi's pretense.

"I know nothing of any arrest," she said evenly; "I think you have mistaken the house."

"I think not," and Penny Wise looked at her sternly. "Your bluff won't go, madam—Sadie, the Link, is arrested, and the game is up. Will you answer questions or will you wait until you, too, are arrested?"

"I have nothing to say," she mumbled, but her voice trembled, and her nerve was deserting her. Inadvertently she glanced toward the closed door of the next room, and Zizi's quick eyes followed the glance.

"Is Miss Raynor in there?" she flung out so quickly, that Mrs. Kent gasped. But she recovered her poise at once, and said: "I don't know what you mean—I don't know any Miss Raynor."

"Oh, tut, tut!" and Zizi grinned at her; "don't tell naughty stories! Why, I hear Miss Raynor's voice!"

She didn't at all, but as she listened, with her head cocked on one side, like a saucy bird, Mrs. Kent's face showed fear, and she listened also.

A muffled scream was heard—not loud, but clearly a cry for help.

Without further parley, Rivers made a dash for the door and though it was locked, he smashed into the rather flimsy panel and the old hinges gave way.

There, in the adjoining room was Olive Raynor, a handkerchief tied across her mouth and her angry eyes flashing with rage.

Holding her arm was George Rodman,

who was evidently trying to intimidate her, but without complete success.

Zizi flew to Olive's side, and snatched off the handkerchief.

Rodman was perfectly cool. "Let that lady alone!" he said. "She is my affianced wife."

"Affianced grandmother!" retorted Zizi. "You can't put that over, Mr. Rodman!"

"Save me!" Olive said, looking from me to Penny Wise and back again. Her glance fell on Rivers, but returned to me, as her face assumed a look of agony.

I couldn't quite understand, as she must know that with us all there, her danger was past.

"Are you his betrothed?" Case Rivers said bluntly.

"No!" Olive replied, in an indignant tone. "Never!"

"Then"—and Rivers seemed about to remove Rodman's hand from Olive's arm by force—but Rodman himself spoke up:

"One moment, please," he said, and bending over, he whispered in Olive's ear.

She turned deathly white, her lip quivered, and she seemed about to fall. Whatever the brief words were, they wrought a marvelous change in the girl's attitude. She lost her air of defiant wrath, and seemed a helpless, hopeless victim of the man who held her.

"Are you engaged to me?" Rodman said, looking at Olive, with a threatening scowl.

"Yes," she managed to whisper, but so agonized was her face that it was palpable that she spoke under coercion.

I was uncertain what to do. Wise, too, looked nonplused, but Rivers, though a stranger to Olive, seemed imbued with an irresistible chivalry, and drawing nearer to her, he said:

"Is that man forcing you to say that against your will?"

Rodman's grip tightened on Olive's arm, and his glowering face looked sternly into hers. She made no reply in words, but her piteous glance told all too clearly that Rivers's assumption was correct.

And yet, what could we do? Olive had assented to Rodman's assertion, and we could scarcely demand a girl from her fiancé.

Zizi mastered the situation by saying triumphantly: "We've got the Link! She's under arrest!"

"What!" cried Olive, and then, dropping her arm, Rodman whirled toward her.

"There!" he cried. "Your secret is out! Unless—" He made a gesture as if to put his arm round her.

With a cry of revulsion, Olive shrank from him, and her face showed that she preferred his threatening attitude to his endearing one.

"You let that lady alone, unless she desires your attentions," said Rivers, his innate desire to protect a woman in distress showing in his repressed eagerness to get at Rodman.

"You mind your own business!" shouted Rodman angrily, as he put out his arm and drew Olive to him. "You're mine, aren't you, deary?"

The disgust on the girl's face, and the shrinking of her form as she tried to draw away from the leering face so near hers was too much for Rivers. He assumed a threatening attitude, and said: "You take your hands off that lady! She doesn't want—"

In defiance, Rodman drew Olive nearer, and raising her bowed head was about to kiss her angry, beautiful face when she uttered a despairing scream.

That was the match in the powder-keg!

Unable to hold back longer, Rivers sprang forward and wrenched Olive from Rodman's grasp.

With a snarl, Rodman lunged at Rivers, who deftly stopped him with an uppercut. Rodman came back with a smashing facer, and Rivers replied in kind.

Zizi, who had flown to Olive's side, and was tenderly soothing her, watched the two men breathlessly. Something savage in her nature responded to the combat, and she flushed and paled alternately as one or the other of the angry men seemed to have the upper hand.

Olive hid her face in her hands, not wanting to look, but Zizi was with the fight, heart and soul.

It was give and take, with such rapidity that I trembled for Rivers's safety. Rod-

man was a formidable antagonist, and far heavier than the gaunt man who met and returned his blows.

But Rivers was skilled, and made up in technique what he lacked in strength.

So desperate was the struggle, so blindly furious were the two men, that Pennington Wise and I were fearful of results. With a simultaneous impulse we made a rush to separate the combatants, but had to get back quickly to save ourselves from the rain of blows.

Never had I seen such a wild, unbridled fight compressed into such a short time, and I wondered what Rivers had been in a fighting way before he lost his identity.

Fighting and boxing had never been favorite forms of entertainment with me, but this contest absorbed me. It was primitive, instinctive—the rage of Rodman pitted against the angry indignation of Rivers.

I had not thought of the latter as a weakling, but neither had I looked upon him as a strong man, and I should have judged that in a bout with Rodman he would have gone under.

But not so; his lean, gaunt frame was full of latent strength, his bony fists full of dexterity.

He rushed in, fell back, sidestepped, with the dazzling quickness of a trained fighter. He showed knowledge and skill that amazed me.

Rodman, too, fought for all he was worth, but he impressed me as being not an experienced fighter and not a fair one.

Wise, too, was watching Rivers with wonder and admiration, and he also kept his alert gaze on Rodman.

Fascinated, we watched as Rodman clinched, and Rivers with a smile, almost of contempt, threw him off. Then Rodman, bellowing like an angry bull, made a head-on rush for Rivers, who neatly sidestepped, letting his furious antagonist have it on the side of his head.

Even this didn't knock any sense into Rodman, and he was about to plunge again, when Wise, seeing a chance, said:

"Now, Brice!"

Springing in, I hooked my arm round Rivers's neck, and yanked him away from

Rodman, now struggling, half-spent, in Wise's grasp.

"Let up, Rivers!" I cried sternly. "What do you mean?"

He glared at me, not sensing what I said, and then, as Rodman, breaking loose, came back at him, madly, Rivers slithered out of my clutch, and caught the other a smashing blow on the ear. This, landing just as Rodman was off his balance from his break away from Wise, spun him around and sent him down with a crash which knocked all the fight out of him, and he made but a half-hearted attempt to rise.

Satisfied, Rivers turned to me, and then, with a half-apologetic glance at Olive, murmured: "Sorry! Couldn't help it, Miss Raynor. Brute!"

The last was addressed to his fallen foe, and was met by a vindictive glance, but no other retort.

Rodman, however, was pulling himself together, and we were of one mind—as to our next procedure, which was to get Olive Raynor away from that house.

"Beat it!" Wise decreed. "You're a good one, Mr. Rivers! My hat's off to you. Now, if you're fit, and you look it, will you and Mr. Brice take Miss Raynor home, and I'll stay here and clear up this little disturbance. Hop along with them, Zizi; I'll join you all at the house as soon as I can."

The faithful taxi was waiting, and Rivers and I put the two girls in, and followed them. Rivers was very quiet and seemed preoccupied. He looked not at all like a conqueror, and I guessed that the fight had stirred some chord of remembrance, and he was now struggling with his lost memory. In silence we went most of the way home.

Before we reached the house, however, he shook off his reverie with an impatient gesture that said as clearly as words could have done that he had failed to catch the elusive thread that bound him to the past, and that he had returned to the present.

Olive saw it, too, and, putting out her hand, said frankly:

"I owe you deep gratitude, Mr. Rivers. I suppose I was in no real danger, but I was glad to have that wretch punished."

Her lovely face glowed with righteous indignation, and Zizi's pert little countenance showed deep satisfaction.

"You gave it to him good and plenty, Mr. Rivers," she fairly crowed; "it was a treat to see you put it all over him! Now, you've knocked him out, physically, Penny Wise will mop up the floor with him mentally—and morally! What did he do to you, Miss Olive? Why did he make you say you were his girl?"

The look of agony returned to Olive's face, as if she had just recollected what the man had said to her.

"He threatened me," she said slowly, "with an awful threat! I can't think about it! Oh, I don't know what to do! I can't tell it—I can't tell it to anybody—"

"Wait till you get home," I counseled her; and Rivers added: "And wait till Mr. Wise comes. He's the man you must tell, and he will advise you. But, I say, we're getting at things; eh, Brice? The Link under arrest, Wise onto Rodman, and he won't let go of him, either, and Miss Raynor safe—whew! I feel as if we should just forge ahead now!"

"Sure we will!" declared Zizi, her little face glowing with anticipation. "Never you mind, Miss Olive, dear; whatever that man threatened, Penny Wise will look after him."

"But—" began Olive, and then stopped, for we had reached her home.

"Oh, my darling child!" exclaimed Mrs. Vail as we went in, "where have you been? I've been nearly crazy!"

I think we all felt a sudden twinge of shame, for none of us had thought to relieve the poor lady's suspense as to Olive's fate! We ought to have telephoned, at least. But she was now smiling and happy at the safe return of her charge, and eager to know all the details of the adventure.

Both Olive and Zizi went off with Mrs. Vail, who was chattering volubly, and I was left alone with Rivers.

"The fight—on which let me congratulate you—stirred some old memory?" I said inquiringly.

"For a few moments, yes," he returned, looking deeply thoughtful. "But it was both vague and evanescent—I couldn't nail

it. Oh!"—and he made an impatient gesture—"it is maddening! I seem just on the edge of complete recollection—and then—it's gone again, and my mind is a positive blank regarding it. But, it's no use worrying, Brice"—and he spoke cheerfully—"I'm sure it will come some day. Until then I shall be Case Rivers, and if I die under the name, I'll try, at least, not to disgrace it."

"You didn't disgrace it to-day," I said heartily. "You put up a first-class fight, and in a righteous cause."

"I couldn't stand it to see Miss Raynor bullied by that brute," he returned simply; "and then, too, I felt a natural antagonism toward him on my own account. No"—as I started to speak—"I know what you're going to say, and I *don't* think I knew him before I lost my memory. Maybe I did, but it wasn't that that started me to thinking back. It was something else—some other impression that made me have a fraction of a reminiscence of something—oh, I don't know what, but I'm going to take it as an omen of future good fortune."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE IS MANNING?

"**YOU'RE** to stay for dinner," a voice said, speaking from the shadows at the other end of the long room:

As I looked toward it, Zizi's little white face gleamed between the portières, and in another moment she slid through and was at my side.

"Miss Raynor says so, and Mrs. Vail adds her invitation. They're going to keep Penny Wise when he returns, and Miss Raynor—"

"Miss Raynor wants to thank Mr. Rivers for his good work," and Olive herself followed in Zizi's footsteps. She was smiling now, but her lips were tremulous and her eyes showed unshed tears.

"Nothing to thank me for," returned Case Rivers quickly. "On the contrary, I want to apologize for such an exhibition of wrath before a lady. But I confess I lost all self-control when I saw that brute intimidating you. If you absolve me of of-

fense, I am thoroughly glad I did him up! And you do?"

"Indeed, yes!" and Olive's frank gaze was sincere, but sad, too. "I was terribly frightened—and—I am still."

"Why?" cried Rivers abruptly; and then added: "But I've no right to ask."

"Yes you have," Olive assured him; "but—I've no right to tell you. Mr. Rodman holds a threat over my head, and—and—"

Just then Wise arrived, and Mrs. Vail came into the room with him.

Olive welcomed him gladly, and then, as dinner was announced, we all went to the dining-room.

"No discussion of our momentous affairs while we eat," Wise commanded, and so we enjoyed the occasion as if it were a social affair.

The conversation was interesting, for Pennington Wise was a well-informed man and a good *raconteur*; Rivers proved to be most entertaining and clever at repartee; and though Olive was very quiet, Mrs. Vail kept up an amusing chatter, and Zizi was her own elfin self, and flung out bits of her odd talk at intervals.

We returned to the big library for coffee, and then, almost abruptly, Wise began to question Olive as to her adventure that afternoon.

"Mr. Rivers was quite right," he said, "in assuming the telephone call sent by Sadie Kent to her 'mother' was a trick. Mighty clever of you"—he turned to Rivers—"and it led to the arrest of Rodman. The woman called Mrs. Kent is not Sadie's mother, but a companion in crime. For Sadie the Link is a criminal—and a deep one! But first, Miss Raynor, let us have your story."

"When I answered the telephone call," Olive began, "a man's voice said rather brusquely: 'We have Amory Manning here. If you want to see him come here at once.' I said—of course I was terribly excited—'Where are you? Who are you?' The voice replied: 'Never mind all that. You have to make a quick decision. If you want to see Manning, a taxi will call for you in five minutes. Tell nobody, or you will queer the whole game. Do you consent?'

I may not give his exact words, but that was his general meaning. I had to think quickly! I did want to see Mr. Manning, and I feared no harm. So I said I agreed to all the stipulations, I would tell no one, and I would go in the taxicab that would come for me."

"But you told me," put in Mrs. Vail, who liked to feel her importance.

"Yes," went on Olive, "I felt I must leave some word, for I had an uneasy feeling that all was not right. If Amory Manning was there, why didn't he telephone himself? But, I reasoned, he might be—well, in fact, I thought he was—held for ransom, and in that case I was ready and willing to pay it. So I said nothing to Zizi, for I knew she would tell—"

"Wow! Yes!" came from Zizi's corner, where she sat on a low ottoman.

"And so I went alone. The taxi was at the curb when I left the house. I got in and was taken to the house in Washington Square. I felt no fear until, after Mrs. Kent admitted me, she showed me into a room, where I found myself confronted by Mr. Rodman. Mrs. Kent remained with me, but I saw at once she was not friendly.

"Where is Mr. Manning?" I asked; Mr. Rodman only laughed rudely and said he hadn't the slightest idea. And then I knew it was all a trap, but I didn't know *why* I was tricked there. And then"—Olive paused, and a deep blush came over her face, but she shook her head and went bravely on—"then he tried to make love to me. I appealed to Mrs. Kent, but she only laughed scornfully at my distress. He said if I would marry him he would protect me from all suspicion of being implicated in—the death of my guardian! Of course that didn't scare me, and I told him I wasn't suspected now by anybody. Then he dropped that line of argument and told me if I didn't marry him—he would—oh, that part I can't tell!"

"Blackmail!" said Wise, looking at her intently.

"Yes," she replied, "and it was an awful threat! Then he saw I was indignant and not to be intimidated—oh, I pretended to be much more courageous than I really was—and he began to talk more politely and

very seriously. He said if I would call off Mr. Wise and make no further effort to run down my uncle's murderer he would send me home safely, and molest me no further. I wouldn't agree to this; and then he grew ugly again and lost his temper, and—oh, he talked dreadfully!"

Olive shuddered at the recollection and her lip quivered.

With quick sympathy Zizi moved noiselessly from her place, and, kneeling at Olive's side, took her hand. With a grateful glance at the comforting little fingers caressing her own, Olive went on:

"He stormed and he threatened me, and that Kent woman joined in and said terrible things! And I was so frightened I couldn't pretend I wasn't any longer—and I didn't know what to do! And then the bell rang, and Mrs. Kent went to the door, and as I looked hopeful—I suppose, for I welcomed the thought of anybody coming—Mr. Rodman threw a handkerchief around my mouth and tied it behind my head. 'There, my lady,' he said, 'you won't scream for help quite as quickly as you planned to!' And I couldn't make a sound! Then, when I heard familiar voices—Zizi's and Mr. Wise's, I knew I *must* make myself heard, and with a desperate effort I got out a groan, or wail, for help, though that awful man stood over me with his hand raised to strike me!"

"You poor darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Vail, putting her arm round Olive, "it was fearful! Why, once I heard of a case like that—no, I read it in a book—and the girl fainted!"

"Well, I didn't faint, but I almost collapsed from sheer fright lest I couldn't make a loud enough sound to be heard by you people."

"Oh, we were coming!" said Zizi. "I saw by the old hen's face she had you boxed up in there, and I was going to do some ground and lofty yelling myself if Mr. Rivers hadn't smashed in the door just as he did."

"I couldn't hold back," said Rivers. "I gave way to a blind impulse—and I'm glad I did!"

"I'm glad, too," and Olive gave him a grateful smile.

"But then," cried Zizi, "he made you say you were engaged to him—"

"Yes," and Olive paled as with fear. "I can't tell about that—"

"You said you weren't, and then he whispered to you, and then you said you were," went on Zizi, remorselessly reviewing the scene.

"I know it—but—oh, don't ask me! Perhaps I'll tell—later—if I have to—but—I can't—I can't!"

Olive's head drooped on Zizi's shoulder, and the eery little voice said: "There, there—don't talk any more now, Miss Olive, dear. Penny Wise, you carry on the conversation from this point."

"All right," said Wise, "I'll tell my story. George Rodman is in the hands of the police, but I doubt very much if they can prove anything on him. He's a sly proposition, and covers his tracks mighty well. Moreover, as to the murder of Mr. Gately, Rodman has a perfect *alibi*."

"Your first lessons in sleuthing always say: 'Distrust the perfect *alibi*!'" murmured Zizi, without looking up from her occupation of smoothing Olive's softly-banded hair.

"Yes—manufactured ones. But in this case there seems to be no question. A Federal detective, who has had his eye on Rodman for some time, was in Rodman's office at the very time Mr. Gately was killed."

"But Mr. Rodman went down on the same elevator I did soon after the shooting!" I exclaimed.

"How soon after?"

"Less than half an hour. And Rodman got on at the seventh floor."

"That's all right, the Federal office man knows that. They went down together from the tenth—Rodman's floor—to the seventh, and then, after they looked after something there, Rodman went on down alone."

"All right," I said, for I knew that Wise and the Federal detective were not being hoodwinked by any George Rodman!

"And here's the situation," Wise went on. "Sadie Kent is a German telegraph spy. She is called the Link, because she has been a important link in the German spy system. A trusted employee and an

expert operator of long experience, she has stolen information from hundreds of telegrams and turned it over to a man who transmitted it to Berlin by a secret avenue of communication. A telegram has been sent to Washington asking for a Presidential warrant to hold her until the case can be investigated. She is also one large and emphatic wildcat! She bites and scratches with feline ferocity, and is under strong and careful restriction."

"And she is the one," I said, "whose identity we learned from Jenny—and—oh, yes, whose identity you guessed, Mr. Wise, from some cigarette stubs, and—"

"Oh, I say," Wise interrupted me shortly, "we must get the truth from her by quizzing, not by clues. We've arrested her now, and—"

Olive stirred uneasily, and Zizi, after a quick, intelligent glance at Wise, which he answered by a nod, rose to her feet, and urged Olive to rise and go with her.

"You're all in, Miss Olive," she said gently, "and I'm going to take you off to sleepy-by. Tell the nice gentlemen good night, and come along with your Zizi-zoo," and smilingly Zizi persuaded Olive to go with her. "You come, too, Mrs. Vail," Zizi added, because, I noticed, of an almost imperceptible nod from Wise in the elder lady's direction. "We just simply can't get along without you."

Pleased at the flattering necessity for her presence, Mrs. Vail went from the room with the two girls. "I'll be back," she called out to us as she left the room.

"She won't," said Wise decidedly after the sound of footsteps died away. "Zizi'll look out for that. Now, Brice, I've important new information. I didn't want to divulge it before Miss Raynor to-night, for she has had about all she can bear to-day. But it begins to look as if Sadie Kent sold her stolen telegrams to Rodman, and he—can't you guess?"

"No," I said blankly, and Rivers said: "Tell us."

"Why, I believe he turned them over to Gately."

"Gately! Amos Gately mixed up in spy business! Man, you're crazy!"

"Crazy does it, then! Haven't we posi-

tive proof that Sadie Kent was in Gately's office the day he was killed?"

"How?" I said, wonderingly, "did she kill him?"

"Lord, no! But didn't I size her up from the hatpin? And didn't your girl trace the powder-paper? And didn't we see cigarette stubs with the S. K. monogram—in Mr. Gately's private office—and his own cigar stubs there, too, as if she had been there in intimate chat?"

"Are you sure about the powder-paper?" I cried, impressed by the realization of Norah's hand in the discovery.

"Yes; we know, at least, that she has bought them from that shop. You see she has lots of money beside her salary from the telegraph company."

"Rather!" said Rivers—"if she's selling government secrets!"

"Well," I said, after the whole disclosure began to sink into my brain, "if Sadie Kent sat around in Mr. Gately's office smoking and chatting, with her hat off and her powder-papers in evidence, she was pretty friendly with him!"

"Of course she was," and Wise looked grave. "That's what I dread to tell Miss Raynor. For it implicates Amos Gately in some way: either he is mixed up in the spy racket—or—Miss Kent was his friend—socially!"

"Oh, come, now," I said, "don't let's say that sort of thing."

"But, my dear man, unpleasant though it be to assume an intimacy between the bank president and the handsome telegraph girl—yet, isn't that preferable—to—"

"To brand him with the shameful suspicion of receiving spy secrets!" Rivers completed the sentence. "Yes, it is! The most disgraceful revelations of a liaison would be as nothing compared with the ignominy of spy work!"

"I know that," I hastened to explain myself, "but I can't connect either disgrace with Amos Gately! You didn't know him, Wise, and you, Rivers, didn't, either. Nor did I know him personally—but I did know—and do know that no breath of suspicion can be attached to Amos Gately's whole career! Why, he was a synonym for all that is best in finance, in politics, in

society! I'm glad you didn't hint this before Olive Raynor! It would have crushed the poor child."

"She'll have to learn it sooner or later," and Wise shook his head. "There's no doubt about it in my mind. You see, the Link usually took her news to Rodman, and he secretly, and by means of the secret elevator, carried it to Gately, who gave it over to the agents of the German government."

"Do you know this?" asked Rivers.

"I couldn't get Rodman to admit it, but when I taxed him with something of the sort he flew into such a rage that I'm sure I struck the truth."

"Where's Rodman now?"

"The Department of Justice has his case in hand. They'll look after him. But I don't see how we can connect him with the murder of Gately. I don't for a minute doubt he'd be quiet capable of it, but he wasn't there at the time."

"Was Sadie Kent?" and Rivers frowned thoughtfully.

"Not at the time of the shooting. Brice here can testify to that."

"Not unless she was in hiding," I said, "and she wasn't, for I looked in the cupboards and all that. We seem to have proved Sadie there before the murderer was, but I don't suspect her of that crime."

"Nor I," agreed Wise, "but it was unusual for her to go to Mr. Gately's office. It must be that she had grown more daring of late, and had some hold over Gately, so that she felt safe in going there."

"Can't they get all that out of Sadie?"

"She's a slippery sort. She pretends to speak frankly, but what she tells means little and is misleading."

"Where is she?"

"For the moment down at Kenilworth House. Detained there till they're sure of the persons working with her."

"She'll get away," said Rivers. "She ought to be in jail."

Now it was a strange thing, but this casual prophecy of Rivers's was fulfilled the very next day!

I was in my office, absorbedly conversing with Norah on the all-engrossing subject of the Gately case when Zizi dashed in.

"Alone I did it!" she exclaimed, and, tossing the folds of her voluminous black cape over her shoulder, she folded her arms and assumed the attitude of Napoleon, scowling from under her heavy black brows, though her eyes were dancing.

"What have you done?" I asked, while Norah gazed, enchanted at the dramatic little figure.

"Returned the missing Link to her rightful owners!"

"What—Sadie?"

"The same. You know Mr. Rivers said she'd break loose from that Whatcha-call-it House and make trouble—also, which she done!"

"Tell us about it," I urged.

"That's what I'm here for. Mr. Wise sent me to tell you that—and a lot of other messages. Well"—and Zizi's black eyes snapped with satisfaction—"somebody called this morning to see Miss Raynor. And that somebody was none other than Sadie the Link! She sent up a different name—I forget what now—and Miss Olive went down to see her. And she blackmailed Miss Olive good and plenty! You see little Zizi was listening from behind a convenient portière, and I heard it all.

"The whole idea was that Miss Olive would quit all investigations, there would be no tales told. But if she kept up her detective work—that is, if she kept Mr. Wise on the job, then revelations would be made about her guardian, Mr. Gately, that Sadie said would blast his name forever. Olive seemed to understand just what these revelations were, for she didn't ask, but she was scared to pieces, and was about ready to give in when I slid into the game. But, before I joined the confab, I called up Penny Wise on an up-stairs telephone, and invited him to come along hastily, and bring a squad of policemen, or something, that could hold that Link!

"Then I sauntered into the library, where the blackmailing session was being held, and I stood by. We had a war of words—the Link and I—but it didn't amount to much, for I was really only sparing for time till Penny Wise blew in. But I kept Miss Olive quiet, and I gave the Link a song-and-dance that made her think

some! I told her we knew she wrote the blackmailing letter to Miss Olive, signed 'A Friend,' and that she could be jailed for that! She wilted some, but carried it off with a high hand, and soon Penny came, and he had his little helpers along. They were in uniform, and they seemed mighty glad to get back their long-lost friend and comrade—the Link!"

"You clever little piece!" cried Norah—"to think of your getting that girl again, after she had broken loose! Didn't they appreciate it?"

"Yes," and Zizi smiled modestly; "but it's all in the day's work. I don't care much about appreciation except from Mr. Wise."

She had thrown off her long cloak, and her slender, lithe little figure leaned over the back of a chair. "But," she cried, twirling round suddenly to me, "I did do one more little trick! When they were taking Sadie away I sidled up to her, and—oh, well, I s'pose I am a direct descendant of some light-fingered gentry—I picked her pocket!"

"What did you get?"

"Her pocket—by which I mean her little leather hand-bag was never out of her hand for a minute! The way she hung on to it—fairly clutched it—made me think it contained something of interest to our side. So I just picked it on general principles. And I got the goods!"

"What?" cried Norah and I together.

"Some stuff in code, or in cipher—I dunno just what it was. But Penny took it, and he's tickled to death to get it. Gibberish, of course, but he'll make it out. He's clever at ciphers, and it will likely be the final proof of the Link's perfidy, and"—here Zizi's head drooped, and her eyes saddened—"maybe it will show up Mr. Gately, or—"

"Or who?"

"You know! But"—she brightened again—"here's something else yet! I'm on the job day and night, you know, and, if you inquire of me, I'd just as lief enlighten your minds to the fact that Miss Olive is a whole lot interested in that fascinating Mr. Rivers!"

"Oh, now"—and Norah looked reproof

at the saucy, smiling girl—"Miss Raynor is the *fiancé* of Amory Manning."

"Nixy! She told me she never was engaged to Mr. Manning. And when I tease her about Mr. Rivers, she blushes the loveliest pink you ever saw, and says: 'Oh, Zizi, don't be a silly!' But then she sits right there and waits for me to be a silly again!"

"But she hasn't seen Rivers half a dozen times," I said, smiling at Zizi's flight of imagination.

"That's nothing," she scoffed; "if ever there was a case of love at first sight, those two have got it! They don't really know it themselves yet, but if Amory Manning wants Miss Olive, he'd better come out of hiding and win her while the winning's good! And it's my belief he'd be too late now! And here's a straw to show which way that wind blows. The picture of Mr. Manning that was on Miss Olive's dresser has disappeared!"

"That may not mean anything," I said.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

for I didn't think it right to encourage Zizi's romancing.

"But I asked Miss Olive about it, and she hesitated and stammered, and never did say why she had put it away. And, too, you ought to see her eyes smile when she expects Mr. Rivers to call! He's making a lace pattern for her, and they have to discuss it a lot! O-ho, o-ho!"

The mischievous little face took on a gentle, tender look, and Norah smiled with the sympathy of one who, like all the rest of the world, loves a lover.

"But," I said musingly, "none of this brings us any nearer to the discovery of Amos Gately's murderer, or to the discovery of Amory Manning—which are the two ends and aims of our present existence."

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Brice"—Zizi's face grew very serious—"that those two quests will lead you to the same man?"

I looked at her—stunned to silence.

Then as suddenly shocked into speech:

"No!" I fairly shouted, "it never did!"

Back to the Straight



by

May Wilmoth

SOUND ethical thinkers have only one conception of the "straight and narrow" path. For conscience' sake, they walk, somewhat drearily, it must be confessed, therein.

Others—twisted souls—cavort blithely in a broad and crooked highway, under the mental illusion that it *is* straight and narrow!

Fifi Montessor—

Let Fifi interpret her point of view for you.

"Fifi, what has become of my powder? Didn't you buy a new box just yesterday?" fretted the voice.

Fifi bobbed into the room from the bathroom, where she had been busily engaged

since her mistress's bath. Her French cap-strings waved; her nose tilted; her Irish cheeks blossomed into a Killarney rose; her beautifully modeled American figure swayed with the grace of a slender young poplar, as she stood beside the bed and gazed down at her mistress.

Mrs. Jones, propped against crumpled, fat, lace-trimmed pillows, held in one hand a dainty laquered powder-box; in the other the cover; a scowl corrugated her alabaster brow as she peered into it.

"It's only half full!" she wailed. "A fresh box ought to fill it, Fifi!"

The maid's gaze foraged the room for mental provision. She found it.

"Powder certainly does go up in wartime, ma'am," she proffered, restraining a wild desire to giggle as her mistress's eyes gazed into her own, complete incomprehension of her little war joke in their cobalt depths.

To add to her mirth, her mistress stirred nervously upon the pillows, and her cap fell off, exposing "ratty" tresses.

Thanking her lucky star for the diversion, Fifi sprang to replace it with deft fingers and inner convulsions of laughter.

"What's the matter with you, Fifi?" asked Mrs. Jones querulously. "You'll have to get something for your nerves if you shake like that."

Fifi coughed to keep from screaming.

"It's just a little cold, ma'am," she explained.

She transferred her shaking to the pillows, having tucked the tattered tresses under the cap; then diverted her mistress with conversation, as she applied some refreshing toilet-water to her face.

"Perfumes and rouge, scented soaps and hair-dye, everything for a lady's toilet has gone over the top, ma'am. Even lip-sticks and eyebrow-pencils aren't what they once were. Mme. Cuckoo says, too, ma'am, that she won't be able to care for your hair at the same price. I saw her yesterday."

"Well, so long as she doesn't shut up shop, I've no intention of worrying about her prices," volunteered the lady languidly, her eyes closing wearily.

"I'm going to do your nails now, ma'am," concluded Fifi.

"Yes, Fifi," nodded her mistress drowsily. "You are certainly a treasure," she sighed, as she opened her eyes and gazed up into the cheerful face of her French maid, born in Third Avenue, of poor but dishonest German, Scotch, Irish, Dutch, English, Hungarian, Swedish, Italian, French ancestors. That is to say that Fifi was plain American.

"Yes, ma'am; I try to be," admitted Fifi.

She trotted away, and her mistress watched her through half-closed eyelids. In her crisp, percale, pink and white striped morning uniform Fifi was certainly well worth watching for esthetic reasons.

Upon her crisp waves of blue-black hair was perched the Frenchiest cap that ever saw Fifth Avenue. Around her waist was bowed a ruffled apron from the same fashionable mart *via* Paris. Upon her feet were little white "sneaks" that made no noise as she pattered around busily, gathering the materials for the manicuring operation.

But besides being good to look upon, Fifi was the deftest maid Mrs. Jones had ever employed. She had come to her with the best of recommendations from an English family in Calcutta. Mrs. Jones had never taken the trouble to investigate her references. Before the Calcutta family had been fortunate enough to employ her, Fifi had been lady's maid to various families in Paris and London, so her recommendations stated.

Fifi, however, was her own best recommendation. Mrs. Jones had been known to expatiate for an hour at a stretch to an envious circle of fashionable friends upon the lightness of Fifi's touch.

That "touch" was of the lightness of thistledown when Fifi massaged her mistress's face, or combed her hair, or did a thousand and one little offices which fall to a personal maid to perform.

Fifi in the bath-room admired herself in the mirror, patted her cap into place, and took from a closet a bowl of rock crystal and prepared a soapy bath for her mistress's nails. The soap from which she ripped the wrappings was fine and scented. There were dozens like that cake stored away in the cabinet, wonderful imported soap, that

was now, since the war, worth its weight in gold.

Fifi ran her eyes appraisingly over the contents of that cabinet. There were other expensive toilet luxuries besides soap stored there—fine perfumes and toilet waters, powders and creams that would have made Mme. Récamier green with envy.

A smile of pure delight crinkled the integument of Fifi's face. It was the smile of a gay young pirate viewing legitimate loot. She laughed; little bubbles of laughter broke on her red lips and vanished into thin air; she seized the bowl of rock crystal and scurried back to the bedside of her mistress.

"Have you made out that new list of my wardrobe, Fifi?" peevish the pampered Mrs. Percy Jones, as the maid sat down beside the bed and immersed that lady's fingers in the bowl of soapy water.

"Yes, ma'am," piped Fifi cheerfully. "I laid it on your desk this morning early."

"Bring it to me."

"Yes, ma'am," droned busy-bee Fifi as she balanced the bowl upon the bed under a fine embroidered towel.

She whisked over to the desk and back and placed the list somewhat ostentatiously upon the bed. She murmured an excuse and whisked away again.

Mrs. Jones rubbed the fingers of one hand dry upon the towel and secured the list. Quiet prevailed in the rose-hung, ivory-furnished bedroom, but only for a moment.

"Fifi!" screamed Mrs. Percy Jones at the top of her wheezy lungs. "Come here!"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Fifi briskly.

In a trice she stood beside the bed. Her eyes were fastened upon a long forefinger that pointed accusingly at an item.

"What has become of my camisoles, Fifi? Only a paltry dozen listed. I had three dozen when Phœbe went away."

"It's the laundress, ma'am," soothed the girl. "They're of such a delicacy and fineness they seem to fall right apart under Jane's heavy hand."

"But my hosiery and nightgowns, Fifi?" whimpered the lady helplessly.

"They wear out, also, ma'am," she convincingly explained. "And if I do say so as shouldn't, when an article of wearing

apparel passes through my hands for the last time it's done for. It can't be mended any more. Now let me put away the list, ma'am. It is not good for madam to worry."

She took away the list and sat down beside the bed and immersed the long fingers again in the soapy bath, while their owner settled back luxuriously among the pillows and permitted herself to be hypnotized back to a complacent acceptance of things as they were, under the gentle ministrations of her deft-handed maid.

"Where am I going this morning, Fifi?" asked Mrs. Jones, as the girl polished her nails.

"To the Red Cross rummage sale, ma'am, at Mrs. Osgood's on Fifth Avenue. Then you go to a luncheon at the Plaza with Mrs. Tracy. Then to a matinée—to see George Marley, and then to tea at Mrs. Glenmore's. I put your engagement-book in the car."

Mrs. Jones had found Fifi so well and capable that she gave her, along with the privilege of waiting upon her august person, the further privilege of doing the work of a social secretary.

Two hours later Mrs. Percy Jones tripped down the steps of her brick house on Washington Square, manicured, massaged, marcelled, and clad like Sheba's queen by the light fingers of the suavely smiling, always willing and courteous Fifi. She motored away up Fifth Avenue to a Red Cross rummage sale at the residence of one of New York's first families.

Fifi from the bedroom window watched her mistress being driven away. Envy, mixed with puzzled wonder, dwelt in her dark eyes.

"Gee, I wonder why that bonehead can ride in a motor and hire *me* to wait on her, when I've got more brains in a minute than she'll ever have?" she silently quizzed herself, as she turned away from the window with a long sigh for the capriciousness of fate.

Her recognition of the inherent injustice of life by no means interfered with Fifi's efficiency in the humble walk to which she had, by means of her "brains," of which she felt she had more than her share, raised

herself. Her Machiavellian scheming had elevated her from plain Molly Molloy, who had once ironed lingerie in a laundry, up through all the stages of hair-dressing and manicuring, and hair-dyeing, when she had mixed brains with her colors, to the responsible position she now held. Fifi Montessoro was the working product, made strictly in the good old U. S. A.

She worked swiftly, putting away her mistress's clothing, straightening up the toilet-table with the same surety of "touch" that recommended her to her mistress. Lastly, she opened the cabinet in the bathroom, and transferred sundry articles to a towel which she gathered up cornerwise, and with a bath-towel hanging over it, to conceal it from the prying eyes of the housemaid, scurried into the hall and up the rear stairs to her attic room.

It was a tiny room into which she breathlessly let herself, directly under the expensive mansard eaves of the Jones mansion. It was furnished regardless of comfort with the broken-hearted furniture from below-stairs.

But Fifi was not thinking about the furniture at that moment. She was tingling with unholy joy as she locked the door and spread her "haul" out upon the bed. In common with other financiers, who make capital of the weaknesses of others, she was taking advantage of the patent "bone-headedness" of her mistress. Mrs. Jones, it seemed to Fifi, had been born for her especial method of exploitation.

Excitedly she took from a closet a dress-skirt. This she turned wrong side out. Patched all over the skirt were pockets.

Sitting upon the side of the bed, her cheeks rosy, her eyes sparkling, she proceeded to insert, with those deft fingers of hers which recommended her to Mrs. Jones, little parcels into the pockets.

Soft little parcels of fine lingerie went in, stockings two by two, as the animals went into the ark; hard little parcels containing bottles of perfume, and boxes of face powder and bars of fine scented soap.

Then she hurriedly disrobed and hung her maid's badge of servitude in the clothes closet, and donned her street gown with its fashionable minaret effect.

It was Wednesday, and Fifi's day out until five o'clock, when she would be obliged to be in her place to make her mistress's toilet for the evening.

It was a wonderful day in late October. Out into the square came Fifi from the rear of the Jones mansion. Through a smother of dusky-eyed Italian children she crossed the emerald carpeted and flaming canopied square; then plunged east through a swirl of traffic until Third Avenue was gained.

She was obliged to stand in the Elevated train which she boarded to go farther down-town; not because this public conveyance was crowded, but owing solely to the plethoric condition of her skirt. Several and sundry urbanites of the opposite sex urged Fifi to sit. With slightly heightened color, which only added to her general attractive arrangement, she was obliged to decline, and dangled, with chin up and feet planted more or less firmly, from the strap.

Rivington Street and a flight of malodorous stairs brought Fifi at last to the door of the room which was her destination. She opened the door and peeped in.

"'Lo, Abie." She chirruped cheery greetings to the young man behind the counter of the little second-story shop, where Abie Solstein as buyer presided over the jointly owned shop with his mother, who sold articles of wearing apparel, fine soaps and perfume, and face powders to her discriminating patrons.

"'Lo, Molly. C'me on in!" Abie greeted and invited all in one breath, his blue eyes sparkling with pleasure, his red head vibrating with the same emotion; his fat, outstretched hands all hospitality.

"Where's your ma?" queried the girl, sidling in.

"Out there," a fat thumb pointed over his shoulder in the direction of the rear.

The girl started that way. Her progress was summarily halted. "Got something for you, Molly. Something you'll like. I've always thought I'd give it to you if you'd let me," babbled Abie.

A thumb and forefinger were tucked exploringly into a pocket of a flamboyant vest.

The girl leaned expectantly forward. Acquisitiveness romped in her sparkling eyes. She licked red lips with a pointed

pink tongue. Visions of a wonderful sparkling diamond danced before Molly's eyes.

Out came the thumb and forefinger. Stuck between them was a ring holding a stone that could hardly have been overlooked by a blind man.

Suddenly Abie's other arm shot out and encircled Molly—Fifi's neck. Before she recovered from her surprise a moist kiss was implanted squarely upon her red lips.

Just as squarely a slap was dealt Abie upon his right cheek.

"Take that, and welcome!" sizzled Molly.

Back popped the ring into Abie Solstein's vest-pocket.

"You'll never get that, you darned little slap-stick artist!" yelled Abie. "Too good to be kissed, are you? Don't want to be Mrs. Solstein, eh? And have a home of your own and—and—"

"You," bubbled the girl. "Nix on you, Abie. You'd spoil anybody's happy home. I'm strong for the home, deary. But any boob that tries to make me believe glass is diamonds before I marry him, would want me to pay my own flat-rent afterward. I guess I'm too smart to be taken in by a piece of glass."

The girl's sophisticated, mocking laughter rang in Solstein's ears even through the door behind which she had retreated into the cozy Yiddish parlor of Mrs. Solstein.

She locked the door and slipped off her skirt as the lady toddled in, summoned by the bell set tinkling by the opening of the door.

"Ah! It iss my teetle Molly. What hass she for her old aunty to-day?"

"Aunty" Solstein was broad, she was wrinkled, her head was shaved under her orthodox wig, and the hands she swathed in her checked gingham apron were large and capable. Her eyes sparkled avariciously as she leaned over the girl, who had dropped upon a low stool and was busily removing her loot from the dress-skirt.

"Some beauties, aunty. Wait till you see!" she cried.

Eagerly she tore away soft tissue swathings and spread out filmy lingerie and scented toilet articles before Mrs. Solstein's eyes.

"See!" cried the girl.

A cold, wary light dawned in aunty's eyes. She regarded the loot disdainfully, veiling the delight that she really felt, restraining her impulse to reach out and fondle the exquisite real lace and handkerchief linen out of which the lingerie was fashioned.

"I vill call Abie," she said coolly. "You put on your skirt. He will pay you what they are worth. He iss always the buyer for the shop, as you know. Efer since you wass in the laundry he hass been buyer for the little shop. Yes!"

As Molly slipped her skirt on again, the old lady pattered around the room feasting her eyes surreptitiously on the "beauties" Molly had brought.

"Who iss the lady that makes these things? Does she vork for other folks besides you, Molly?"

"I'm taking all of her output now, aunty," grinned the girl.

She had, upon other visits to the old lady, told her a masterly fiction of a poor widow woman who had only one leg and for whom she—Molly—was buying material to be fashioned into articles of feminine wearing apparel which she—Molly—was disposing of to the shops. The skirt of many pockets she had explained by dwelling largely upon her antipathy to carrying parcels.

If there was anything that Molly could not explain satisfactorily she—Molly—had yet to discover it. The key-note of Molly's character was "smartness." She was succeeding because of it.

"She sews fast to make all these things so queek," commented the old lady.

"Yes, she's a fast needlewoman. I'm all ready for Abie, aunty," she parried.

She gave her belt a last pat, perked her hair out at the side, and stood with arms saucily akimbo, smiling tantalizingly as Abie entered.

Solstein regarded the goods lying upon the sofa. He appraised them with thumb and fingers and eyes.

"We ain't going to deal in this stuff much longer," he said. "We're going to deal in furs and suits. But if you want to let this go cheap I'll take it. But we don't want any more of your cheap lingerie."

"Cheap!"

Fifi screamed her wrath, and almost told the secret of the exclusive Fifth Avenue shop where the wearing apparel had been purchased by Mrs. Jones.

"Well, we don't want it, anyhow; you can take my price or else take it away!"

Abe waved grandiloquent hands and vanished into the shop.

Fifi swallowed her wrath. She was quite certain that pique was at the root of the whole occurrence. After a little chat with Mrs. Solstein she sailed into the shop.

A derisive smile wreathed her lips as she stood, arms akimbo upon slender hips, her face rose-brown, her topaz eyes, black-lashed, sparkling under her rose-wreathed hat. Abie was certainly a poor loser and justly deserved contempt.

"Here's your money," he said surlily. "And remember, we don't want any more lingerie."

"Soaps and perfumes on the list of things not wanted?" quizzed the girl smilingly.

"Yes. Find another market!" he bade her curtly.

"All right, *Mr. Solstein!*" returned the girl good-naturedly, dropping the money he had given her into her hand-bag. "By-by, deary. Don't let any one find you dead with that sparkler in your pocket!"

"Go chase yourself," cried the disappointed lover glumly. The last glimpse he had was of a vividly mocking smile and then the door was slammed, and he caught the scurrying rustle of skirts as the girl ran down the stairs.

Fifi walked slowly along the street jingling the money she had just jiu-jitsued out of Abie. In spite of the fact that she had not been paid anything like what her merchandise was worth, she was jubilant.

Success was gravitating toward her. Her bank-account was growing; soon she, too, might be riding in a motor and hiring some Fifi to wait upon her!

"Only I'll be wise," soliloquized Fifi as she paused to gaze into a shop window attractively dressed with furs. "I'd just like to see any one put over a stunt on me like I've been pulling!"

She passed hurriedly the laundry where she had once ironed. In the flush of her

victorious career she did not care to be reminded of its dim beginnings.

The day was beautiful, the air like wine, the streets filled with merry autumn shoppers inspired by the autumnal tang in the air, harbinger of a "cold, hard" winter, into making giddy calculations anent furs warranted to lighten the heart of even the heaviest ~~parse~~ *parse*.

Molly, too, caught the fur fever. The skins exhibited in the shop windows were of a richness and beauty to set any susceptible feminine heart to palpitating. It was only two thirty. Four thirty would be ample time for her to make the start for home.

She determined to explore the fur-shops and revel in the thought that perhaps, she, too, some time, would be making giddy calculations like unto the ones chattered into her ears by sundry shoppers.

Fifi sauntered into a fur-shop further up the avenue that was thronged. It seemed to Fifi, now gazing enviously at the beautiful furs, that every one in the world was buying them but Fifi Montessoro.

"Tisn't fair," muttered the girl, her white teeth gnawing at her full red underlip. "Some people have too darned much. Oh, wouldn't I like to wear you, you lovely thing!" she apostrophized a long, luxurious sealskin coat that was being exhibited upon a dazzling blond wax lady.

A stout shopper with a consequential air inserted a padded elbow into Fifi's midriff and sought to remove her from her place of vantage. But Fifi's elbows were thinner, consequently more effective as levers. With elbows and heels and short, little snorts of rage, she annihilated the pretensions of the padded lady, and put her very much to rout.

"Huh!" said Fifi, and then again, "huh!" and resumed her adoration of the sealskin.

But however much she might covet it, it could never be hers. Another had viewed its charms and had succumbed; some one evidently with a larger bankroll than Fifi's. The clerk of whom she asked its price quoted a fabulous sum.

"A thousand dollars, ma'am. But, you see, it is sold."

"I see," droned Fifi hopelessly.

She read the address: Mrs. Andrew Stannard. Thirteen and one-fourth East Fifty-Fourth Street. To be delivered at five o'clock.

Fifi disconsolately drifted out of the store. She paused in the doorway and looked—with the indecision attributed to her sex—backward. It seemed to her that the arms of the wax lady encased in that wonderful coat of seal were held entreatingly out to her.

The entire garment begged to be taken away from the crowded confines of the stifling store by some tall, slender girl, properly proportioned to a perfect thirty-six.

Or at any rate that was the way it seemed to Fifi.

With lagging footsteps, the girl dragged herself away from the lure of the fur. In a moment she paused before a window and gazed into it with eyes that saw nothing but sealskin. Consequently she was quite unaware that she was gazing intently into the window of a café, behind the semi-transparent screen of which two men were having a friendly game of cards.

She kicked a russet boot against the wall meditatively. Never in all her life had the lure of possession so obsessed her. But she had always confined herself to the small peccadillos, always with the hope—the siren that sings to the struggling mariners of life, whether pirates or traders—of great things—of taking her place some time among the infamous elect.

She considered herself now quite inside the pale; in fact, she was of the opinion that she had not even started, that in spite of her recent accomplishments at the Jones mansion she was still in the "piker" stage of the game, still walking in the straight and narrow path.

Standing there, kicking her toe against the wall, Fifi was inspired with a demoniac frenzy to leave the "straight and narrow" for the broad highway. Deep in her twisted soul she thrilled with the thought of removing the obstacles which now stood between her and the thing of fur that she desired; to feel the glow of achievement—a real achievement.

All great careers have their small beginnings; but there comes a point where the soul that aspires must hazard.

Fifi had reached the point.

There had flared into her brain as she stood there an inspiration; white hot it burned its way into her nerves—her brain.

Her feet flew to obey as if winged like Mercury. To a telephone booth she went and slipping her nickel in the slot, listened.

"Give me Rector 315, party J."

She was connected.

"Is this Rosenwald's fur shop?"

The voice that was transmitted over the wire was thin, high, ladylike. The house of Rosenwald received it.

"This is Mrs. Stannard—"

She was interrupted.

"Yes, Mrs. *Andrew* Stannard," there was a simulated impatient note now in the thin, high voice. "Thirteen and one-fourth East Fifty-Fourth Street. I am sending my maid around to get my coat—"

Came another short interruption from the other end of the wire.

"Yes, yes, I know you were going to send it at five o'clock, but I am starting on a motor trip up in the mountains and I want to take my coat with me—"

Interruption number three.

"How will you know her? Easily enough. I will describe her. She is tall and dark and she will wear a hat with roses and a blue silk street-gown—yes, I know the coat is very valuable and that you don't want to make any mistakes. She will be there in about fifteen minutes."

Fifi hung up the receiver and then dropped upon the stool in the booth. She was seized with a violent fit of trembling; her breath came in little, short gasps; she wondered if she were ever going to get out of the booth alive. She was just beginning to realize the daring of the deed she was about to commit.

Failure meant—"stir," that bugaboo of the criminal classes. Fifi called it jail to herself; she was not familiar with the nomenclature of the class to which she was aspiring.

Swift came the reassuring reflection. It rested entirely with her whether she stole that fur coat or not!

Fifi sat erectly up. She remembered her successes in the past, she had never failed in all the years that she had been ascending the ladder to success, and now opportunity was beckoning her on to bigger successes, she was about to demonstrate again her inherent smartness.

Up to her? Well, rather!

Fifi gathered her recreant nerves into a tight little bundle and wrapped them around with steel; she rose from the stool, head erect, cheeks rosy, eyes flashing, determination in her every footfall, and pursued her way slowly back to the fur store.

She managed to evade the clerk with whom she had parleyed a few moments previous. Straight to the girl at the desk, who appeared to have charge of things, she went and stated her errand.

The girl telephoned to some one somewhere and Fifi waited.

Moments that seemed like eternity to the girl drifted past, as she waited in what grew to be an agony of apprehension. She could hear the throb-throb of her own heart above the hum of human voices, the singing of her nerves as she gazed around the store apprehensively; the crash of traffic, the kaleidoscopic swirl of shoppers, the light of the afternoon sun filtering through the windows, were all merged into one blurry whirl in her brain.

She wondered if she had managed so cleverly that the store detective, the faithful watch dog that every store employs—would be deceived? She thought of a thousand and one things that had not occurred to her in the beginning as she stood there and eons of time slipped past.

Even her mind, as does the person's who is drowning, wandered back into the past; she was a humble laundress again, going each day from the room in Rivington Street where she lived with her parents and several little Molloy—*it must not be forgotten that Fifi Montessor was plain Molly Molloy once upon a time—to the laundry in Second Avenue, where she ironed day after day, the dainty linen of those more fortunate than she, and did it very well indeed, which was Molly's way.*

Occasionally she had endeavored to pay what she felt fate owed her, at least in a

small measure, by filching and dedicating to her own use an especially fine article of wearing apparel. She was fairly sozzling herself in ancient lore when she was brought back to the present by a voice:

“Here's yer parcel.”

A brass-buttoned, round-hatted, errand boy was holding out to Fifi a large box neatly and conveniently equipped with a handle for carrying.

Fifi's heart did a jubilant sprint.

She accepted quite casually the thousand-dollar parcel thus casually tendered and walked not too slowly and then again not too swiftly out of the fur shop.

Gaining the street, she found difficulty in restraining her feet from running. She walked sedately enough, however, though her pulses hammered maddeningly, and she could not resist the temptation to glance this way and that, slyly.

One of these glances was intercepted—and misinterpreted. One of the two men who had been having a friendly game of cards behind the semitransparent window shade in the café, before the window of which Fifi had meditatively kicked the toes of her russet shoes against the wall, had kept her in sight ever since, with the sole exception of the short time Fifi had waited for her parcel to be delivered to her.

He had watched her emerge with the parcel, he had rapidly preceded her up the street, threading his way through the crowd, and now he stood upon the curb watching her.

He caught the glance and advanced toward Fifi. Frozen with horror, the girl stopped still. For the first time in her life her wits absolutely deserted her. This was the end! The game was up! This was a detective come to arrest her. Her first venture into the broad highway was a failure.

Fifi lost control of her features, they froze also into a frightened grimace, that was mistaken for a welcoming smile, as she stood there and curious pedestrians swirled and eddied past her. The man shouldered his way through the crowd and paused before her.

Despairingly, with the horrible remorse that only the *caught* can ever know, Fifi

held the box out generously with both hands.

"H-here, take it!"

"Why certainly, little one," acquiesced Jimmy Lane, who, attracted by Fifi's beauty was trying to make her acquaintance. "That's a big parcel for a girl to carry. C'm on in here an' we'll talk it over."

Jimmy, who was an opportunist and figuratively made hay while the sun shone, had seized the box and Fifi's elbow simultaneously, and was guiding her toward a restaurant in the front of which was a terrace with little tables dotted here and there, guarded by tall, ornamental shrubs set in boxes, quite *à la Parisien*. Though the time was late autumn the day held only a warning tang of frost.

It was not until they had reached the little gate between tall shrubs that Fifi realized that this was not an arrest in the common acceptance of the term. It partook more of the nature of a "hold-up."

She glanced up haughtily. The look of admiration that beamed upon her from the brown orbs of Jimmy would have melted a harder heart than Fifi's. Besides, the reaction from the fear of the moment before had a tendency to make Fifi forgiving, though she considered him exceedingly impertinent, and told him so.

"But ye shouldn't be so darned pretty," he told her as he opened the gate and smiled into her eyes. "No girl's got any right to be such a reg'lar queen."

But Fifi was not listening to his compliment. She had glanced up the street. Emerging from Rosenwald's fur shop was a real menace: a policeman in uniform, a tall man, and a small boy with brass buttons and a round cap. After Fifi had gone, the store folk, with belated caution, had telephoned to Mrs. Stannard—and discovered the hoax.

Fifi's wits did not desert her the second time.

"Get a table," she said. "Watch the parcel. I'll be back in a minute," and vanished into the hospitably opened doorway of the hotel.

Jimmy Lane sat down at one of the shrub-guarded tables. He set the box in

plain sight in one of the chairs, reasoning that since it had come from a fur shop it must be of some value and therefore he must watch it rather closely.

He took a silver cigarette case from his pocket, and with a complacent flourish lighted a cigarette and rang the bell for a waiter.

He had taken one long, satisfying puff and was exhaling the smoke in lovely rings when a torrential stream, consisting of uniformed Mike Flannagan, plain-clothes detective Dennis O'Grady, and brass buttoned Ikey Goldberg, errand boy at Rosenwald's, opened the gate and rushed in.

They saw the box and Jimmy simultaneously.

"There he is, there's her accomplice," shouted Mike Flannagan, and the stream swept toward the unsuspecting and quite innocent Jimmy.

In the mean time, Fifi had rushed past the doorway and paused a moment bewilderedly in the hall without the faintest notion of what she was going to do to extricate herself from the dilemma into which her ambition had landed her.

Upon one side was the door to the lady's dressing-room. Fifi's eyes saw the flutter of a white apron hanging on a hook, as her ears caught the words of Mike Flannagan.

There was no one in sight—not even a doorman, as this was between the luncheon hour and dinner hour and the servants were all busily engaged elsewhere.

Pell-mell into the room rushed Fifi. She dragged her hat from her head and threw it behind the door. She breathlessly hauled down the maid's apron from the hook, and with fingers that trembled tied the bow and then stood in the shadow of the doorway panting but game, with her arms folded—waiting.

An elderly lady drifted across the hallway; she tossed to Fifi a motor coat. Fifi hung it across her arm and—waited. The elderly lady proceeded into the dressing-room.

Fifi had only a minute to wait, though if the waiting in the store had seemed to consume eons of time, there was no word in the English language that could describe

the tortuous length of time that flitted past Fifi, as she stood there—waiting.

A musician scraped a chord on a violin somewhere in the recesses of the inner dining-room. The girl shuddered, as if her quivering nerves had been scraped raw, instead of the catgut.

Then came Mike Flannagan. Fifi drew herself tautly together and stood upright.

“Have ye seen a girl with flowers in her hat?”

“Yes,” asserted Fifi patting her hair into place nonchalantly.

“Where is she?” queried Flannagan sharply.

“She just went up-stairs, I think.” There was interest in Fifi’s voice. “What’s happened?” Fifi in maid’s apron was—Fifi—and mistress of herself and the situation.

“Big theft, fur coat. A slick one!” flung back Mike as he ran up the stairs.

Fifi disappeared from the doorway. The elderly lady who had been arranging her hair before a mirror started to pass out of the room.

“Do I need a check for my coat?” she asked pausing in the doorway. “I heard the policeman say that a coat had just been stolen.”

“No, ma’am. I’ll take good care of it,” said Fifi pleasantly, as she controlled her voice into evenness.

The elderly lady disappeared, presumably going back to her elderly spouse in the indoor dining-room.

Fifi heard big Mike Flannagan lumbering around up-stairs as she whisked off her apron, slipped on the motor coat, tore the hairpins from her hair, piled it up swiftly on top of her head, and taking a big can of talcum powder that stood upon the dresser, quickly covered her dark locks with a temporary snow of age.

The girl had often given a dry shampoo to sundry women of her clientele when she had worked in the beauty shop and had often marveled at the appearance of age the temporary whitening of their hair had lent them. It was doing the same thing for her.

Mike Flannagan, feeling somewhat suspicious of the somewhat pert maid, came

lumbering down the stairs from the upper dining-room.

He peered into the dressing-room.

An elderly lady in a motor coat was putting the finishing touches to a somewhat hurried but very becoming coiffure. She stood before the mirror and answered his query in a pleasant, ladylike voice.

“Where’s that maid that was just in here?” he roared.

“I haven’t the slightest idea in the world,” she said.

And Mike believed her.

He rushed around the first floor; into the kitchen he dashed. A maid that was a replica, so far as Mike could judge, of the one who had stood in the doorway was talking and laughing with a black-coated waiter.

“Has a girl with flowers in her hat gone through here?”

“Nope,” said the cook laconically. “Besides, she couldn’t go through here. If she came in she’d have to turn around and go right out again. ’S’matter?”

But Mike was gone. As he shot through the doorway to join the group that was waiting for him to return with the girl, he saw a graceful figure in a motor coat and an elaborate gray coiffure open the gate between the tall shrubs, close it carefully, and walk not too fast and not too slowly down the street.

“She’s gone,” bellowed Mike. “Not a trace of her, anywhere.”

“She’s certainly slick about getting away, but she wasn’t slick enough to take her loot with her,” said Dennis O’Grady, who held in his hand the box that contained the coat.

He and Jimmy had dismissed the errand boy and were having a social glass, over which Jimmy had explained how he happened to be the recipient of stolen goods. Jimmy’s credentials were good, his face familiar in the precinct, and the coat found. Everything seemed just about all right.

Mike consented to take two big beautiful Havanas, garlanded with red and gold rings. As man to man he quite understood that Jimmy shrank from figuring in the case.

Jimmy wandered slowly up Second

Avenue, a wise and more chastened soul, cogitating deeply upon the hazards of life in general and femininity in particular, but with a well defined regret that a girl so beautiful should belong to the criminal classes!

How about Fifi?

Speeding along up the avenue in a taxicab and busily engaged in shaking the talcum from her hair, much to the detriment of the cushions, Fifi also was deeply cogitating.

The motor coat she was wearing was a good one, worth perhaps fifty dollars; in the pocket was a purse containing a ten-dollar bill, some loose change, and a thrift stamp; in her own purse was the money she had received for the articles purloined from Mrs. Jones.

Eighty dollars in all, besides the loose change *and* the thrift stamp!

Having shaken the talcum from her hair and rearranged her coiffure low on her neck again, Fifi settled back disconsolately among the dusty cushions.

Sadly she smoothed the lapel of the motor coat; slowly she withdrew the purse from the coat pocket and transferred the ten-dollar bill to her own purse and languidly dropped the other out of the taxicab window.

Her gaze wandered ruefully out over the crowd that surged and frothed and foamed in the asphalted street. She stopped the chauffeur at the south side of the park. She evaded the curious glance he gave her as she paid him—he had thought that his fare was an elderly woman—and plunged across the Square in the soft dusk of a wonderful October night.

Like censer lamps the stars hung in the splendor of the sky lighting Fifi's way. She fitted her latch key into the rear door.

Somewhere a clock chimed out with silvery tones the hour of five. She leaned against the door jamb a trifle breathlessly. Her eyes were raised involuntarily to the jeweled cup of the sky.

For an instant she lived over again that moment—that horrible, sickening moment when she had stood upon the sidewalk with the stolen coat in her possession, and had thought that a detective was going to arrest her.

From within came the sounds of preparation for dinner, the cook scolding the scullion, the butler giving orders, the rattle of silver, the clink of china, the delicious aroma of roasting meats assailed her nostrils—all the homely, domestic sounds and odors with their reassuring note of safety.

A delicious little thrill scurried over Fifi; her key scraped in the lock. She looked back over her shoulder as she opened the door and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Gee!" she told herself silently. "I never could steal. I haven't got the nerve. Once is enough for me. Back to the straight and narrow for you, Fifi Montessor!"

And Fifi closed the door.

Which observation by Fifi appears to prove rather conclusively that Fifi did not consider that she had *stolen* the motor coat, nor the ten-dollar bill, nor the lingerie, nor the soaps and perfumes and powders, nor the small change and the thrift stamp!

Nor would all her future blithe speculations be *stealing*.

No, indeed! These were all perquisites vindicating Fifi's claim to smartness and her right to travel the "broad and crooked highway," with all the other twisted souls who are under the mental illusion that it is straight and narrow.

*There's the tang of the sea—the whispering voice
of mystery and the hissing breath of fight in*

“AVALON”

BY FRANCIS STEVENS
Author of "Citadel of Fear," etc.

AUGUST 16

Playing the System

by

C.C. Waddell and Leslie Bradshaw

Authors of "Setting the Trap," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WITHOUT looking or caring where I was going, I swiftly traversed several blocks. My one impulse was to get away. While that was uppermost in my mind, however, I retained sufficient self-control to act in something approaching normal fashion.

I did not run. I did not make myself conspicuous. I was like a ship without a rudder—I simply drifted along, although I drifted with considerable speed.

Many times during that self-repressed dash I felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to stop and look around to see if any one was pursuing me; but fear of attracting notice restrained me, and I pushed ahead.

I had no goal or objective at the start, but as I proceeded I debated and dismissed as unfeasible several plans of concealment.

Suddenly, though, I happened to think of Howard. True, I had treated him rather shabbily all these weeks, but in his relief at my return I knew that my abandonment of him would be forgiven. He was just the kind of reckless, happy-go-lucky chap, too, who would be delighted to be let in on a scrape of the sort.

I had been to his bachelor apartment several times, and knew where he lived. The only question was whether or not I would find him in. The morning was getting pretty well advanced, and the chances were that he had left. In that case, I

would simply have to wait until he came, meanwhile trying to get him on the telephone. At any rate, I would make a try, I decided. It was the only possible refuge that suggested itself.

The apartment was on Twenty-Seventh Street, east of Madison Avenue, and I reached it in a few minutes. Although the location was good, the building was evidently quite old. An old man in a very worn uniform sat in the hall reading a newspaper. In response to my inquiry he did not bother to announce me by telephone, but simply waddled to the elevator and took me upstairs without a word. Stopping the elevator at the fifth floor he pointed to the door of Howard's flat, and, preserving his tomblike silence, descended.

I rang the bell several times without success, and was about to turn away with the natural assumption that Howard was out and the place was empty when the door was opened, and Howard himself, looking very sleepy and wearing a gorgeous bath-robe, faced me.

"Horton!" he exclaimed. "The very man I want to see. Come right in."

I went right in, and followed him down a long hall to the front. It was a room unusually large for New York apartments, looking down on the street. Howard settled himself on the couch and regarded me with interest.

"Welcome to the prodigal," he said. "Tell me all about yourself and where you've been. As you see, I am only just

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 5.

getting up. I was up pretty late last night. Had a bit of a party. It's a funny thing, but I was going to call on you at the Glendale this morning if I had got up earlier. Ripley told me that you would be there."

"When did you see him?"

"Last night, at the theater. He told us he had seen you. I was with Goddard."

I nearly jumped at his mentioning the name of my late victim. So that was how Goddard had found me!

"Howard," I said. "I'm in a pretty tight place, and I'd like you to help me out."

"Sure," he said, with a look of surprise. "What's the trouble?"

I told him. I told him the whole story, from the day Goddard had threatened me, the day that Fellamore had died, down to the fight at the Glendale only half an hour previously. Howard whistled.

"Some adventures you've been having! Well, what can I do?"

"Why, I'd like to stay here with you until I can see how the land lies, if you don't mind. I hate to impose on you, but, honestly, I don't know where else to go, or what else to do. There's a risk, of course, but so few people know me in New York, or anything of my associations, that it's doubtful if any one would suspect you of harboring me. Ripley, I am sure, will say nothing if you tell him to keep quiet. And Goddard, if he's alive, won't do any talking, either. If he's well, the other thing—" I finished with an expressive gesture.

"I'm throwing myself on your mercy, Howard," I appealed. "You know how you'd feel, yourself, in a mess of the sort. Still, if you don't care to have me, or feel uneasy about it—" I half-turned toward the door.

"Uneasy? Not a bit." He caught me by the arm and drew me back into the room. "Only too glad to be of help. And cheer up, old scout. Don't worry. You've probably only knocked the beggar out. I'll get dressed right away, and begin nosing around for some news. First, we'd better call up the office; he may be down there by now. I can make an excuse that I want to know how the market is going."

Suiting the action to the word, he picked up the telephone and got Ripley. Goddard,

he informed me, had not been at French, Palmer & Co.'s that morning, and nobody knew where he was. The market was steady, he added, unchanged to fractionally higher than the previous day's closing; but this latter intelligence was of little interest to me.

I kept urging him to hurry, and see what he could learn outside; and like the good fellow he was, he lost no time getting into his clothes.

"I'm going to slip up to the Glendale," he announced. "I'll find out what's doing up there. You'll hear from me very soon."

"Don't be any longer than you can help," I said. "The suspense is awful."

And it was. The next half-hour was the longest I have ever spent. I tried to read the morning paper, but could not. My mind was filled with a picture of Room 817 at the Glendale, the signs of violence, that immobile body lying flat on the floor. Surely the man could not be *dead*?

But where was Howard? It seemed as if he would never return. What could be keeping him? The worst must have happened, and Howard was unwilling to break the bad news. With the passing of each moment my worry increased. I could not sit still; I could only pace up and down, filled with the direst forebodings.

Just as I had begun to feel that I could not stand it another moment there was a sound of a key being turned in the door, and Howard bounded in.

One look at his face told me that at any rate there was still some hope.

"Nothing to worry about, Horton. No dead body. But there's one curious thing about it," He frowned. "Goddard has disappeared!"

"Disappeared! What do you mean?"

"Sit down and take it easy. As soon as I hit the Glendale I noticed some newspaper men in the lobby. I knew all of them fairly well, so I hustled right over and asked them what was doing. They had the story, all right, and were just about to go. Their version is that there was a tremendous fight in Room 817, but that both parties have vanished. The room is all broken up, but there isn't a sign of either yourself or your sparring partner."

My first sensation was one of immense relief.

"Then Goddard is alive!"

"Probably; and not only alive, but able to navigate under his own steam. No one seems to have seen him depart, but there's absolutely no doubt that he *has* departed. However, you'd better lie low for a while until the whole incident has blown over. You don't want to be hauled up under suspicion of being a suit-case murderer. Stick around here for a while.

"Now, I'm going down-town," he continued. "What do you think about our account? We've played the system, and it has treated us right. But all good things come to an end sooner or later, and I've been sweating blood for the last two weeks wondering how I could get hold of you.

"Now you know the old saying," he went on. "'You never go broke taking profits.' I figure that we have about \$110,000 to our credit, which is our original \$10,000 and \$50,000 profit each. I'm all for taking it. If any break should occur, we'd never forgive ourselves for not having grabbed the money while we could. What do you say?"

I assented listlessly. Yesterday I would have been stirred to wild enthusiasm by his report, and have discussed the matter with him from every phase and standpoint, but now my mind was so full of other things, and I was speculating over so many possibilities, that I hardly gave an ear to what he was saying.

"Do just as you think best," I told him, and so, as the selling order had to be signed jointly by us both, he wrote it out on a sheet of paper, and when we had both affixed our signatures, took it with him.

"I'll be back around dinner-time," he said on leaving. "You know where you can get me, if anything turns up meantime."

But after he was gone I fell into another senseless panic. The idea occurred to me that perhaps the police had removed Goddard's body from the hotel, and were allowing the other impression to be circulated in order to lull me into a sense of security—and then arrest me. I tried to convince myself that it was silly, but it would not be downed.

I spent a miserable day under the spell of various gloomy apprehensions, and my spirits were not improved by a telephone call from Howard late in the afternoon.

"Nothing new, so far as I can find out," he reported. "I put the selling order through, though, and we're now entirely out of the market with exactly \$55,129.50 each to our credit."

He paused, as if expecting some note of jubilation from me, but as I merely muttered: "All right," he went on.

"I'm sorry, old man, but I can't get up to dinner with you as I expected, because I've got to stick around with a fellow down here, but I'll shake him by eight or nine o'clock at the latest, and then I'll be with you for the rest of the evening. I wouldn't go out if I were you. Just tip the old hall-man there in the building, and have him bring you in something from the outside."

"Very well," I answered. There was nothing else to say.

Accordingly, about seven o'clock, I phoned down to the old servitor, and asked him to order me a dinner from a near-by hotel, directing him at the same time to bring me in all the evening papers, for I was almost wild by this time to learn if any fresh developments had occurred.

Presently he appeared with the dinner on a tray, and the sheaf of late editions under his arm. I paid no attention to the former, merely nodding to indicate that he was to place it on the table; but I snatched hungrily at the papers, and hurried over to the light to scan them over.

"Did you speak, sir?" he glanced up at me.

I shook my head. It was merely an involuntary exclamation that I could not repress. For there, staring up at me from the front page of the very first paper I opened was a bold, black head-line:

WOMAN IN THE GLENDALE CASE.

Participant in the Hotel-Room Fight Had a Lady Caller.

Rapidly my eye raced through the several accounts. They were all practically the same. A woman who was rather closely described had been seen paying a visit to

my room that morning, and was now being eagerly sought by the police.

It was unquestionably Louise to whom the description pointed. She had been noted going to my room. She was regarded as implicated in the fracas. The police were searching for her. I stood appalled as I realized what it might mean to her in the way of humiliation and disgrace.

"Dinner is served, sir." The voice of the old hall-man broke in upon my tortured reflections.

I waved it distastefully away. To eat now was the last thing in my thoughts. Louise was in peril. At the very least she could hardly escape being compromised. She must be spared at any cost or hazard to my own personal safety.

A sudden thought came to me, born of the very stress of the emergency, and I made a quick decision. Catching up my coat and hat, I turned to the old hall-man.

"Tell Mr. Howard that I have gone out when he comes in. Just say to him that I had to go!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHO'S THE MAN?

OFTEN one may puzzle and puzzle in vain over some baffling and seemingly unsolvable riddle, only to find that under the spur of a great necessity the answer springs to one's brain in a flash.

That morning, when I would have pursued Louise with only my own interests at stake, I had immediately come up against a blank wall. I hadn't an idea where to look for her, and to follow the example of Orpheus and go aimlessly wandering about the town wailing that I had lost my Eurydice would only have served to land me at Bellevue under observation.

But now that her interests were involved, now that her safety and security were in question, my mind fairly leaped to the clue which disclosed to me her whereabouts, and all the little tangled threads of memory grouped themselves together to aid me.

Her old schoolmate of whom she had so often spoken, and who had married and come to New York? What was the name?

Ah, yes; Marie! And Marie had married Dick. But Dick who? That eluded me for almost a second. Then, like a close-up at the movies, there flashed before my mental vision a fac-simile of the letters which Louise had asked me to post from time to time.

I had never consciously noted the address, yet it must somehow have imprinted itself upon my recollection; for I saw it now as plainly as if upon an envelope that I held in my hand.

MRS. RICHARD POWERS,
No. 746 West 138th St.,
New York City.

That was where I would find Louise. There was never the slightest question in my mind on that score.

As I say, I disregarded the dinner which the old hall-man was laying out on the table, and with a parting message for Howard caught up my coat and hat and dashed for the door, leaving him staring after me, as if he thought me the victim of some kind of a fit.

Since he was inside, the creaking elevator was, of course, at a standstill at our floor; but I had no time to wait for him to come and take me down. Instead, I clattered down the stairway, taking a half-dozen steps to the jump, and less than a minute later was out in the street.

Above me gleamed the big clock on the Metropolitan tower, and I noted that it was twenty-five minutes to eight.

For a moment I paused, uncertainly, to lay my course; for it will be remembered that I was not very familiar with New York except for the financial district, and in the zone where the bright lights flash from the fronts of theaters and cabarets.

The subway, I finally decided, was probably the best route for me to follow; so I hurried around the corner to the station at Twenty-Eighth Street and Fourth Avenue, and just succeeded in catching a local train.

At Grand Central I changed to an express, but, as it happened, to one headed for the East Side, and, as in my ignorance of up-town locations, I did not make the

proper change at Ninety-Sixth Street, I was carried far out of my way, and thus having to retrace my steps was later than I otherwise would have been in reaching my destination. This was, of course, prior to the inauguration of the celebrated subway "shuttle."

It was, I fancy, just about half-past eight when I ultimately arrived at the number I was seeking, one of those handsome, modern apartment-houses, typical of Washington Heights.

I was just approaching the hall-boy to ask what floor Mr. Powers lived on, with a view to going up unannounced, when I noticed ahead of me a well-dressed, distinguished-looking man, with gray hair and close-cropped gray mustache. I had to wait until he was through, and it was impossible not to overhear what was said.

"I want to see Miss Barrows, in Mrs. Powers's apartment," he said. "Please announce me."

"Name, sar?" drawled the listless West Indian at the switchboard.

"Black. Say that Mr. Black is calling. She is expecting me."

To say that I was surprised would hardly be the truth. I had been certain that my hunch was correct, and that Louise—whatever the purpose that had brought her to New York—was stopping with her friend, Marie. Yet I cannot deny that this definite confirmation of my surmise came to me with something of a shock.

I was startled, too, by the presence of this man who seemed so assured of his welcome, and eyed him more closely. Who was he, I wondered, and just how much of an acquaintance? The name, Black, conveyed nothing to my mind to help me in forming an estimate. I had never heard Louise mention any one of that name that I could remember.

Perhaps he was just bluffing about being expected. Perhaps he was a book-agent or something of that sort, employing a ruse.

But the answer to the boy's telephone query settled any doubts of that character.

"She says for you to come right up, sar," he informed the caller. "Fo'th floor, No. 46." And Mr. Black, with a nod, stepped toward the elevator.

Evidently, then, Louise was in. Evidently, also, she was expecting her visitor.

The boy turned inquiringly toward me, but I stammered out some sort of an excuse for my presence, and sought to engage him in conversation. A dollar bill overcame any inclination he might have had toward reticence, and I learned practically everything that he was able to tell me.

The caller who had just gone up was a stranger to him, he said; he had never seen him before. But that, he admitted, did not mean that Mr. Black might not be a frequent visitor to the apartment, for he himself had only assumed his present job a day or two before. And the rest of his intelligence was of about equal value.

Miss Barrows lived there with Mr. and Mrs. Powers, yes; or maybe she was visiting them. She went out every morning about nine o'clock and came back about six in the evening. It looked like she had a job of some kind down-town, but he had never heard that such was the case. That evening she had been late, did not come in until almost seven.

Mr. Powers was a newspaperman and worked at night. He always went out a little after seven, and did not get back until three and four in the morning. Their apartment was on the fourth floor, with two windows in the front, the two nearest to Broadway.

There was obviously nothing more to be gathered from this source; so, giving the boy a plausible excuse for my interrogation, I went outside to take up an uneasy vigil and try to digest what I had learned.

It would never do, I felt, to intrude, so long as Black remained; for not only was what I had to say of too intimate a character to be discussed before a third person, but I was by no means sure of being allowed to say anything unless I talked quickly and to the point. This was not one of those occasions where I could sit around and babble polite commonplaces while waiting for him to go. Neither could I burst in there to blurt out the truth in front of him, when I was so absolutely ignorant of the relation in which he stood to the household.

And that last point, as I reflected, was

one which caused me a steadily growing anxiety. Who and what was Mr. Black?

One fact I had to take into my reckoning, whether I wanted to or not. Louise had undoubtedly seen the evening papers, just as I had. She knew just as well as I did that she was the woman of mystery being sought by the police.

In her natural perturbation and distress would she be apt to receive an ordinary caller? No; I knew she would not. She would have asked to be excused. This man Black must then have been somebody she had sent for either to obtain advice or assistance. That, of course, explained his statement that he was expected.

Vainly I tried to catalogue him. He did not carry any of the ear-marks of a lawyer, or doctor. Nor was he a detective or public official of any kind; of that I felt certain. Somehow I could not place him to my satisfaction. A professional man, I should judge, but in what line I could not say.

Under the circumstances the only position to which I could assign him was that of a very old and trusted friend of Louise's—which I knew he was not—or else her lover and fiancé.

I looked up at the two windows on the fourth floor. They were both brightly lighted, but the blinds were down. I could see nothing of what was occurring within.

I could picture it, though. I could imagine her sobbing and downcast. I could see him soothing and comforting her, taking her in his arms, kissing away her tears.

G-r-r-r! I gritted my teeth in jealous rage, and mopped my brow with my handkerchief. He should not have her, I vowed. No other man should have her. She was mine, mine, mine!

Up and down that block across from the apartment-house I paced, my eyes fixed on those two lighted windows, sometimes seething with fury, again cold, with a sort of dull hopelessness as I thought of the coils in which I seemed to become constantly enmeshed.

Up and down the block I tramped. Up and down. Would he never go?

Everything ends some time, however. At last I was rewarded by the sight of Black coming out of the door of the apartment-

house. He paused a moment on the steps, then started briskly off toward Broadway.

For the instant the impulse was strong upon me to follow him up, to demand what he had been doing there, and unless his answer was to my liking to pick a row with him and beat him up.

Happily I restrained myself, though. I had no time to waste, for it was now well after ten o'clock. Therefore I hurried into the apartment-house, and, slipping another dollar into the palm of the hall-boy, told him to take me up to the fourth floor.

I calculated that Louise would still be up, her caller having just left, and that she would probably answer the bell. Mrs. Powers had doubtless gone to bed. I found the apartment by its number, and rang the bell. Then I waited, my heart beating fast. I heard steps approaching on the inside. Just as I had expected, Louise opened the door.

"You!" she gasped. She went white as a sheet, and for a moment I thought she was going to slam the door in my face, and thrust my foot out to prevent it.

"Yes, me," I said. "And there's going to be no silly business about not wanting to speak to me this time. You and I are going to have a talk, whether you wish to hear me or not."

She looked at me a little strangely. There was a note of determination in my voice that was new to her. She hesitated a second longer, then threw back the door.

"Very well," she said. "Come in!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

SHE led me into the living-room of the apartment and motioned me to a chair. But I shook my head. I was battling for what was more to me than anything else in the world, and I wanted to be on my feet to do it. So we both remained standing.

"Look here, Louise," I said. "You told me you didn't want any explanations, and I don't intend to make any. I am simply here to help you, to keep you free and unsmirched from this nasty mess—whatever it may prove to be—that I've got into."

"How?" she questioned.

"Well"—I hesitated—"I thought of giving myself up to the police, and then denying that you were in any way concerned with the affair, denying that I had any woman caller at my room at all. That ought to settle it."

She shook her head. "You forget that I was seen to enter the room by unprejudiced witnesses. Your denial would carry no weight at all against their word. In fact, it would only make a bad matter worse."

I had to admit that this was so. "But surely I can do something!" I exclaimed. "Only tell me what, and I'll do it, if it kills me!"

The faint, ironic smile that flickered across her lips drove me almost beside myself with resentment. She was cool as an icicle.

"Oh, I mean it!" I declared. "It isn't John Walton with his dreams and his vagaries that's talking to you now. It's a man who's been through a rough-and-tumble with life, and has come out on top."

"On top?" she repeated. There was just the hint of a sarcastic inflection in her voice, but it cut me like a knife. As always, it was the truth that hurt; for in view of my present situation my claim certainly did sound a good deal like empty boasting.

I stammered and stuttered in the attempt to make a retort, but before I could hit upon anything sufficiently in point, Louise, her manner swiftly changing, leaned toward me.

"Forgive me," she said penitently. "I do not want to be nasty. I believe you really did come here to-night on a generous impulse to try and be of assistance to me, so let's confine ourselves to that issue. And perhaps it would help, if you told me exactly what happened down there at the Glendale, for the newspapers, of course, have nothing but conjectures and surmise."

Again she asked me to sit down, and this time I complied. She herself took a seat on a low chair just across from me.

"Well," I said, "there's really nothing very much to tell. A fellow came up there to my room to try and blackmail me, and then when I bested him at his little game he got so furious that he made an attack

on me. I had to defend myself, and we tussled all over the room, until at last I got a chance to swing on him, and he went down."

"You killed him!" Louise shrank back, her eyes dilating, as I paused. "Then what did you do with the body?"

"No, no," I corrected her. "I couldn't have killed him. I only thought I did."

"You see," I explained, "I realized while we were fighting that he was badly out of condition, so when he went down that way and laid so still, with absolutely no heart-beat or any other sign of life, I got frightened and beat a retreat as fast as I could. But it must have been only a knock-out, or how else did he get away from there?" I repeated Howard's argument.

She gave me a long, searching glance as if to determine whether or not I was telling the absolute truth.

"And you left him lying there; you did not go back?" An expression of relief was dawning on her face. Then it clouded again with a sudden suggestion. "Might his pals or associates have carried him away?"

I shook my head. "He didn't have any. He was playing a lone hand."

"In that case you are right, of course. He was only temporarily stunned, and left when he came back to consciousness."

"And all this tissue of sensation and mystery"—her voice rose higher with a little tremble of excitement—"is only a mare's nest, after all!

"John"—she probed me again with some return of suspicion—"are you telling me the whole truth about this thing?"

"To the letter," I averred.

"And you know this man?"

"Of course. His name is Goddard, and he is the cashier at French, Palmer & Co.'s, a brokerage house down-town where I have been doing business."

"Then the thing is simple," she declared. "We have only to find him and get him to confirm your story. With that the whole matter collapses like a balloon with the air let out."

"I am going to telephone Dick." She jumped up and started for the telephone.

"Hold on a minute." I stayed her. "Goddard will never admit that he was try-

ing to blackmail me. Better just say that we had a business disagreement."

So with that correction she put her information in to Powers at the *News*, and he immediately sent a reporter on the jump to locate Goddard and get his version of the altercation.

Naturally the city editor insisted on talking to me, and I repeated my story practically as I had told it to Louise.

"But what about the mysterious lady caller?" he demanded when I had finished. "You don't say anything about her."

"Oh, that was just a young woman who happened to stray into my room by mistake," I answered in a tone so indifferent that I was proud of it, "and who immediately went out again. Nothing else to it, Mr. Powers, I assure you."

He was satisfied and rang off; but the question had raised a query in my own mind, and when we returned to the living-room, I put it to Louise.

"By the way," I said, "what did bring you to Room 817 this morning? It certainly wasn't to see me, for I never saw a more astonished look on a person's face than when you opened that door."

"It was an assignment." She hesitated. "No"—with a quick toss of her head—"that isn't exactly the truth, either. But I thought it was."

Then she told me the story of how she had gone to the theater and of overhearing the conversation of the two men behind her with all that had come from it.

As I sat wondering over the tangle of cross-purposes and of chance-encounters which had been woven into the last two days, a sudden suspicion pierced my brain. I leaned slightly forward.

"And who is this editor," I asked, "that seems to be taking such an interest in forwarding your career?"

"Why, Mr. Black, of the *Excelsior Magazine*."

"Ah!" I encered. "The same man that was here to-night, eh? He must think he has struck a veritable gold-mine of talent the way he is working it. Is it the custom for editors to go gallivanting around with unknown authors every night in the week?"

Her head went up stiffly.

"Mr. Black has been more than kind," she said. "And it was only natural that he should have called to-night after he saw what a narrow escape I had had—as he thought—from being involved in that mess down at the Glendale—a mess caused entirely by your stupid blundering."

Fortunately the telephone rang at this minute and interrupted the impending altercation.

It proved to be Powers with the report that Goddard had been found at home considerably the worse for wear, but still far from being a gory corpse. He had been housed all day, it seemed, and as both his eyes were swelled completely shut had made no demand for newspapers. Consequently, until the arrival of the reporter, he had been in complete ignorance of the sensation caused by his disappearance from the Glendale.

He had been extremely averse to giving any details of the affair at all until he discovered that further silence on his part would only tend to a greater publicity for it, and then when he had heard my account he sullenly verified it in all essential particulars.

"And so," said Powers with mock reproach to Louise, "you've succeeded in puncturing one of the prettiest little mysteries that has broken for the newspapers in a coon's age."

She hung up the receiver with a light laugh and came back into the living-room in a far more amiable frame of mind. I do not think that up to this time she had been fully convinced that I was telling the truth.

I promptly pressed my advantage.

"So now that you have seen what a coil circumstances have woven around me in this case, don't you think that you ought to be willing to grant that I may be just as free from any connection with the death of old man Fellamore and the disappearance of his wealth?" I urged.

She bit her lip in silence a moment, and then shook her head.

"I am sorry," she said, "that I must tell you no, and sorry, too, that you have brought that matter up. You have been generous to me to-night, you have done me a great service; but if I were to express my

real feelings toward you, I would have to repeat what I told you this morning in the hotel. I believe that you are guilty, whether it is ever proved against you or not; and I always shall believe you guilty. Appearances are too strong against you not to have some basis in fact.

"These two cases are entirely different," she went on. "In this Glendale affair you had but to come out and state the facts to thoroughly exculpate yourself. Why you did not do it instead of skulking and hiding all day while the newspapermen spun fancies about your disappearance passes my comprehension. But in the Fellamore matter there are things that you cannot explain. You have had ample opportunity to face your accusers and to clear your name, and you have not done it. What is one to deduce?"

She rose.

"I think you had better go now," she said. "And I shall not see you again."

"No," I said, rising to face her, "I shall not go until you have listened to me. You sneered a while ago when I told you that I was 'on top.' Well, that's where I am, and with it all I am as clean and as straight and as innocent of any crime as I was when you used to tell me that you trusted in me and were certain of my success. I've had everything against me—calumny and misfortune and double-dealing; but I've come to this big city, and I've made good in the hardest game men play. I'm a rich man now, as fortunes go in West Kinnikinnick, and I'm going back there to make those clacking villagers eat dirt.

"You say I had the opportunity to face my accusers and clear my name," I went on passionately. "Yes—and a healthy chance it was, with no money and only a record of failure to serve as my passport. But I'm going back now, with one of the best lawyers that I can hire, and we'll put the kibosh on this slander once and for all.

"Then, when my name is cleared, I'm coming back here to marry you!"

I took an impetuous step toward her as I spoke, but she waved me away.

"No, John, no!" she cried. "That can never be. I hope that you will clear your name. I shall pray for it. But whether

you succeed or not, I will never marry you. And that is final."

"Then there is some ofe else!" I exclaimed. "Ah! I see it now. It's that Black, the editor-chap, snooping around here with his glittering promises of making you a great writer, who has turned your head. You've thrown me over for him. He's the one you're in love with. He's—"

"You're raving, and you'll wake up the entire house," she interrupted me. "Don't be a fool. Leviticus Black has no idea of falling in love with me, nor I with him."

"Whom did you say?" I caught her by the arm. Even in the fog of jealous rage which blurred my faculties I caught at that name she had spoken. It struck a chord somewhere in my memory. "Whom did you say?" I repeated.

"Why, Leviticus Black"—she stared at me, half-frightened by the tenseness of my manner—"weren't you speaking of him?"

As if in a vision that scene in old man Fellamore's cabin rose before me when he gave me the little parcel marked "L. B." to deliver as a memento.

"Give this to Leviticus," he had said.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PAPER MILLIONS.

DASHING abruptly away from Louise, I made for the telephone in the hall and called up the hotel at which I had first stopped on my arrival in New York.

I had left there in arrears, but as soon as I had taken over my little Long Island place from the Delaines and had established myself there, I subtracted the amount of the bill from my scanty store of cash and sent it in, at the same time requesting that my few belongings be packed up and held for me until I called for them.

I had done this because I was afraid that if I gave an address to which they might be sent it would be used in some way to trace me up; and I had been so occupied ever since I had returned to the city on the present occasion that I had had no chance to go after the things, even if I had thought of them, which I had not.

But now Louise's disclosure had given

me a sudden, vital interest in those old traps of mine, and I was eager to know if they were still held safe against my coming.

Fortunately the phone was answered by a night clerk with whom I had struck up quite an acquaintance during my stay in the house, and who readily recalled me. He informed me that everything in my room had been put into my suit-case, and that it was in the storage-room awaiting my call for it.

Then at my request he consented to rummage through it and make sure that a paper-wrapped parcel marked "L. B." was among the contents.

Impatiently I shuffled my feet and shifted the receiver from one hand to another as I waited for his return from this errand.

"Yes," he said, "the parcel is here, all right. Do you want me to send it to you?"

"No," I answered, "I'll be right over after it in person."

Then, as I clapped the receiver back upon the hook, I turned to Louise, who was, of course, thoroughly mystified by my conduct.

"It's your turn next," I said. "You know where Leviticus Black lives, don't you?"

"Yes." She named an exclusive downtown hotel, adding that he had told her he resided there with his mother.

"Then call him up and tell him that you and I are coming there to call on him immediately."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she balked.

"Listen, Louise," I urged. "You said you hoped and were going to pray that my name might be cleared of any stain in connection with the death of old man Fellamore. Now, strange as it may seem, Leviticus Black is the one person who can help me. He is the only relative for whom the old man had any affection or in whom he reposed any confidence, and he can certainly give me some assistance. At any rate, the delivery of that parcel to him will show that Fellamore and I were on friendly terms when we separated, or he would not have made me the bearer of it. You will say, of course, that I could wait until tomorrow to see him, but I cannot. Don't, you understand how much this means to

me? Every moment of delay would be torture. Come; do as I ask, I beg of you! It is not late."

With the matter put to her thus she finally reluctantly yielded, and, calling up Black, told him that a young man from her native village was very anxious to see him that night, and as it appeared to be a matter of considerable importance, asked if he would be willing to receive them.

The editor obligingly consented, and delighted at my success I lost no time in summoning a taxi.

Half an hour later, after a stop to get the "L. B." parcel at the hotel where it was held, we reached Black's abode, and, having been announced, were shown to his rooms.

He opened the door for us himself and ushered us into a room where he had evidently been working, for the drop-light was on over his desk, and it was littered with papers and manuscripts.

"Mr. Black," I said, "let me attend first to the commission which is my excuse for intruding upon you." I held out the little parcel. "I was charged to deliver this into your own hands."

He took it and, removing the wrapper, gave a little start.

"Ah—a miniature of my mother!" he exclaimed. "This must have come from my cousin, Luke Fellamore."

He glanced up at me and I bowed.

"A lovable old fellow, even though a little touched here." He tapped his forehead. "I shall prize this memento the more because it was probably the only thing of any value that the poor old man possessed."

Louise stared at him in amazement.

"Why," she stammered, "he was a millionaire, was he not?"

"Only here." Again Black significantly touched his forehead.

"But up at West Kinnikinnick people have been making the greatest to-do over the disappearance of his fortune. And his relatives have been searching high and low to—"

"Yes, I know." Black shrugged his shoulders a little wearily. "They based their belief upon the discovery of a ledger, did they not? which purported to record

transactions in stock speculation upon a mammoth scale. Unfortunately there are family troubles in the connection, owing to which I do not speak or hold any communication with Mr. Fellamore's nephews, his direct heirs; but if any of them had asked me, I could have told them that I had seen that ledger years ago, and that all the dealings set down in it were purely imaginary."

It was my turn now to gasp. I was perhaps not quite so surprised as Louise, for back in my mind there had been a haunting suspicion for some time that Fellamore's vast fortune was not quite so substantial as he had represented. Yet I cannot deny that Black's flat statement hit me with something of a shock.

"You see"—the editor went on to explain—"my cousin was for years a book-keeper in a brokerage house down-town, and while there he evolved a system of playing the market which he claimed would make anybody rich that followed it. But he never could persuade anybody to embark upon it, and he himself did not have the money to finance the initial venture. However, in the hope of finding a backer sooner or later he recorded in a book the trading he would have done—played it on paper, as they say—until finally his mind, enfeebled by disappointment and adversity, gave way, and he became obsessed with the delusion that his paper millions were real.

"He, of course, could no longer retain his situation, and I don't know what would have become of him, but another old friend and I managed to coax him into taking this little shack of his up in the Berkshires, and then contributed sufficient to insure his support.

"After that he was perfectly happy, pottering around among his flowers and imagining himself another Rockefeller. As I say, though, this miniature was the only thing of any real value he possessed, although he carefully preserved two counterfeit bills which had once been passed on him and which he had to make good, and also the deeds to some run-down land on Long Island which I believe has since been sold for taxes."

There was nothing more to say. Indeed,

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in our dazed state, neither Louise nor I was hardly capable of speech.

I did manage to stammer out a request that Mr. Black would put down in writing the statement he had just made and give it to me to use in refutation of the slanders which had been spread abroad against me, and he readily promised to do so, and also to furnish proofs to back it up.

Then we made our adieus and started to leave. But at the door he halted Louise.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Barrows," he said, "I have been thinking over that suggestion for a story-plot you made to-night, the one you know, where the girl encounters her recreant fiancé in the room at the hotel, and I would hardly advise you to tackle it. It is so unplausible that it might almost be a true story. The other idea you presented is much better."

As we sped back up-town in the taxi I naturally pleaded my cause to Louise. My name was cleared. I told her I was able to care for her well—my dream of a million was sure of realization. I painted a future for both of us to, luxury, of travel, of success. But she only shook her head.

"No, John," she said, "I have wronged you in one way, but not in another. It was not the clattering tongues of the village, nor the accusations made against you, that killed my faith in you. It was your own act. When you sold the little, old hili-farm without a word to me, you showed your utter lack of consideration, and you showed, too, the spirit of the gambler.

"You may do and become all that you say, John. I hope you may. But I doubt it. For you are building on false premises a house upon the sands. I will marry no man unless I can feel that he is on a substantial footing.

"Good night, John, and at the same time it's good-by!"

CHAPTER XXX.

BACK TO THE GAME.

I WAS in far from a buoyant mood as I started back down-town with that definite and decisive "Good-by!" of Louise's ringing in my ears; for I had little hope of

changing her determination. The Barrowses had always been known to the village as "sot in their ways."

In the career I had marked out for myself I had triumphed over every obstacle. My difficulties had all vanished away like mist. All that I had dreamed or hoped was right to my hand, ready to be seized.

But again her refusal of me had turned my triumph to dust and ashes in my mouth. For what was the world and the fulness thereof to me unless Louise went with it.

The subway guard's call, "Grand Central next!" roused me from the moody abstraction in which I had wrapped myself. Should I seek out a hotel to spend the night, or go on back to Howard's? A disinclination to be alone with my own brooding thoughts decided me. Besides, it was only due to Howard that I should gratify his natural curiosity as to what had occurred. I had given him poor enough return as it was for all the good offices he had shown to me. The only thing that bothered me now was that I had not given him the chance to let me have a night-key, and that if he had gone to bed I would have to wake him up to get in.

Hurrying toward his house as I came from the subway station, however, I was glad to notice that a light burned in his front room. Evidently he was still up.

He opened the door in answer to my ring and greeted me as cheerily as usual.

"Well, old top, here you are again! What's the news?"

I told him briefly what had occurred while he brewed a hospitable cup of tea.

"I've treated you shabbily again, Howard," I said, "and I'm terribly sorry. I don't know what in the world you can think of me, but—"

"Oh, that's all right. Forget it! You've had a tough time, and I'm tickled to death that things are shaping themselves the right way at last. I was a trifle anxious, of course, but I figured that if the cops had got you they would have given you a chance to telephone me. As a matter of fact, I've spent a profitable evening. Arthur Woodman, the fellow I took dinner with, kept me until half an hour ago. He nearly talked a leg off me; but it was great stuff."

"Arthur Woodman? Who is he?"

"He's a cotton broker, and he was telling me all about the cotton market. I always knew, of course, that it was very speculative, and that a fellow could make a pile of money playing it, and in a very short time. But I always figured that he could lose it just as easily, and as I really knew nothing of its workings I kept away and dabbled in stocks. But from what Woodman has told me about it, I'm inclined to try it out. And this brings up the question: What are we going to do now?"

"How do you mean—what are we going to do now?"

"Well, we've both made a nice little pile, we're out of the market, and we've nothing to do. What's the next move? Invest it in bonds and live modestly on the income—or play the system again?"

"No bonds for me," I said emphatically. "I'm going right ahead and work the system again. I want to get my million. Nothing else interests me."

"Not even the lady?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't interest her."

"That's tough," he said sympathetically, and did not refer to the subject again, much to my satisfaction. I could not forget Louise for a moment, and I was determined to try to blot her out of my mind as much as possible in the only way I knew—a feverish, frenzied, mad effort to make money, money, money; to pile it up, more and more; to take wild risks and experience the thrills that go with them.

We both sipped our tea in silence for a time. At length Howard spoke:

"Well, what does the system call for now?"

"The short side," I replied.

"Well, I guess it's right," remarked Howard. "The market's had a good, steady rise for weeks, and while it looks awful strong and all the news is bullish, the technical position must be in more or less of a weak condition. I suppose a lot of people are now long of stocks on margin, and any sudden bad news, with the help of professional short selling, would get them all to unloading. That would mean a big, quick decline. Yes, that's the dope, all right."

"Sure it is," I said, "even though it seems silly to sell a market as strong as this. Why, everybody is buying stocks—office boys, scrubwomen, waiters, car conductors, old maids, everybody. And all the news you read is encouraging—rising prices, bigger earnings, large surpluses being accumulated, increased dividends being anticipated."

"It's always that way at the peak of a bull market. The darned thing looks as if it were going right on up forever. But it's always had its break before, and I don't see why this time should be an exception to the rule. The head of a Stock Exchange house told me not long ago of what he called an absolutely sure way of making money in the Street. He said that if I or anybody else would go short of stocks to the extent of, say, one-quarter of the long stock he was carrying for his customers, and put up plenty of margin, he would make a clean-up."

"I don't quite understand."

"Well, suppose this house is carrying for all its customers forty thousands shares of different stocks. I go short of ten thousand shares, putting up one hundred and fifty thousand dollars or two hundred thousand dollars to protect it. The break comes. The longs sell out at declining prices, the most stubborn at the lowest. Each one-hundred-share-fellow loses his little one-thousand-dollar-margin as soon as the market has dropped ten points. Those who put up a little more margin hang on a little while longer, and then lose that, too. Follow?"

I nodded.

"Assume that the general market drops an average of fifteen points. My ten thousand shares short can be covered at a profit of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars—all in ten days or two weeks. It is proverbial that markets go down a darn sight faster than they go up. It's like a building. It may take many weeks to put up a nice house, but it can burn down in a single night.

"Yes," he said, summing up, "I think your system's true to form. Let's turn in now and go down there bright and early in the morning and start her going again."

I was getting sleepy myself after my strenuous day and I assented.

We got into French, Palmer & Co.'s office just before the market opened the next morning. Ripley was there, as smiling and suave as usual. He greeted me cordially and with a touch of respect that had been absent hitherto. I felt that he would like to ask me what had happened at the Glendale, but lacked the nerve. For myself I had no desire to enlighten him. I did, however, ask where Goddard was, and learned that he had telephoned his resignation that morning, asking for his two-weeks' salary. He knew that he would be fired, anyway, on the strength of the notoriety he had attained.

Then Howard and I, after a study of the board, started in. We selected one stock from each of the three classes: railroad, mining, and industrial, as before, and putting up our combined one hundred and ten thousand dollars, sold two thousand five hundred shares apiece short. The house borrowed the certificates in the "loan crowd" on the Exchange floor after the close of the market, and made delivery at two-fifteen the next afternoon in the usual way.

As I had half feared we had been too hasty. The market persisted in its strength, and by noon was up anywhere from a point to three points all along the line. There was hardly a single factor helpful to the bears. All the news was bullish. Several concerns during the day either declared initial dividends or increased their previous ones.

Apparently the only foundation for a bearish position was the technical position of the market, which was obviously impaired. All experienced brokers recognized this, and most of the houses in the Street were already demanding larger margins, especially on new business. Yet the public still came in. It cheerfully furnished fifteen and twenty, and even twenty-five, points margin.

I asked Ripley what he thought of the situation.

"It's a big market," he said. "The public has it all its own way at present. Of

course it cannot last. Sooner or later the whole structure will tumble, but just when it is difficult to say. The shorts have been bitten so badly lately that they are a bit shy of it. I know some floor brokers who were feeling for the top three weeks ago. They got burned in doing it, and I guess they won't try it again. Instead, they will wait until after the market has definitely turned. Then they'll jump in and pound it."

"It looks as if we'd been a little premature," I volunteered.

"Perhaps so. Still, you never know. Something might occur at any moment. Sudden news, especially overnight stuff, is invariably a bear factor, not bullish. Personally, I have my eye on the money market. Call-money is still ruling around five per cent, but if the banks should take it into their heads to discourage speculation, they could easily jump the call-rate up to eight or ten per cent. Then you would see the market break, all right."

"Why?" I asked. "You see, Ripley, I confess to a good deal of ignorance yet!"

"You're unusual," he returned with a smile. "Most of these traders, especially the green ones, pretend they know everything. They pay for their bluff, for they never learn the fundamentals. The interest rate on money is in reality one of the most important factors in stock speculation. I believe it is a fact, as Thomas W. Lawson claimed in 'Frenzied Finance,' that the market can be put up or down at will by the big interests, meaning chiefly the banks and those behind them. Their action is concerted and very powerful.

"For instance, if right now they should decide to end this bull market they could easily do it. By jumping the call-rate and calling brokers' loans they would force a great deal of selling. If they said to us: 'Here, you, French, Palmer & Co., you're putting in far too much industrial stuff in your collateral. You'd better lighten the load. The rate on loans, supported by your present collateral, is henceforth ten per cent. The six per cent rate applies only to seasoned railroads and industrials, split sixty-forties, and so forth and so on. What would we do? Would we pay the banks

ten per cent while charging our customers only five or six per cent? Naturally not. What would we do with the industrial collateral that the banks refused to take?"

"Sell it, I suppose."

"Exactly. We would sell it. If you were long of stocks we would advise you to take your profit and get out. If you refused, we would want more margin, to replace the money that we formerly got from the banks. While we were doing this, all the other houses would be doing the same. Result, a large volume of selling. Next result, prices going off. Next result, bullish confidence impaired, and more selling. Next result, bearish confidence strengthened, and much short selling. Next result, continued and more rapid decline in prices. All this, mind you, without any bad news. Throw in some bad news, and the whole business would be accelerated."

"I see," I said. "But unfortunately this has not happened yet, and meanwhile stocks are still going up!"

"Yes, and they are likely to go higher. The buying power is very strong. Look at that—Steel up another point. That makes three points since eleven o'clock—a big move for the market leader. Crucible is up eight, Baldwin nine, Alcohol twelve. When will it end?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

COTTON!

AND still the market kept soaring upward. Howard and I had five points loss already on our combined 5,000 shares—\$25,000 clipped off our \$55,000 margin. Another similar move, and we would have exhausted our playing money and be using our reserve. Two or three such moves, and we would be wiped out.

We were in a gloomy humor as we sat together at lunch. We kept assuring each other that the system could not fail, but it was only whistling to keep up our courage. Inwardly, we were both decidedly dubious.

"We did it too soon," frowned Howard. "The market hasn't reached the top yet, and before it does they may get us. We

should feel rotten if we were cleaned out after making all that pile. What do you say to getting out while we have the chance? We've still got \$30,000 apiece. How about trying cotton for a change?

"Cotton is strong now," he went on, "partly in sympathy with stocks, but also largely on its own account. It's a commodity, and its market does not depend on the individual affairs of individual stocks as the stock market does. There is a shortage of cotton now. The crop has been small for two years running. Consumption is on the increase. The price has risen from twelve cents, the normal, to twenty-five, it is true, but the percentage of increases is much smaller than that which has taken place in other commodities—wheat, for instance. Very much smaller. Cotton could go to thirty or thirty-five cents, and still not be out of line. Arthur Woodman thinks it will."

I hearkened to the voice of the tempter, but said nothing. I was determined not to act, as usual, on impulse this time, but to look before I leaped. It was then about two o'clock, so we went back to French, Palmer & Co.'s and found that the stock market was steady at around the same level as when we went to lunch.

In the final fifteen minutes of the day, however, there was a bulge—probably due to short covering, Ripley said—and taking the three o'clock closing prices as a basis, Howard and I figured as we went up-town in a taxicab that we were just about \$60,000 behind altogether; in other words, that our total capital of \$110,000 had slumped to \$50,000.

Howard renewed his cotton talk again at dinner, and as I listened to him there was a greater and greater response from the devil of recklessness inside me to his arguments. Finally, I broke out, smashing my fist down on the table:

"You're right. That system was never anything but the delusion of an old lunatic, and if we keep on following it we're no better than lunatics ourselves. More than that, we'll go broke. Already we've seen more than half our money slide away from us.

"Let's decide here and now to can the

system," I went on, "and try, as you say, to get our loss back from the cotton market. Just how do you trade in cotton, anyway, Howard?"

"Oh, it's easier and simpler than trading in stocks," Howard declared with enthusiasm. You simply trade in what are called 'futures,' that is, contracts for future delivery. You make or lose by the advance or decline in the quotations for those futures. To be precise, spot cotton—that is, cotton obtainable right away, on the spot—is now quoted about 26 cents a pound. The futures run somewhat lower; December around 25 cents; January around $24\frac{3}{4}$; March $24\frac{1}{2}$; and so on.

"These quotations, although they are in cents per pound, look like dollars and cents when they are written. For instance, let us say that March futures are quoted 24.50"—he wrote it out on the menu-card—"it looks like twenty-four dollars and fifty cents, but it is twenty-four cents and fifty-hundredths of a cent.—24.51 for March, therefore, would be an advance of one point, or one-hundredth of a cent, per pound.

"There are 500 pounds to a bale, and you trade in 100 bale lots, that being the unit, just as 100 shares is the unit on the Stock Exchange. When you buy 100 bales, therefore, you are buying \$50,000 pounds of cotton. Suppose you buy 100 March at 24.50 and sell them out at 25.50, an advance of one cent or one hundred points. One cent on 50,000 pounds is \$500. Each point, therefore, represents \$5. Do I make it clear?"

"Yes, that's clear enough. One point is five bucks; ten points are ten; a hundred, which is one cent a pound, represents \$500, and so on. But you don't buy the 100 bales outright, do you? It would cost you \$12,500, and \$500 would not be much of a profit compared to what you could do in stocks. Therefore, \$12,500 would buy you 1,000 shares of stock easily, on which you would make \$1,000 on every point rise. Besides, a hundred-point move in cotton—a cent a pound—is a rather big movement, even for the cotton market, isn't it?"

Howard smiled indulgently.

"No, of course you don't buy it outright,

You put up margin, just the same as you do in stocks. On 100 bales you put up \$500 margin, which protects you for 100 points, or against a decline from 25 cents to 24 cents; \$500 would buy you on a 10-point margin only 50 shares of stock, and if you got two points—\$100—out of the stock in a day you would be tickled. In cotton, however, you easily get a movement of from 20 to 60 or even 80 points in a day—\$100 to \$300 or even \$400 a day. It invariably fluctuates from high to low at least thirty points a day.

"To reduce risk we would be conservative and put up twice the ordinary margin. We have \$50,000 between us. With that we can swing 5,000 bales on a margin of \$10 per bale, or 200 points. Cotton isn't going to break any 200 points. On the contrary, it is likely to go up 500 points or even 1,000. Now, on 5,000 bales every point means \$250; 500 points, then, would give us \$125,000 profit, and 1,000 points would be \$250,000. *That's* worth playing for, isn't it?"

"You bet it is!" I agreed warmly. "We'll go to it, Howard, to-morrow morning."

We did. We covered our short lines of stock and took our loss. Then we gave Ripley an order to buy 5,000 bales of March futures. We got them at an average of 24.50 cents. The market closed that day at 25 cents. We had made 50 points, or \$12,500.

"You see how easy it is!" said Howard in triumph. "And there's no interest piling up against you as there is in stocks, because you have no debit balance. You don't buy the cotton as you buy stocks, and so you don't owe your broker anything. All it costs you is the broker's commission, two points for buying and two for selling, four altogether. The total commission both ways on our 5,000 bales is \$1,000. We have made it already, and we have \$11,500 net profit."

The next day it went even better for us. Woodman's "dope" on the cotton situation worked right. March rose buoyantly in common with the other months and crossed the 25.50 mark. We had about 100 points profit, or \$25,000. We had al-

ready regained half our stock losses. Stocks had had a reaction and the bull fervor was subsiding, but we were so engrossed watching the quotations on the cotton board at the other side of the room that we paid no attention to stocks.

I do not like to dwell upon that brief ten minutes in which almost every cent I had was swept away. The memory is painful. Woodman said afterward that we would unquestionably have cleaned up \$100,000 before the week was out, but for the catastrophe that wrecked us. If I could be philosophical about it, as Howard was, I could agree with his reasoning that it was not our fault, that we made no mistake, that it was simply an accident, just the same as being run over in the street. To me, however, the bitter fact remains that I was once worth over \$55,000 and that I lost half of it speculating in stocks and the other half trying to beat the cotton market.

The cotton débâcle cured me of all desire to speculate. What happened can be told in a few words.

The price was nearing 26 cents and advancing steadily almost every minute. Suddenly the advance ceased, and the quotations began to drop sharply. A man standing near the news-ticker read out in a loud voice: "News despatch from Washington announced that a bill has been introduced in Congress fixing the price of cotton on a normal basis."

The despatch had reached the floor of the Cotton Exchange two or three minutes previously. I learned afterward what happened over there. Pandemonium ensued. Brokers fought madly to execute selling orders. Everybody threw over cotton. All the options were offered freely. Quotations dropped 20, 30, even 50 points between sales. Ours was sold on a stop-loss order put in by Ripley to save the firm any loss. He got an average of 22.55, so that we had a loss of 199 points and a mere balance of \$250 to divide between us. Five minutes later the price was down to 20 cents. In the days that followed it slumped further before a recovery set in.

And that was not all. It was not the worst of it—the maddening, sickening thing about it. For the same kind of price-

fixing news, reaching the stock market, supplied the long-awaited bear factor. Stocks broke. The weakness of the technical position, on which our system had been based, was revealed. There were infinitely more sellers than buyers, and the professional shorts helped the downward movement along. Consequently they made large profits.

Had we only stuck to our position we would have cleaned up a small fortune. In the weeks that elapsed, with the steady, daily decline, the stocks of which we had been short sank nearly 30 points. By buying in our 5,000 shares that much cheaper we would have made \$150,000, to say nothing of further profits from additional short sales based on what would have been our increasing margin all the time. But that is another story.

It was our own fault. The system was all right, but—as is the case with all systems—human nature was too strong for it!

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

HOWARD took me home that night, I remember—and after that, I don't remember anything for a long, long time; nothing, that is, except vague, disjointed imaginings and the most weird, nightmare shapes.

When I came to myself again I was sure that I must still be in delirium; for instead of cramped, city quarters, my eyes beheld a big, old-fashioned bedroom, the bed of which alone, with its four high posts and its canopy overhead, was almost large enough to take in an entire city flat.

What had happened to me, my poor, tired brain could not well decide. I realized, though, that since my last spell of consciousness on that disastrous day down in the Street, considerable time must have elapsed; for it was only October then, and now the snow banked high against the window-panes.

While I was still wondering and puzzling in the effort to explain it all, some one entered the room, and then I caught my first clue as to my whereabouts; for I made out

the familiar face and figure of old Mary, retainer for many years to Aunt Sarah Barrows.

At a sound from me, she hurried quickly over to my bedside, and looking down to see me gazing back at her with an evident recovery of my faculties, gave a little exclamation of delight.

Of course she forbade me to talk, and equally of course I had a half-hundred questions which with the querulousness of an invalid I insisted on having immediately answered.

Whether it all came out at that first interview, or a little then and much more later, I cannot say; but ultimately I gleaned the information that I had been very, very ill for almost six weeks; that at first Howard had tended to me with the utmost devotion, but soon found the task too great for him, and having heard me repeat over and over in my ravings a telephone conversation with Powers, city editor of the *News*, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, hunted up the latter in the hope of getting in touch with my friends; that shortly afterward Louise had descended upon the scene with trained nurses and all kinds of sick-room comforts, and since the doctor advised that I be removed into the mountain air, soon had me conveyed by automobile to her aunt's home in the Berkshires; that ever since, I had lain there nursed by Mary and another attendant, and that Louise herself came up over week-ends to see how I was progressing.

When I heard this last bit of intelligence, I immediately inquired what day of the week it was, and almost had a relapse on learning that it was only Tuesday.

However, the time passed more rapidly than I had dared hope; for I was still weak enough to put in the greater part of my hours at sleep, and Saturday at last arrived to find me quite respectably advanced in convalescence.

The train arrived after a wait which seemed endless, and Louise came in with a bright touch of color in her cheeks. I supposed from contact with the keen, frosty air.

Ah! That was like one of our old times. We sat and talked about everything and

nothing. She had a hundred new stories to tell of her experiences, and kept both Aunt Sarah and myself in a gale of laughter.

But there was one subject upon which neither she nor I touched, and that was love.

I could see that she wanted to put our relationship solely on the basis of friendship, and I was in no position to protest. Before I dared speak to her again I had to get out in the world and make something of myself.

This idea took more and more possession of me during her stay, and after she left on Monday morning to return to town, I sat down and took sober stock of myself and my assets.

The little money I had left after being cleaned out in the Street would of course be all used up with the expenses of my illness, and I had nothing else except a busted "system," two counterfeit \$500 bills, and the potato-patch down on Long Island which I had taken over from the Delaines.

The last was the only one which offered even a ray of promise, and as I kept turning over its possibilities in my head, my mind reverted to those suggestions in regard to vegetable-raising which I had gleaned from the little agricultural paper.

I sent for a back-file of it, together with a lot of other pamphlets and government reports, and devoted myself assiduously to the study of them.

By Christmas I had made up my mind what I was going to do. I found that after settling all the doctor's and nurse's bills, and paying for my medicines, *et cetera*, I would have left from the sale of my potato crop and from my final settlement with French, Palmer & Co. almost \$900. I tried to force this on Aunt Sarah, but she would not accept a penny of it. She said that as a citizen of West Kinnikinnick, she had no more than made amends for the scandalous way in which the village had hounded and malign'd me.

Consequently I had this amount free, and it was my intention to go down to the Long Island place with it, and try my hand in earnest at intensive truck-farming.

Louise came out to stay over Christmas,

and the evening before the holiday, while she and I sat up late before the open fire, I detailed all my plans to her.

At last a silence fell between us. The logs on the hearth were burning down to embers. The hands of the tall, old clock were creeping around toward the midnight hour.

"John," she murmured, "if Santa Claus were to come down the chimney now, what would you want him to bring you out of all the world?"

"I know," I said hoarsely, "but I don't dare say it. It is too far beyond my deserts."

"Well, I know what I want," she said, "and I dare say it, too. I want a handsome truck-farmer husband, and I want a truck-farm down on Long Island with an old house on it all full of hideous red and blue and green and yellow upholstered furniture. I want a home like that—a home and all that goes with it."

"But, Louise, darling, I can't accept the sacrifice," I cried. "When I had money and could offer you something, you refused me. Don't tantalize me now. You said the man you married must be on a substantial footing. I have nothing, absolutely nothing."

"But you have a substantial footing," she declared. "You have faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and your feet are no longer planted on the shifting sands, but on the solid earth."

"Well, we did it, and I have made good. We have the home and all that goes with it. And I have a truck-farm, the produce of which is every day becoming better and more favorably known in the commission market.

I never expect to make a million out of it; but that is not saying that there will not be a million in the family—that last might be taken in two ways, but you know what I mean.

Anyhow, at the rate Louise is selling stories and the prices she gets for them, I shall never be tempted, no matter how potatoes go up or down, to disinter the dear old system from the junk-pile where it now reposes.

(The End.)



Hurry!

by
Will MacMahon

AUSTIN IRBY, until quite recently a railroad telegrapher, confidently approached the door that opened into the top floor operating-room of the Western Union's main office in that important city which is known to the commercial message fraternity by its call of "G." He was fortified with a note from the manager downstairs advising the traffic chief up-stairs that the bearer was "experienced."

Austin, who was not yet seventeen years old, had laid emphatic claim to no less than a sixty-dollar-a-month telegraphic status. He privately based this boast on his employment in a Postal Telegraph branch which had lasted just one day and an hour and ceased not more than thirty minutes before he gave the W. U. an opportunity to hire him.

"This main office work will be easy for me," he told himself, as he stood complacently eying the sign on the top floor door that read: "No Admittance Except to Employees"; "there'll be no noisy messenger boys here and, better yet, no wild-eyed customers trying to right their wrongs with their fists. No, siree! Nothing but nice, sensible telegraph operators. Gee, it's a cinch!"

If experience is composed of several exciting incidents crowded into a brief space of time, the youth was strictly within the truth in his major contention. In his ten hours of actual commercial work he had encountered on the Postal wire a steady time-maker of a sender and also a fast, flighty one—and neither of them had worried him more than he expected. He flattered himself that if those commercial men were to tackle a busy railroad wire their

performances probably would not be as meritorious as his own.

His professional morale had, indeed, suffered somewhat under the handicap of a continual whistling in that branch office, the misguided effort of an aged, half-witted wreck of a man who was masquerading in the uniform of a messenger boy.

"Poor, old Gilbert Parker!" Operator Irby mused as he purposely delayed his triumphant entry into a broader field of telegraphic endeavor. "He certainly was a nut! I wonder if he really would knife any one that objected to his one tune. He thought it was 'John Brown's Body,' but I'll be dog-goned if it didn't sound more like 'Marching Through Georgia.'"

In addition, the Postal branch manager was a booze-fighter of great determination, and in the midst of a spirited battle with John Barleycorn had humorously "bulled" a message for which a client, who lacked all sense of humor, tried to man-handle Austin Irby. That was why the ex-railroader's first commercial job ended after the initial hour of the second day.

"Aw, there wasn't time enough to resign," the boy meditated over what had been a scant escape from bodily injury. "I left the office like a hundred-yard champion getting away from the mark. That crazy customer had fists as big as coconuts, darn him!"

Naturally, he said nothing of that "buli" to his new employer. The Western Union, being an opposition company, was not entitled to know the Postal Telegraph's private affairs. Austin, moreover, would not have snitched to either concern any inside stuff about the Pittsburgh-West division of

a trans-continental link line where for two and a half years he had been the road's child operator. He not only was ethical but reticent, having the usual boyish dread of being misunderstood.

It was with a clear conscience, therefore, that "Commercial Operator" Irby seized the door-knob, intending to march blithely into that W. U. operating-room and make himself right at home. He took one step across the threshold, froze in his tracks for a horrified second or two, and then recoiled, softly closed the door, and gingerly retreated a half dozen paces in the hall.

"Geewhillikens!" he breathed in awe. "Why, I never heard such an awful noise in all my born days!"

The collective clattering of three-score metal-tongued sounders had beaten on his surprised ear-drums with the *rat-a-tat-tat* of machine-gun fire, the roaring of a gale in the forest, and the thunder of surf on the seashore.

"Dog-gone!" he exclaimed mentally. "It's a regular boiler-shop! I've taken messages while an engine blew off steam right under the tower windows, but darned if I see how these operators can read the dots and dashes, to say nothing of the spaces."

Then he recalled that his fleeting glance around the large room had found serenity as far as the women and men there were concerned. None of the faces or forms that flashed from the general blur of the scene was distraught or contorted in the effort to hear the instruments.

"Aw, I guess it's O. K. after a fellow becomes accustomed to the general uproar," Austin concluded. "I'll go in again and get another shock!"

"Say, maybe these main office operators put cotton in their ears before they come to work? Nope! They couldn't hear the telegrams then."

So it was more in curiosity than with any hope of becoming a useful member of the "boiler shop" crew that the young ex-railroader and former Postal branchite re-entered "G" office. Inside, the noise still was terrific to him, but he discovered at once that the threatening hammer beats and the menacing roll of drums were caused

by a great electrical chorus and not the solo effort of any particular wire.

Instead of sitting out naked and unashamed on the table, as in the towers of the Pittsburgh-West division, each sounder was chastely screened on three sides by a resonator, a small, open-topped box standing on end and elevated to aim directly at the receiver's ear. As a result the individual operator heard only his own circuit and paid no attention to the general pandemonium.

Non-telegraphers will better understand the situation by imagining a noisy crowd where earnest conversationalists shout into one another's ears and listen with cupped hands. It also bears some relation to the phenomenon of women in a group at a card party, a tea, or a sewing bee, all talking at once and shrilly, and each understanding perfectly every word. This story, incidentally, delves into acoustics but discreetly remains at guessing distance concerning the mysteries of femininity.

Operator Irby approached a desk where sat a large, benevolent-appearing male person who, he assumed, was the traffic chief. He was.

"Use a mill (typewriter)?" the great man inquired, briskly.

"No, sir," Austin answered apologetically.

"H-m!" the traffic chief remarked, with an absence of regret that the new man later would appreciate. "Good sender?"

"Yes, sir; I think so."

"Ah-ah! Come this way. We are starting up the second side of the New York 'quad' in a few minutes."

Straight down the middle aisle of a room that seemed a mile long the large, dignified executive paraded. The newcomer docilely followed in his wake, nervously wondering what was a quad and why it should have a "second side."

They paused alongside a flat-topped table with room for two operators on each side. It was divided into halves by a glass partition on which was painted the word "*Hurry!*" in large, red letters.

Three men already were seated there and two of them were working at top speed. One of the busy operators was receiving

messages on a typewriter, skilfully introducing a new blank onto the platen just before he withdrew a completed telegram. His side partner was sending rapidly with the right hand and casually using the left to pencil his personal sign of two letters and the hour and minute on the message.

The third man, on the opposite side of the table, with pen and ink was meditatively decorating a sheaf of blanks with consecutive numbers and the date of the month. Operator Irby took the empty chair to the right and waited for the unexpected to happen:

The traffic chief majestically marched away, and for a few minutes the former "OS" man inquisitively looked around at his strange surroundings. At one side of the room was a huge switchboard where three wire chiefs officiated on high stool with the gestures of men at a self-service lunch-counter, and they frequently descended abruptly from their perches to do mysterious stunts with jacks and cords otherwise beyond reach.

To Austin's left were long tables with glass partitions both lengthwise and crosswise. Here were the single wires that served many neighboring towns, and among the operators were a half-dozen women.

Farther up the room was the city department, with circuits to the various hotels, railroad stations, and markets. The majority of the employees here was feminine and mainly girlish in appearance.

The glances that the somewhat forlorn youth encountered were incurious but not unfriendly. Then he turned in his chair and stared to the rear, obeying an instinctive impulse.

The sympathetic gaze that he met was electric. The lady had large, brown eyes, and their setting was a tragically beautiful face.

Austin Irby blushed, and she smiled fleetingly at that tribute to her charm. This brunette siren was the recognized heart-breaker of the office, but entirely beyond reproach—as might be expected of a married woman who worked every day beside her intensely jealous husband.

The new operator was not too much entranced to miss the belligerent glare that

he inspired in the man seated beside the gentle charmer. He promptly gazed over their heads and thence to the ceiling, and slowly turned back in his chair, congratulating himself on having made a clever retreat.

"Robbing the cradle, eh, Inez?" the husband demanded brutally of his beautiful, dutiful wife.

She turned to him a gaze of plaintive puzzlement.

"You say the queerest things, Bob!" she remarked, encouragingly.

He took refuge in a frowning silence rather than go to the trouble of explaining the meaning of that hackneyed phrase. This lady not only was lovely of face and form, but clever enough to make her lord and master believe she understood only the finer amenities.

The sending operator on the first side of the New York quad now had sorted out the long messages in the stack before him, retaining all the short ones for himself. He calmly tossed his discards over the partition to the unsuspecting new man who was yet to learn that fast sending records are made with the number of telegrams handled and not the total of words.

Austin felt a surge of pride at the lengthy messages entrusted to him, and began to tune up the closed key preparatory to showing the Western Union Telegraph Company what he could do in this great emergency. His fondest ambition as a sender never had forecast that some day he should have undisputed control of nearly a hundred telegrams averaging about fifty words each.

"I like my little 'N'!" the idle receiver beside him said suddenly.

"Er—yes?" Operator Irby inquired politely.

"Yes, sir!" the man declared, emphatically. "If I couldn't have my little 'N' I would get out of the business."

Austin stole a cautious glance at his partner's hands and necktie to see if he meant some ornament of great value that began with the letter "N." He saw no ring or pin that would supply a clue to the mystery.

"That so?" he asked blankly.

"The traffic chief tried to take it away,"

the receiver replied darkly, "but I went right over his head to the manager downstairs and got a ruling that he wasn't to interfere with my little 'N'!"

The ex-railroader vainly tried to imagine just what was the subject of their conversation, and he was on the verge of asking boldly for enlightenment when he noticed that his companion had written the letter "N" in the space for the receiver's signature on the topmost message blank in front of him.

"Oh, oh!" he groaned inwardly. "He merely is referring to his personal sign. Here's a lunatic if ever there was one; 'N' stands for 'nut!' And I had hoped these W. U. operators would be nice and sensible! By rights, the traffic chief ought to wear a cap with 'keeper' on it!"

"I sign 'IY,'" Austin volunteered modestly.

"That's a crazy combination!" Mr. "N" declared, uncompromisingly. "One letter is enough—and I tell you my little dash-dot cannot be equaled. It not only has a musical sound on the wire but three straight lines are all that's needed when I'm timing messages with my left hand."

"'IY' isn't hard to make with a pencil," Austin began defensively, but just then the traffic chief loomed over him.

"Mr. Irby," he announced pleasantly, "I forgot to tell you that your sign will be 'UQ'!"

He stalked away, placidly oblivious to the ruin he had wrought. That outlandish "sign" would be a severe handicap to a sender who was not remarkable ambidextrous.

"Dog-gone!" the newly christened victim said. "There isn't a straight line in it!"

"Watch out for that traffic chief; he is a fiend!" Mr. "N" confided guardedly. "I tell you no one can trust a white-haired old bachelor that dyes his mustache black! He's the kind that tries to be sweet with all the girls in the office—and succeeds in making enemies of all the boys.

"He gives me all the heavy receiving to do, hoping that I'll be forced to buy a typewriter and learn to use it. He has the agency for the office, you know. But my little 'N' and I are too much for him; we

can write rings with a pen around any sender in the business."

Austin made no comment on that interesting bit of gossip, being feverishly engrossed in making left handed "UQ's" on a spare blank for practise. If he had pursued the subject of expert penmanship it would have been to boast about the copperplate writing of Dispatcher Vic Ryan, his former teacher of the Morse alphabet and present good friend, back on the Pittsburgh-West division. The boy believed that no other operator in the world could "sling ink" as fast and legibly as his railroad tutor. Mr. Ryan, incidentally, signed "V."

"Gee!" he exclaimed mentally. "What a cinch Vic would have on this job! Two straight lines with the left hand—a mere check mark."

Then the second side of the quad came into "balance," and the sending operator on the New York end began to call.

"'G, G, G,'" he rattled off; "'NY'!"

"I (Aye!)," Mr. "N" tersely replied.

"G m (Good morning)," the Gothamite said. "Who?"

"'N'" was the answer, and nothing more.

The distant sender waited a suggestive quarter minute and then demanded:

"Did I hear you say 'G m'?"

Mr. "N" dipped pen point into ink-pot and maintained a bored silence.

"Say, you talk too much!" the aggrieved sender declared unexpectedly. "You're a regular chatterbox! Our business is being delayed seriously by your continual conversation!"

This unjust, if whimsical, charge still failing to get a rise out of the receiver, the "NY" man now pretended that "G" office was speaking to him.

"Oh, sir, I beg pardon!" he said, in disguised sending. "Good morning, sir! What is the weather in Greater New York, please, sir!"

Then he started to send telegrams at his top speed with the laudable intention of putting that "G" grouch "on the table"—a virile figure of speech that suggests the harassed penman scribbling away for dear life with back bent until his nose nearly touches the message blank.

Austin now saw an exhibition of receiving skill with the pen that shook his belief in Dispatcher Ryan's previously unquestioned championship. "N's" writing was without shading, but beautifully efficient, as plain as print and no wasted stroke appeared in any letter. He put ten words on a line to verify the check in the longer messages and for the smaller ones there were columns of fives.

Then the second side receiver in New York broke in to say briefly, "G a (Go ahead)."

"G m!" the genial ex-railroader remarked. "Bright, sunny day here, and—"

The "NY" receiver interrupted him.

"Hire a hall!" he said brutally.

"Ha, ha!" the distant sender exclaimed. "We're even now!"

Austin confessed to himself irately: "Aw, I'm not going to like these W. U. hams! Darn 'em; they're all as crazy as June bugs! Say, I'd like to get that Smart Aleck on a busy railroad wire with a bunch of car reports. And wouldn't Vic Ryan roast him to a turn with train orders!"

He did not know that this stirring up of the provincial operator was the one diverting incident of an otherwise dull day for the stars in Manhattan. They enjoyed exerting themselves with rapid message work, both sending and receiving.

The faster the telegrams came, the better. These experts then were like ambitious baseball players—infielders covering everything between second and third bases. While sending, their mood was that of the masterly pitcher; they actually called the performance "putting 'em over the plate!"

The commercial message companies literally make capital out of these wire jealousies among the cities. New York annoys them all with its calm assumption of superiority; Chicago retorts furiously, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and others assert themselves, and only Boston remains cool and contemptuous.

The traffic chiefs everywhere exercise tact and diplomacy to keep local pride high and, therefore, profitable to the company. Under this subtle spur a man sends fast, and the stack of messages melts away. Trac-tion concerns claim that their dividends are

in the straps to which the passengers cling; the Western Union and the Postal Telegraph as truly could assert that their net income is in the "scraps."

Operator Irby began to send like a house afire, pausing only when that awkward "UQ" momentarily tied up his unaccustomed left hand and diverted his attention from the right one. He whizzed away with the long messages until a score or more were gone, and some of them were "beef" (packing house) telegrams in a confusing code that must have been composed by the insane genius who named the Pullman Company's sleeping cars.

It dawned on his absorbed mind that perhaps this particular New York receiver was not exactly a ham. And, as he sent still more swiftly, a queer idea came to him.

His good right forearm was a greyhound, he imagined, and the man to whom he was sending was a wild hare scampering just ahead of the pursuer. If he put on a bit of extra speed at the right moment the New Yorker might break—and the rabbit would be overtaken.

At the end of an hour Austin had to acknowledge to himself that his greyhound was chasing a full-grown jack-rabbit.

"But he's bug-house, just the same!" he mused ungraciously. "I guess all these first-class operators are somewhat peculiar from the strain of handling so many messages. Now, on a railroad the 'OS' men are human beings and every one of them says 'G m' like a gentleman."

At noon-time the stream of telegrams had dwindled until the first side of the quad was equal to handling it alone. Mr. "N" reluctantly laid aside the unconquerable pen and departed on his luncheon "hour" of thirty minutes. He did not make even one dot of farewell to the New York sender.

Austin's distant coworker, however, now was in a conversational mood.

"Good stuff, old man!" he said. "Come again!"

"Aw, shut up, you fresh brat!" Mr. "UQ" remarked insultingly, and hugged himself with delight at getting even for that presumptuous "hire a hall!"

"You poor old cripple!" the New Yorker countered, with an abrupt change of front.

"Speaking of hams," the grinning youth returned, "I think you're both smoked and sugar cured!"

The "NY" man became profane then and Austin was about to make a red-hot rejoinder when the traffic chief approached him with a benevolent air.

"Relieve the man on the first side, receiving—lunch relief," he suggested softly. "After that you can go out to eat."

Operator Irby stepped around to the other side of the table, and looked in vain for pen and ink. Moreover, the blanks there were the kind devoted exclusively to the typewriter.

"I don't use a 'mill,'" he explained reproachfully.

"Ah, ah, I had forgotten!" the office tyrant said apologetically.

He crooked his dexter finger to a nearby check-boy, who hastened to supply the tools of a handwriting artisan. Austin hoped to have time to date up some of the blanks, but the sender beside him was in the confidence of the traffic chief and had at once instructed the New York man to go ahead.

Then the former "OSer" discovered that the distant sender, too, had been shifted around the table for a "lunch" relief. He was, in fact, the "fresh brat!" and also the ham "both smoked and sugar cured!"

The distressed greyhound now agreed that he had not been chasing a jack-rabbit at all, but a large, fierce, curly wolf. He just managed to keep his gravel-scratching heels out of the pursuer's open jaws' and, altogether, put in a decidedly uncomfortable half-hour.

"I've certainly been slinging ink!" he observed when the regular man returned.

"Oh, he's a good sender, but not really fast!" the expert stated, not unkindly. "My man is back now. Listen to him!"

"Come on, 'Spike,'" he whizzed over the wire. "Give us a touch of high life!"

The New Yorker obligingly cut loose, and the messages began to pop out of the "mill" three to the minute. That lurid word "*Hurry!*" on the glass partition now assumed a great dignity in "UQ's" eyes.

He walked down the aisle in deep thought and paused before the traffic chief.

"I wish I knew where to buy a typewriter!" Austin said invitingly. "I'd like to get one on time and learn to use it in a *hurry!*"

"I think it might be arranged," the great man remarked musingly, as he arose to lead the way into an anteroom.

Here were a half-dozen new machines, and in their presence the office ruler became the expert salesman. He dilated on key-speed, carriage-return, and platen-control, to say nothing of a word-counter attachment, and soon had his customer's signature to a contract.

"Scrub the ink off your fingers now!" he commanded generously. "Your half-hour is up, but I'll look after you. Take a good, long lunch at the company's expense. And I'll keep you off the hot receiving jobs until you master the keyboard. We 'mill' men must stick to each other, eh?"

The great man used the word "stick" advisedly. He had inside information that the company was about to install typewriters at its own outlay, and it behooved him to sell his stock before the blow fell.

Austin, of course, went out of that sales-room in a glow of gratitude. Ten dollars down and five dollars a week for months and months to come seemed to him much like the larceny of a nice, new, shiny, mechanical ink-eraser of magical power.

"Dog-gone!" he breathed in ecstasy. "Just wait until I learn the touch system on my 'mill.' Say, inside of a month I'll be telling 'Spike,' himself, to get a move on or I'll have him lifted for delaying the business. I'll show those New York stars what's what; darn 'em!"

And it was not until he had before him the quick luncheon of the Western Union restaurant—coffee and sinkers, or was it milk and pie and more pie?—that he recalled the charmer who sat behind him while he sent and before him when he received on the quad.

"I wonder what she signs?" he pondered dreamily.

That was the natural curiosity of a clean-minded boy. He admired the beautiful brunette lady because she was a telegrapher, and not the other way around.

Austin, however, considered himself a great philosopher where the fair sex was concerned. He predicated his vast knowledge on two fine examples of womankind—his foster mother, Granny Mowrey, and his make-believe sister, Agnes Helene Mowrey, her granddaughter.

Granny was a little, old Irish lady who had cherished this lad from the morning of his birth because his own mother had died that same afternoon. Agnes Helene was only thirteen years old, but already a high school freshman and soon to be a sophomore, and ever since her toddling days extremely jealous of any outsider in skirts that won a second glance from her pretended brother.

And there had been his love affair with Miss Ruby Luella Clarke, an operator on the Pittsburgh-West division. She was a tall, buxom, auburn-haired heart-breaker of twenty-five years, and had thrown him over to marry a heroic-sized engineer on the same road.

Austin was every day of fourteen and a half years old at that time and, although thirty healing months had passed since then, he cherished her memory along with a deep conviction that his heart had been severely cracked if not actually shattered. Now, as a man of the world, he felt immune against another attack of puppy love, believing it to be like other ills of adolescence, say, the measles or the mumps.

"I'd like to hear this dark-haired one send!" he told himself, more interested in her probable Morse than the undeniably brunette charms.

That was his frame of mind when he entered the Western Union operating-room at 1.30 P.M. Five minutes later the lightning of love at first sight broke the recognized rules by striking again in the same spot. Moreover, the flash came from an unexpected quarter of the room.

She was a blonde this time, small and dainty, with baby-blue eyes and a pink rosebud of a mouth. Her years were not more than eighteen and she worked a city wire that ran to several down-town hotels. "LY" was her personal sign and even a non-telegrapher might guess that it stood for "Lily."

"This young gentleman will relieve you for lunch," the traffic chief announced to her as he ushered Austin up to the wire. "The dill pickles and ice-cream are very fine to-day!"

Operator Irby smiled so broadly at the pleasant jest that he failed observe a quick little look of understanding pass between the girl and the great man. In truth, not even a suspicious soul possessed of the detective faculty to a high degree might have deduced that "Dill pickles" meant a certain expensive restaurant nearby and "ice cream" was 1.45 P.M.

The traffic chief casually strode away and Miss "LY" slowly took off her paper cuffs and stood chatting for a few minutes to give him time to leave the building ahead of her.

"Be easy with the girls on this circuit, won't you?" she pleaded bewitchingly, chaining Austin's gaze with her uplifted eyes. "They're mostly beginners. I may be a bit late to-day: I'm going to do some shopping."

He not only was rattled by the implied compliment to his telegraphic speed, but found himself staring miles deep into those twin lakes of blue. He had a curious impression of falling forward and downward from a fatal height, and caught himself up with a start.

"Why, I—I—" he stammered: "I'm only a—a beginner myself!"

"So I see!" the self-possessed girl remarked, smilingly, and glided away.

Austin looked after her, appraising the yellow crown and the little, arched feet.

"Dog-gone!" this man of the world exclaimed mentally. "Her hair looks like molasses candy and, say, I'll bet she could wear Agnes Helene's shoes!"

"LY" did not return at the end of thirty minutes, nor when forty-five had passed, and all that time "UQ" handled the beginners on the wire as if they were his make-believe sisters. He not only sent slowly and carefully but said "G m" to all.

"She had her fingers on this key!" he mused. "Her hand held this pen!"

At 2.45 P.M. the assistant traffic chief, a tall, broad-shouldered, dark-eyed young man, strode over to the city wire.

"When did Lily say she would be back?" he demanded, with an air of proprietorship that nettled her new admirer.

"She didn't say!" Austin replied coolly.

"Did the chief mention 'hard boiled eggs and apple fritters'?" was the next inquiry.

"No!" was "UQ's" grudging answer. "Something about 'ice-cream and dill pickles'!"

"That's a new one!" the assistant remarked darkly. "I wonder—"

He hurried away, having caught sight of his superior entering the office. "LY" came in ten minutes later and slowly put on her paper gauntlets.

"The stores were dreadfully crowded!" she said, with a calm glance at the clock marking 3 P.M.

"How were the hard boiled eggs and apple fritters?" Austin inquired, roguishly.

The blond young lady was thoroughly startled. "What makes you ask that?" she demanded sharply.

"Why, er—that's what I had for lunch!" he fibbed, seeing that somehow a social blunder had been made.

"Oh-h-h-h!" she exclaimed, greatly reassured. "'Out of the mouths of babes—'"

Austin, obeying the beckoning of the traffic chief, walked away to another wire. He never dreamed that his idle chatter with the fair Lilian embraced still another expensive restaurant and a different luncheon period in the wise, old bachelor's secret code.

His new location in the room placed him nearly head-on to the married lady with the soulful dark eyes. She was only a dozen feet away on the Buffalo duplex—and that is a killing distance, if not really battle-sight range for an innocently flirtatious beauty.

And when four o'clock arrived a happy fate threw the "great philosopher" precisely at her side. It appeared that the husband had some imperative business outside the office and was laying off an hour ahead of time, and the traffic chief chose Operator Irby to relieve him on the sending side of the duplex, which is worked in similar fashion to the separate halves of a quad.

There the boy, between messages and

while he painstakingly printed "UQ" with his left hand, stole admiring glances at the receiver's fascinating profile or the distracting ivory of her rounded neck where it contrasted with the sable of her black hair. Completely forgotten were the blond attractions and telegraphic potentialities of "LY," but at 4.30 P.M. she was again brought vividly to his attention.

At that moment his disturbing companion took the key to tell Buffalo "Min pls (Minute, please)." Then she sat staring straight ahead, and her wonderful dark eyes were aflame with wrath.

Austin looked in the indicated direction, but saw only Miss Lily leaving the room. Those "dreadfully crowded" stores again, of course, he concluded.

"What—what do you sign?" he inquired diffidently.

The lady's curved lips were trembling and she would not trust herself to speak. Instead, she silently handed to "UQ" a telegram that she had just taken. It showed that her signature was "K," a musical letter in Morse and easy to make in script. His admiration increased until it verged dangerously on adoration.

At 4.45 P.M. the wire was clear of all business on both ends, and Mrs. Inez turned graciously toward the new "man." Lightning no longer played in the seal-brown orbs and her voice was as sweet and low as a summer zephyr in the trees.

"Isn't 'LY' the most perfectly charming person in the world?" she inquired. "I saw you talking to her."

"Yes, ma'am! Er—no, ma'am!" he replied brilliantly.

"No-o-o-o?"

"No, ma'am!"

"Why-y-y?"

"Aw, she's only a girl!" Austin answered triumphantly.

"K" studied his frank countenance for a half minute and decided that he was quite young enough for her subtle purpose.

"I wonder if you would do a very great favor for me?" she demanded winningly.

"You bet!"

"Well, to-morrow, find some excuse to talk to 'LY' and ask her, offhand, if she likes roller skating!"

"I'm on!" he agreed promptly, but he was not, because his knowledge of the unspoken circumstances entirely failed to equal that of Mrs. Inez.

The lady's husband lately had gone in rather heavily for the rink, claiming that his figure needed reducing. That was an admirable ambition, she thought, and she occasionally accompanied him on the rollers although her own figure did not require any improving whatsoever.

But on the morrow there was to be a masquerade at the rink—and it was his lodge meeting night. This was too much coincidence for a wife's peace of mind, particularly while Mr. Bob and the bewitching Miss Lily were simultaneously absent from the office during a working hour. A regular detective would have charged her seven dollars for the evening's espionage; a volunteer came much cheaper.

Just before 5 P.M., quitting time for the day force, she cautioned her young cavalier against breathing a word to a living soul about his mission. When the clock struck she arose, with a whispered "Until tomorrow!" and glided down the aisle.

The majority of the men on the day side and all those coming on for the night trick gazed after her. If any one of them remembered his Byron he surely thought:

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies.

But Operator Irby's only confidence to himself was:

"Gee, her hand looked nice on the key!"

In truth, milk-white, dimpled fingers make a fetching picture in the Catlin grip, thumb underneath the black disk with the first and second digits atop and the other two gently curled toward the palm. That pose is both beautiful and useful and, therefore, much more effective than when the feminine hand merely is holding a flower.

And when the sender is otherwise lovely and mysteriously swears a youth to secrecy in a delicate enterprise, about all he can say to himself is:

"Darned if things aren't coming my way!"

He was right—if he had in mind the detective business.

11 ARGOSY

"I guess she's about twenty-five!"

Ten years under the mark, Austin.

"I'd like her more if she wasn't married!"

Nice boy!

During the evening meal he entertained his foster-mother and his make-believe sister with anecdotes of the day's telegraphing. There were the "business" telegrams of no human interest at all. "UQ" dismissed them with a few words of warning—one must beware of confusing "net" with "ten," and so forth.

"Bulls" would be followed in due course by "prize packages," embarrassing documents setting forth how the message read originally and the distorted form in which it was delivered to the addressee. All the unfortunate operator could say in defense was: "That is the way the sender sent it to me!" or "That is not the way I sent it to the receiver!" And, of course, the other man involved would perjure himself with a countercharge.

Austin's women folk were more interested in the telegrams of a personal nature. This was nearly as exciting as listening in on a "busy" telephone wire.

There had been one message that day, a veritable love letter, addressed to a famous actress and signed with a name distinctly not that of her equally well-known husband.

"What fools th' min ar-r-r-e over a rid-headed woman!" Granny Mowrey remarked sagely.

Her foster-son winced, remembering the auburn tresses of Miss Ruby Luella Clarke on the Pittsburgh-West division.

Agnes Helene absent-mindedly felt her own thick brown braid and said nothing. This was an old-fashioned household, and she would not be permitted to discuss affairs of the heart as betrayed by a hundred-word paid message from a reckless gallant to an incautious wedded woman.

There also had been death condolences and birth congratulations—and a telegram from a woman to a man that was like a terrified cry for help in the dark night.

"Run up-stairs an' get me a han'kerchief off th' bureau, Agnes; that's th' good girl!" Granny commanded craftily.

Little Miss Mowrey dutifully sped up the

stairs and the old lady had her say as to that wired appeal.

"Poor-r-r little fool!" she exclaimed pityingly. "May th' Lord protict her—an' th' divil make iverything ready for th' mon if th' answer isn't ixactly what she wants. Do ye watch th' wire closely t'-morrow, Austin, an' let me know what th' blaggard replies, th' cruel scoundhrel!"

Austin, who had not comprehended the significance of that peculiar message, hurriedly changed the subject from the work to the workers when Agnes Helene re-entered the room. He carefully avoided any praise of Miss "LY" and Mrs. "K" and dilated upon the idiosyncrasy of Mr. "N," but when he finished with his topic the girl asked a question that took him fifteen minutes to answer.

"How - many - women - and - girls - work - there - and - how - old - are - they - and - how - do - they - look - and - what - do - they - wear - and - what - did - they - say - to - you - and - what - do - you - think - of - them?" she demanded in one breath.

On the morrow when the flaxen-haired "LY" began to ponder as to whether yesterday's bashful boy again would be her "lunch relief," he was in a distant corner of the room thoroughly enjoying himself on a wire that ran to the general offices of the railroad system of which the Pittsburg-West division was a part. He had just sent several long dead-head messages and was about to reveal his identity to the "GO" operator and to talk "shop" at a great rate.

The traffic chief, who was a strategist of high rank in his chosen field, had placed Operator Irby in that remote spot for a definite purpose. He now laid a circuitous course that took him out of the A. T. C.'s purview and reached Austin's elbow in time to hear him declare on the wire:

"Say, I once was 'OS' man on the—"

The great man calmly reached over "UQ's" shoulder and opened the wire.

"I'll get a man to relieve you here!" he said generously. "You go over to that easy city circuit and let Miss 'LY' go to lunch. Tell her I said the fricasseed chicken and corn-pone are just right to-day!"

Austin, wrathful within because of his interrupted chat, gave little heed to what he imagined was a frivolous injunction. He well knew that those Southern delicacies were not on the Western Union restaurant's meager bill of fare.

When he stood beside Miss Lilian his mind perversely bade him say:

"The chief is going to eat 'dill pickles and ice-cream' again to-day. You'd better try 'em, too, 'LY'!"

The girl appeared surprised, but said nothing and left the room. Five minutes later the traffic chief made a dignified exit.

"UQ" sat in and for a half-hour amused himself by chasing those lady hams just enough to make them nervously apprehensive. If he could have projected his astral self into the down-town hotels it would have witnessed the lamentable perturbations caused by his material dexterity. Several of the unfortunate misses coughed gently; three patted their coiffures; two used powder-puffs, and one was forced to say on the wire:

"Min cust (Minute, customer)."

Then Austin became aware that some hostile presence was standing behind him, and turned to face Miss Lily.

"I told you not to rush those girls!" she declared peevishly.

Her face was as black with displeasure as it is possible for a peaches-and-cream complexion to become.

The disturbed youth hurriedly arose.

"Aw, I was only joking with 'em!" he explained contritely. "Say, you weren't out long enough to eat, were you?"

"No!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I'm not hungry to-day."

"Maybe you took a little whirl on the roller skates, eh?" he inquired, with great cleverness—for an amateur detective.

"LY" flushed to her pretty temples.

"I suppose that old fool of a traffic chief put you up to say that!" she observed witheringly. "You might be a fast sender, but you're as slow-witted as a—"

"The girls on your wire are sweet, all right," Austin broke in as he moved away with the determination of saying something waggish as the last word. "They're sugarcured hams!"

"Come back here!" Lily called after him.

He returned smilingly, in the belief that his wit had melted her anger.

"Now, go away!" she said spitefully. "And stay away, you—infant!"

His ears still were burning from embarrassment fifteen minutes later when he sat in on the Buffalo duplex beside Mrs. Inez. She, with a jealous wife's "intuition," managed to fit together a complete plot from his jig-saw report on "LY's" strange behavior.

"'UQ,' you are a born detective!" she asserted flatteringly. "'And now I need the assistance of a courageous gentleman this night on a secret, if not a dangerous, mission."

"Try me!" Austin begged eagerly.

"O. K.!" she agreed gently. "Listen—"

The instructions that followed were for him to go to a certain costumer's establishment at 7.30 P.M., choose a masquerade suit, and present himself at the roller skating rink at 8.30. He was to make a careful survey of such skaters as appeared up to nine o'clock, at which hour Mrs. Inez would reach the floor. She would be garbed as a Spanish girl.

The characters that her emissary was to keep particularly under surveillance were such as might disguise a small, dainty blonde like Miss Lilian of the city department, and a tall, broad-shouldered man about the size of "K's" husband.

"Do you know the man in the case?" Austin inquired, with all of a professional sleuth's astuteness.

"I once thought I did!" the lady conceded. "But, I'm beginning to think that I do not!"

By this time the traffic chief had returned to his sentry-go up and down the aisle and crosswise. His face was a thunder-cloud, and he very pointedly avoided looking at Miss Lily, who was ignoring everything in the room but the clock and the messages on her wire.

The assistant traffic chief, after a thoughtful survey of the situation, maneuvered to get Austin out into the hall on a "short relief."

"Just what did the chief tell you to say to 'LY' before lunch?" he demanded.

"That the 'fricasseed chicken and corn pone' were just right to-day," "UQ" replied.

"He said the same thing in my hearing a week ago," the A. T. C. remarked, musingly; "but to-day she was out only twenty nine minutes, and—"

"But I told her 'dill pickles and ice-cream'!" Austin announced blandly. "I guess I spilled the beans, eh?"

The good-looking young man heartily shook hands.

"You're O. K., 'UQ'!" he exclaimed. "I'm your friend for life! You undoubtedly are going to be one of our star operators. Shake again!"

The jealous assistant had solved the puzzle of the luncheon code and he hoped that the course of true love now would be macadamized for him. Miss Lilian undoubtedly had cooled her pretty heels outside of the wrong restaurant while the old trifter chewed his dyed mustache in front of the right one. Each thought, of course, that the other had perpetrated an unforgivable "stand-up."

At the evening meal Operator Irby informed his admiring women folk that he was going to work a few hours of "extra," but for them not to wait up for him. A man never could tell just when the night people would turn him loose, what with business piled up and everything.

"'Tis r-r-rich th' bhoy is goin' to be wid a regular-r-r salary an' overtoime, Oi dunno!" Granny Mowrey declared.

"But, Austin, you left the railroad to get a day job so as to be with us in the evenings," Agnes Helene reminded him.

"Aw, I won't do this kind of work often!" he promised, truthfully.

Indeed, he would have to skimp on his lunches for a month to come to make up for this night's detective duty because he was not the lad to permit a distressed lady to reimburse her volunteer champion. The masquerade suit would be at least three dollars, admission to the skating rink a dollar apiece, and the "overtime" hours, otherwise devoted, forty cents each.

Austin chose a *Mephistopheles* costume. He was obeying his love of the picturesque and not the fitness of things. That suit

probably had been worn by many persons, but when this youth dashed out of the dressing-room onto the circular, hard-wood track surely he was the most innocent devil that ever wore the red tights and jacket, the crimson cloak, the magenta cap, and the cerise feather. His mask was appropriately the shade of soot.

At about 8.45 he discovered Miss Lily. She was a *Dresden Shepherdess*. Her escort, tall and broad-shouldered as was expected, made a striking *Pierrot*.

Promptly at nine o'clock a fascinating *Carmen* glided from the ladies' dressing-room, and the *Devil* rushed to greet her. He found her dimpled fingers icy and shaking as they skated into the whirring, swaying stream of masqueraders. Her dark eyes smoldered behind the mask.

"'LY' is here!" Austin said, with the air of a *Sherlock Holmes*. "I spotted her at once."

"Who—who is w-with her?" Mrs. Inez stammered, her white teeth chattering uncontrollably.

"I haven't doped him out yet," the detective replied serenely, "but I will! He's dressed as a *clown*."

"He—he ought to be!" the Spanish beauty said to herself in a fierce undertone.

Around and around the rink they went, urged on by a blaring band in the gallery. "K" was a graceful skater, but now she pleaded for less speed—to permit the other masked ones to pass them for inspection. Nowhere in sight was the guilty couple for whom a vengeful wife sought.

Finally, Austin spied their quarry seated at one of the refreshment tables alongside the rink floor.

"We'll stop there the next time around," his companion announced, her voice no longer unsteady, "and sit at their table even if there are empty ones near by. Don't utter a word; just listen until I make sure of the man—and then I'll say everything that is necessary! And, no matter what happens, keep on your mask. I imagine there is going to be somewhat of a scene!"

Her hands now were steady and glowing, and her ashen lips again had assumed their natural crimson.

The devil was thrilled without understanding why. He did not recognize that *Carmen's* emotion was a throbbing rage. If this actually were old Madrid she would have enlightened him by making sure that her knife was where she could reach it in a hurry.

When they seated themselves at that table for four, the *Dresden Shepherdess* pointedly turned in her chair to look at empty ones to the right and left of them that should have prevented this interruption of a conversation for two only. *Pierrot*, however, made a not unkindly appraisal of the Spanish girl's profile.

Whispering was difficult so close to the resounding planks of the rink, and "LY" used a telegrapher's subterfuge to relieve her caustic thoughts. It is a method that requires both ear and eye to read, contrary to the impression spread by non-operator fiction writers that hearing suffices alone.

Loudly clicking a spoon against her ice-cream dish, the dainty *Shepherdess* slowly spelled out:

"Who are the nebbly freaks?"

"Don't know," *Pierrot* ticked back, "but she's nice to look at!"

"Padded!" Miss Lilian clacked on, and followed this libelous charge with another: "Wears a wig, too!"

"He's giving you the X-ray!" the man telegraphed warningly.

"Wish he'd go right back to his own fireside!" she ticked off, and laughed merrily at her own wit.

The *Devil* intercepted a waiter and recklessly ordered two dishes of ice-cream with cake on the side. He not only was thirsty and hungry but heatedly minded to do some retributive Morse work with spoon and saucer because of that too slightly veiled injunction for him to go to Hades.

Austin also imagined that "K" might wish to make some dots and dashes. Her bosom had heaved convulsively at the word "padded," and the curves left her lips over that "wig"!

Pierrot, reconciled to the presence of what appeared to be non-operators, now did some highly personal telegraphing.

"Cut out the comedy, Lily!" he ticked

away, nervously. "I'm crazy about you! Let's—get—married?"

Mrs. Inez half started to arise and then sank back, weakly. She had been adjusted to the shock of finding her Bob a faithless philanderer, but if he were capable of bigamy she never, never would get into the matrimonial "balance" again.

The *Dresden Shepherdess* was oblivious to everything but her saucer. For all of a minute she stared at it, and at last slowly lifted the spoon. Then she tremblingly touched it five times against the china.

The clicks were too faint to be read, but all at that table could distinguish them by sight.

"LY" had given the fateful answer: "O. K.!"

She arose and turned toward the skating floor. *Pierrot*, too, stood up.

"Not here, Dave!" she begged, but he could not wait.

It was a mere dot of a kiss, but a caress, nevertheless—and quite creditable for agitated sweethearts on roller skates.

The happy *Clown* turned to *Carmen* and the *Devil*.

"Don't mind us!" he said. "We've just become engaged in the Morse alphabet. We're telegraph operators."

They sped into the whirling stream of skaters.

"I've heard that man's voice somewhere!" the mystified sleuth declared as he gazed after them.

"K," who instantly had recognized the assistant traffic chief and also realized the possibility of her husband returning home unexpectedly from his lodge meeting, suddenly had a violent "headache."

"I can't eat a bite!" she announced cheerfully. "I'll have to go home at once and lie down."

"Shall I go with you," the *Devil* inquired, "or remain here until midnight and get a good look at that fellow's face when he unmasks?"

"No, thank you!" *Carmen* decided quickly. "And don't let 'LY' or her lover know you are here. Promise me, on your word as one of nature's noblemen, that you'll never breathe a word of this to a living soul!"

"You know me!" he asserted, with the proud humility of a Sir Walter Raleigh.

In solitary state *Mephistopheles* ate all the ice-cream and cake that he had ordered, and then for a lonesome hour skated alone among the hand-holding couples, as befitted his satanic majesty. And as he swayed and whirred around the crowded, noisy rink his thoughts veered from the allure of *Carmen* to the mystery of *Pierrot*—and thence to the solid fact that this exercise was costing him forty cents an hour.

"Seven thirty to ten thirty P.M.," he told himself reproachfully. "Three hours—one dollar and twenty cents! Gee!

"Aw, I'm going home to Granny Mowrey and Agnes Helene!"

THE CORNFIELD

IN fields of corn the sunbeams creep,
Where cups of crimson poppies steep
And drop their drowsy dreams until
The little winds grow faint and still,
On murmuring leafy seas asleep,
In fields of corn.

The yellow kernels fold and keep
The mellow wealth the seasons heap,
And happy orioles pause and thrill
In fields of corn.

In fields of corn the truant sheep
Through red-tipped, tangled tassels peep,
Where silky tufts in crinkles spill
From silvery sheaths the ripe ears fill,
Like golden sweets my heart hoards deep
In fields of corn.



The Spark Divine

by John D. Swain

(Def.—*Anhydrous chloral*: a colorless, oily fluid prescribed as a hypnotic. The resultant sleep is frequently attended with hallucinations. Chloral is known among criminals as “knock-out drops.”)

IT was the servants' night out. After dinner, Meehan had brought coffee and liqueurs into the library, and departed, leaving Hadley and his wife alone.

Directly after the butler had left, the stranger had arrived, and had accepted a demi-tasse and a cigar.

He was no stranger, so far as Hadley's thorough knowledge of his tortuous mind and corrupt soul was concerned; only, he had never before seen him in the flesh. His appearance was a frank confession that he was at the end of his string; for rare indeed was it for Milliken to appear personally in any matter. He was far too well served by trained and unscrupulous henchmen.

Yet, he had been obliged to come out into the open at last. Those papers, the damning proof that fifty capitalists would buy at Hadley's own valuation, and which laid Milliken's soul as naked as a shucked oyster—he would never rest until he had secured them!

To be sure, Hadley felt no desire to use them; they were, to him, merely a guarantee against any future deviltry Milliken might devise against him, or against the

interests he represented. So far as that went, Milliken himself would have paid more for them than would any one else; but they *were not for sale*.

Just what the man had in mind puzzled Hadley not a little, and intrigued him more. He would stop at nothing—not even murder—to get them; provided his slimy trail was covered. That much was certain.

He proved to be an extremely agreeable visitor; Hadley knew his ability and intelligence, and had assumed that he owned a certain breeding, a superficial polish; but nothing like the form he displayed. Even Anna, who, of course, knew who he was, and what he was after, was manifestly under the charm of his wide experience and travel, his humorous comment and subtle flattery. Not once had he mentioned the object of his call.

Hadley waited with the same lively interest that he always felt during the third act of a clever drama. He found himself studying Milliken's mouth.

Obviously, there are mouths formed by nature for kisses, and others solely intended for the intaking of nourishment. There are mouths framed for oratory, or dental advertisements, or vaudeville; mouths even, which seem to have no other object than to wear a perpetual sneer.

Milliken's was not in this category. It was a gash; thin, non-committal, firm with-

out being stern, flexible without a trace of loose voluptuousness. It was only when he smiled that it became a menace. He smiled now, and spoke, leaning over the table, eyes fixed upon the floor. His hand swept gracefully forward and pointed.

"What a ripping *Baluchistan!*" he cried. "Oriental rugs are a passion with me; and we are of course not getting any in, now!"

Inevitably, Hadley and his wife turned their heads, and for a brief instant their eyes followed his gesture. Jimmy, to be sure, caught from the tail of his eye the flicker of Milliken's hand as it passed over the table edge; but on turning, their guest was helping himself to another lump of sugar for his fresh cup of coffee.

No suspicion lodged in his mind; yet, deft as a conjurer, Milliken's hand, hovering over his cup, had released the contents of a tiny, wide-mouthed vial into it.

Hadley's cigar was drawing bitter, and he selected a fresh one. Before lighting it, he lifted his tiny cup and drained it in one swallow—making a wry face.

"Coffee tastes like nicotin, and the cigar tastes of coffee!" he complained, scratching a vesta.

"Try one of my manilas," suggested Milliken. "These were made from year before last's crop; extra mild, but aromatic."

His wide-spaced eyes looked squarely into Jimmy Hadley's. The latter found himself unable to focus back upon them.

In fact, he found himself unable to do *anything whatever*. He experienced for the first time the ghastly sensation of having lost all connection between mind and body. "They don't answer!" the great central was saying.

The feeling is not agreeable. Most of us get a hint of it, in nightmare; the victim of apoplexy, if the shock is too mild to cause loss of consciousness, understands it only too well; possibly it may be felt by the departing spirit as it hovers uncertainly over the body, so recently its humble and much-abused servant, but now inert.

Yet, after the first violent effort to resume control, Hadley found the sensation strangely endurable. By some subconscious

process, he knew instantly what had occurred; knew that by inexorable natural laws, he was dead to all the world.

As one seated in a luxurious orchestra chair and idly beholding a rather dull play, he saw the flicker of triumph in the stranger's eyes, saw him leap, catlike, to his feet, felt his deft hands as they played about his pockets and learned that the papers were not there.

He saw, too, the incredulous look in his wife's eyes, and knew that she had no inkling of what had occurred.

Milliken turned his back contemptuously upon him, and seized her wrists in a harsh grip. Her scream came, not unpleasantly, to Jimmy's ears, as part of the play, having no subjective interest for him.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Why don't you make him stop!"

Milliken roughly dragged her toward the little writing room forming an alcove of the library, its desk littered with papers.

"Now, my lady, you will save time for me and trouble for yourself by showing me where those papers are! And be quick about it!"

"I'll die first!" sobbed the little woman.

The visitor laughed mockingly.

"You have at least admitted that you *know*—and dying isn't as easy as you make it sound!" They passed, struggling, beyond Jimmy's vision.

Sleep! That was it; dreamless sleep. Oblivion! He was a young, ardent man, in the full vigor of life; and he thought that he had desired some things pretty keenly. But, compared with his desire for oblivion, these other needs became trifling fancies, the impulse of a passing mood.

He understood, in a flash of inspiration, the mighty truth of Buddhism. Eternal rest, lost in a profound contemplation of nothingness; that was a goal worth a thousand toilsome and bloody reincarnations! The Christian heaven, with its singing, its sweep of seraphic wings, its plucking of golden harps and strolling by the river of life—the energy required appalled him.

He was brother to the lean and dirty adept squatting half naked beneath a date tree, while his hair grew below his shoulders and the nails of his fingers pierced his

bloodless palms; rousing only, and that reluctantly, to take a mouthful of water and a little rice left by some pious pilgrim.

To feel that the soul was straining at its bodily cable, like a balloon; like a bird perched on a twig, exerting no appreciable weight, but merely balancing, ready for instant flight; to slough off the flesh, and everything that entailed motion, and fatigue, and sweat, and the invisible but none the less tedious metabolism of cell life. Jimmy Hadley wanted that, and that alone. Yet—did he?

For the first time in his life he was conscious of a force apart from body, or mind. Back of the muscles vibrated the controlling nerves. Back of the nerves, the brain; back of all brooded the mind. But none of these responded to the cries of his wife, the sting of defeat, the call of duty. Infinitely unimportant were these fantasmata, to what was left of his intellectual processes. Yet, something—some austere voice, bade his mind rise up, bade his sodden body bestir itself, commanded him to live.

He felt as Lazarus must have felt, when his corrupt flesh answered to the Voice which bade it come forth, wrapped in its cerements, from the friendly tomb. With an agony inconceivable, Hadley listened, and prepared to obey.

He would receive from the unknown taskmaster no aid, it seemed. No strength passed into his atrophied nerves. The very thought: "*I must arise!*" did not come all at once; rather, it was as if he spent days in the mold of etymology, grubbing up, not complete words, but letter by letter; and that each, as he uprooted it, shrieked as mandrakes are said to do, when torn from their native sod.

With no personal interest in what might transpire, or be done to his wife, or with the papers, but as a sick and broken slave answers to the lash of a brutal driver, he concentrated his will upon the struggle, aware all the time that his will was in its turn merely a servant—that looming back of it, invisible but potent, stood the soul, the Spark Divine!

He opened his eyes after what seemed years of effort; and his body had slipped

from the chair to the floor, and was lying prone, face downward upon the rug. More than that, it had moved—how he could not tell—some three feet forward, toward the writing-room, from which he could hear the impassioned voices of his wife and Milliken, saying he knew not what!

Hadley accepted the task of performing the impossible. He knew perfectly that, by every law of chemistry, physiology, and psychology, he should be sitting in his chair, without thought or motion, for many hours to come. He set himself to surmount science by sheer will power.

Yet, despite his almost incredible exertions, his eyes closed again. The unspeakable desire, the very lust, for sleep, never for an instant left him. If anything, it increased. He spurned it, accepting the fearful agonies with which it revenged itself upon him.

He beheld himself thrust deep beneath the cornerstone of the first pyramid of ancient Egypt. A mighty monolith was dragged over his body, stiff in its many yards of stout linen daubed with pitch. Other vast stones were hauled in place. When the first course was laid, inclined planes of Nile mud were built, up which sweating hordes of slaves were driven with cracking whips, dragging behind them, by mighty cables, the granite cubes.

Generations passed; men died like gnats at the frightful task. When at length the great pyramid stood complete, cunning masons arranged intricate corridors and stairs leading to the secret inner chamber. The most gifted artists of their age decorated its walls with endless files of stiff figures, brilliant in vermilion and yellow and blue. Their work finished, artists and masons were slain, that the secret of royalty might not be disclosed.

Pharaoh was brought here, in the fulness of time, and after him, many more; an entire dynasty. Mummified cats were placed by their sarcophagi; sacred *scarabei* within their gilded coffins. Jewels, weapons, murdered favorites were there. Deep graved in the granite walls, hieroglyphics recounted their histories.

The line of kings passed away, after a period so vast that history merely hints at

the centuries consumed. Finally, no more royal corpses came to the inner chamber. The line was extinct. The sands shifted; the centuries glided by, and the very secret of the entrance was lost.

During all this time, Hadley abode, beneath the cornerstone, an implacable mind, with the fixed purpose of winning back to physical action. And at length, his eyes opened.

The voices still sounded in his ears, from the little writing-room. He observed that though flat on his face, unable to rise to his elbows, he had writhed along a full two yards. He could measure this, because he was no longer upon the rug, but on the cool maple floor.

Once more exhaustion closed his eyes. He lay upon the desert sands, at night, and alone. One by one stars appeared, as lanterns are lighted at a festival. He was beholding the beams from the first fixed stars to reveal themselves to mortal vision. The light came from a distance so unthinkable that astronomers can only designate it as a "year of light:" that is, by taking as a unit the distance ray of light, traveling one hundred and eighty-six miles a second, will advance in a solar year. From some of the nearer stars the rays came in a little less than twelve million years; others took longer. Eternity chilled their molten cores, and they congealed into dead crust.

Hadley saw them all, one by one. Dynasties rose and fell; old worlds rotted away, and new constellations were spawned in the lap of time. Through unspeakable eons his will fought on to be free; patient, unchangeable, undefeated. He opened his eyes once more. He was half way to the writing-room door.

More than that, a little life seemed to have crept through his dead arteries. He strove to move his hand; the fingers opened reluctantly.

Now, it seemed to him, he passed through the slow evolution of the race. First, as a worm, a mere slug, he could only feebly wriggle upon the floor. Presently excrescences appeared; amorphous limbs, flaccid and weak. He learned to use these rudimentary aids to locomotion, and with a

dull amazement found himself advancing upon knees and elbows. He was in the lizard stage of development. Not at once, but through thousands of years, he won to the final stage; and, having reached the wall, pulled himself erect, and stood up, a man! The first anthropoid ape felt no greater elation than did he.

He drew in a mighty breath, and felt strength flooding his system. His veins seemed alive with swarming bees.

Still, he was pitifully weak. His reluctant body had to be lashed on by his remorseless will, as flagellants in the Middle Ages drove their bleeding carcasses through the streets, singing as the spiked lash drew blood with every step. His eyes fell upon the clock. *Nearly two minutes had elapsed since Milliken had dragged his wife across the floor, and into the little room.*

By the doorway stood a stand of ancient armor. Hadley was, in his way, a bit of a collector. The pieces represented were of Milanese fabrication. Among them hung one, known among French knights, with whom it was popular, as "*l'oiseau*," since it made, when whirled about the head, a whistling noise like the cry of an angry sea-fowl.

It had a heavy wooden handle, terminating in a chain some two feet in length, with a metal bar covered with sharp steel spikes. Hadley felt the need of a weapon of some sort. His automatic was at this moment reposing in the drawer of his dresser.

As he entered the writing-room, his plucky little wife was moaning with pain, forced to her knees by the gallant Milliken, who was slowly bending back her slender fingers, causing exquisite pain, and threatening fracture. The slight noise made by Hadley caused the man to look up.

It is a fact that when an individual, or a nation, which works along mechanical and methodical lines, checking up every known possibility, perfecting the last detail, rehearsing over and again, meets with the unexpected, the grain of sand in the bearings, the machine usually breaks down.

Milliken, glancing up, saw a stranger standing in the doorway. He knew that Hadley was slumped down in his chair, wrapped in the coma of a potent drug, be-

cause by every law of science he *must* be there. He knew there were but three of them in the house, because he had made it his business to know. Yet, here was an unknown man, dangling some curious thing in his hand!

So haggard, so frightfully drawn were Hadley's features, that it is doubtful if he would have recognized himself, in a mirror. He looked, in truth, precisely like one of the unhappy wretches in advertisements, labeled "Before Taking," something which they very much need!

Milliken's surprise was not unnatural. It served to throw him off his guard for an instant; to leave him in doubt—his plan having developed an unforeseen emergency.

Above all, it served Hadley for time enough to cross the slight space between them, and not be shot dead on the way. He raised his singular weapon a second before the other recovered sufficiently to draw his gun, so that he threw up his arm in an instinctive posture of defense.

It was quite correct, the defense; it stopped the heavy wooden handle on the fleshy part of his forearm. Had it been a cudgel, no harm would have resulted. But the old Milanese armorers were cun-

ning men, according to their lights. They knew the very posture of defense a man would be certain to adopt, and they had vitiated it.

Over Milliken's head, as the wooden handle was suddenly arrested, thus imparting an additional snap to it, curled the light chain like a serpent; into his noble brow bit one of the keen steel spikes bristling from the loaded end.

Milliken swayed slowly, and not ungracefully, forward. His body fell at Hadley's feet, and did not move. A thick current of dark blood oozed from a clean, round hole just where his hair began to thin out.


Jimmy Hadley looked upon his wife, looked upon his foe. He listened, but the voice issued no further command. *He could sleep.* A smile of ineffable bliss overspread his face. His wife thought he was going to speak to her; but he was not even thinking of her. He was not thinking of anything in the universe, save that as he crumpled down to yield voluptuously to oblivion, he could, by moving so little as a single inch, avoid pillowing his head in Milliken's life blood. But it was not worth the effort!

He closed his eyes with a sigh of ecstasy.

Called Intuition

by

George L. Catton



PICARD raised his head stealthily and peered through the bushes. The man he was watching had hailed some one on the river, and that hail had been answered. Now another young man, in a

canoe, was paddling in toward the camp-fire.

Picard cursed silently in his throat. It was near sundown, and the newcomer might decide to double-up in camp with the man

he was watching, and in that case he would have to abandon his plan altogether, or kill two men instead of one. Damn the newcomer!

Not that the extra killing worried him. A human life more or less was of small consequence to Picard. What worried him was the added danger to himself. He was minus a gun, having lost it among the rest of his personal belongings in a poker game the evening previous, and a knife was a poor weapon against two men. One man, sleeping, meant but one well-aimed drive with the steel. But two men?

The young fellows on the trails those days were quick to waken and quick on the "draw." The first man to get the knife might thrash around noisily before the second could be reached. Both carried revolvers. Damn the newcomer!

A canoe grated against the rocks, and the man at the camp-fire greeted:

"Coffee's boiling, and the bacon's sizzling, Herb. I thought you'd gone out. They told me in Cudahy you were going Monday."

Herb pulled his canoe up on the rocks and laid his paddle athwart the gunwales.

"Should have, Jimmie; should have," he laughed shortly. "The little girl's waiting on me in Dawson, wanted to catch last week's boat; but I couldn't make it. Ran into another little pocket when I'd figured I was about through, and just had to stop to clean it out. I've taken nineteen thousand out of it already, and that's only about half. How's things?"

"Just so-so," was the answer. "Started a drift in the second level yesterday and managed to pick up another half-dozen shovel-stiffs in Cudahy this morning. Stuff's running about two hundred to the ton now. When are you figuring on going out?"

"Tuesday coming." Herb poured himself a cup of coffee and set it down to cool. "Wrote the little girl this morning to pack up and be ready to hit the trail on Monday night. Good bacon, that."

The conversation lapsed; then, in a rattle of knives on metal plates and the audible sipping of hot coffee.

Over in the bushes Picard drew his knees up under him and began a slow-crawling,

noiseless retreat. The conversation he had just overheard had changed his plans. Whereas he had planned to wait till Jimmie Thorald, owner of the Lucky Miss, was asleep, and to kill his way to the roll of a thousand dollars or so that Jimmie usually carried around with him, now he was going after bigger game. Herb, the newcomer to the camp-fire, was Herbert Cowan. He had heard of Cowan.

Herb Cowan was "the lucky stiff who fell into Squaw Creek and climbed out with his hands full of nuggets"; was the man who had started the famous Squaw Creek stampede. Previous to that he hadn't had a dollar. In fact, his girl, Miss Elliott, the clerk at Kinney's general store in Dawson, had grub-staked him four separate times.

But after that, a week after Cowan recorded the discovery claim on Squaw Creek, he had not only repaid, with a hundred per cent interest, every dollar he was in debt, but had banked seventy-five thousand dollars besides. The creek-bed sands had yielded him that. Then when he swung his pick into a seam of rotten gneiss in the bank of the stream he opened out a lead to another one hundred thousand.

And now, sitting there at Jimmie Thorald's camp-fire, he had told Jimmie, in a voice loud enough for Picard to hear, that he had run into an unexpected pocket for another thirty-five or forty thousand dollars, and had taken out already nineteen thousand.

Nineteen thousand!

Picard got up on his feet, when he had crawled a safe distance from the camp-fire, and turned down the valley. He felt reasonably certain that Cowan wouldn't clean up and bank that nineteen thousand till he had cleaned out to the last show of color the newly discovered pocket. And a ten by twelve log-shack was a small space in which to hide nineteen thousand dollars in gold in its matrix.

Nor was there any necessity to hurry. Cowan would stay in camp with Jimmie Thorald, he was quite sure of that. The fall nights were getting very dark, and there were the lower rapids to run—dangerous work indeed in the dark. So there would be all night in which to search the shack.

But he was away out in his calculations. Herb Cowan not only did not stay in camp with Thorald, but ran the six miles to his claim in record time. He must have left Thorald's camp immediately after he finished his supper, for he and Picard arrived at the cabin almost together.

Picard crouched in the bushes at the edge of the clearing around the cabin and cursed long and luridly. There was a light in the cabin, and he could see through the window some one moving around inside. His chance was gone. Armed only with a knife, he had no stomach for a scrap with a big, young fellow like that.

For ten or fifteen minutes he watched the moving figure through the window. Then his hand went to the breast-pocket of his jacket. Cowan didn't know him, had never seen him before. He crossed the clearing and rapped on the door.

"Come in." The man in the cabin had the fire going and the inevitable coffee-pot on the boil.

"Spotted your light from the bush and hiked right over," Picard announced easily. "Ran into a rock in the lower rapids and lost everything I had. How's chances for eats?"

"The best," came the answer. "There's half a side of bacon and a pail of beans there in the grub-box, and I've got the coffee-pot on the stove. Go to it. Had my supper in camp about sundown."

"Thanks."

Picard needed no second invitation. He was hungry, not having eaten since noon. Also the "welcome" invitation to cook his own meal, and the coffee-pot on the stove gave him the chance he needed to put into operation his new plan. He whittled off a half-dozen slices of bacon and dumped a pound or so of cooked beans into a pan, keeping up a genial conversation the while.

But when his host took the lid off the coffee-pot and reached for the water-pail, he raised his hand.

"Don't bother—if it's coffee for me," he laughed shortly. "Never take it. Been on the water-wagon for a month, and the river's still running."

"Shucks!" the other man ejaculated. "I'm on the wagon myself—never was off

it. But coffee! Got the coffee habit as bad as the old-timers. Sure you don't want it?"

"Wouldn't touch it with a shovel! Water for me—just plain, cold water."

"Good enough." Cowan caught up the pail. "I'll get a fresh bucketful." And he strode out of the cabin.

Picard's hand slipped into the breast-pocket of his jacket when the door closed. A little box, a tiny box with the skull and crossbones and the words "strychnin" and "poison" in conspicuous red on its cover, appeared on his palm. And into the coffee-pot went two little pellets!

Strychnin is extremely bitter; Picard knew that. But the coffee those habitual coffee-users made was also bitter, black, and boiled strong, and drunk in its full strength as it came out of the pot, and he didn't think the flavor would be so noticeable as to excite suspicion. And he guessed right. Cowan drained the coffee-pot with his second cup and smacked his lips over it.

Picard ate his beans and bacon and watched his host closely. He kept up an animated conversation on river news and doings to keep the other man's attention off his drink. Then when he was finished with his meal he reached for his hat.

"Guess I'll travel along," he announced. "Got to be in Cudahy by ten in the morning. Thanks for the grub. So-long."

He was gone two hours.

Cowan, his clothes all on, lay sprawled on his bunk when Picard came back. His arms and legs offered no resistance when they were lifted, and dropped back inertly when they were released. Picard grinned—and began his search.

And he drew a blank.

Beginning with the bunk, and ending with a thorough search of Cowan's clothing, he overlooked no possible hiding-place. He searched in the stove and under it, in the grub-box and under it, and even shifted, stick by stick, the little pile of stove-wood in the corner. But he failed to find anything. He didn't know that Cowan's trip up the river that day had been expressly to bank that nineteen thousand dollars.

Then when he was all through, when he had to give up the search and acknowledge

that he couldn't find that nineteen thousand, Picard glared down on the still figure on the bunk and cursed it. He was now a fugitive from the law, and would have to go into hiding till the excitement and search for him was over, and his crime had brought him nothing. And in his twisted and perverted thoughts he blamed Cowan for it all.

For if Cowan hadn't come along when he was waiting for Jimmie Thorald to go to sleep, he would now have Thorald's thousand dollars, instead of nothing at all, and be well on his way toward the coast and the outside. Damn Cowan!

Now he would have to go down to Dawson and hole up with a friend till the excitement had died down along the river. Unless—Jimmie Thorald! If he hurried he might yet catch Thorald asleep. He climbed into Cowan's canoe and paddled up the river.

But it was six miles up-stream, with one portage, to Thorald's camp. Thorald was cooking his breakfast when Picard arrived.

So Picard paddled on up the river to Dawson.

And when he walked through Dawson to his friend's cabin he passed Kinney's general store.

Miss Elliott, Herb Cowan's girl, clerked in Kinney's.

Miss Elliott was not a girl. She was a woman matured, with all the charm and grace and intuition of a woman. It was that that made her so necessary to Kinney's general store. There was opposition across the road, and at times the prices across there were a little lower; but Miss Elliott brought the trade to Kinney's.

"Thread, you said, Mr. Smith?" Miss Elliott was waiting on a man. "And you don't know the number? All right, just tell me what it's for and leave the rest to me. Buttons, eh? That's what you want, then. You won't ever have to sew them on but once with that thread. Thanks."

Or maybe she was waiting on a woman.

"Paregoric, Mrs. Jones? How is the wee tot? I really must run over to-night and see the wee darling."

Again it was a man.

"Veronal, Mr. Doe? Mosquitoes are bad these nights, aren't they? There it is. You'll sleep right through a fire or a stampede if you take that."

And the people dealt at Kinney's. They not only got waited on quickly there, but smiled on besides. Man, woman, or child, Miss Elliott was glad to see them and to wait on them.

She was standing at the window talking to Kinney the day Picard passed up the road to go into hiding. She had just got a letter from Herb, her Herb, telling her to get ready to go out on Monday night, and she was telling Kinney that she would be leaving him on Saturday. She pointed to Picard across the road.

"There, Mr. Kinney; there's a man I don't like," she pouted. "He came in here about two weeks ago and asked for strychnin."

"'What for?' I asked him.

"'Wolves,' he said.

"But I didn't like his face. So I gave him veronal in a strychnin box, and he never knew the difference."

IN GLORIOUS COMPLETENESS

THE beauty of the full-blown flower
Is thine, and thine the splendor of the flaming sky.
Bright glory round thee shines.

O Summer, thou art queen, thy bower
Bedecked with garlands wonderful, in hues that vie
With heaven, and flowering vines,

Forth-reaching to thy glad embrace
Their perfume-laden petals in the calm, still sweetness
Of the woodland way.

In regal robes, with queenly grace,
In tender beauty and in glorious completeness,
Comes the summer day.

John Carleton Sherman.



The Log-Book

By the Editor

BROWN and Jones were at it again, dissecting stories.

“It doesn't much matter what he does,” affirmed Jones, “as long as the character is made to seem like a real person to you.”

“Shucks,” retorted Brown. “Who's going to take any interest in reading about a fellow or a girl if they don't do something that excites either your admiration or curiosity?”

“But your friends are not always dropping into ticklish situations or accomplishing heroic rescues, and yet they interest you,” insisted Jones. “To my mind, the successful story must make its characters seem so real to you that every single commonplace thing they do impresses you as if it had happened to people you actually knew.”

How about it, Log readers? Have you any notions on this subject? If so, let's hear them.

High light and shadow—tragedy and romance—like a strong wind blowing among high peaks, gathering sweep for the last, tremendous, vibrating chord before the final silence—that is

“LUCK”

BY JOHN FREDERICK

Author of “The Hammer,” “The Higher Strain,” etc.

And then, in that final, dramatic encounter with the lone wolf of the range, he found himself stripped of the talisman which, men said and he himself believed, had brought him safe through the thousand hazards of his desperate calling. This is a greater even than “The Hammer”—a broader canvas—a tale to stir the blood. It begins as a six-part serial in *THE ARGOSY* for August 9.

A situation positively unique in fiction is the key-note of our complete novelette for August 9—

“A LETTER OF DISCREDIT”

BY GARRET SMITH

Author of “After a Million Years,” “On the Brink of 2000,” etc.

Is the golden rule an actual dead letter in this material age, or are there still those whose faith in human nature will endure even if faced with “confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ”? A gamble in humanity—that was *Bradwell's* trump card, and only one, and he played it, face upward, staking life and love and hope in one desperate and final hazard.

"AVALANCHE TACTICS," by Russell A. Boggs, is just the sort of railroad story to interest everybody, whether he be a railroad man or not. You will find it in next week's ARGOSY along with a powerful tale of presence of mind in deadly peril, set forth in "HIS SIDE PARTNER" by May Emery Hall. Then there will be one of Wallace M. Sloane's delightful comedy tales, this time on "RESURRECTING ALABAMA SLIM," showing the dependence of man—in fact two men—on one woman. And these are not half the good things in the way of shorts to be placed at your service in the issue of August 9.

WISHES REAL VILLAINS MIGHT GET FICTION DESERTS

Melrose, Montana.

You asked for an opinion on "He Swallows Gold." Well, I think it is good. I like to read those stories where scamps get "just what is coming to them." It's a pity they don't all get it in real life, instead of fiction. I like the stories of the Far East; ocean stories, especially by such authors as Loring Brent; Western stories by George Washington Ogden.

Say, it's a good thing you explained matters about not changing THE ARGOSY to suit W. L. Pond, or some of our non-partizan leaguers. I. W. W.'s, Bolshevik, anarchist readers might have treated him as they treated Ole Hansen, Mayor of Seattle—sent him a birthday present of a bomb. Pond works too hard; let him lay off and catch up on his reading.

L. C.

DELIGHTED OVER THE RAILROAD CONSOLIDATION

Sunbury, Pennsylvania.

I read a letter in your wonderful magazine in which a gentleman by the name of Pond asks that THE ARGOSY be published semimonthly. I wish to protest against this outrage upon the readers. I cannot wait one week for it, much less two weeks. I think that all other readers will agree that two weeks are a long wait. I wish to hand you the praise which I think is due you. I have read every story in the *Railroad Man's Magazine* and later THE ARGOSY AND RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE. I was delighted so much when I saw that you were going to consolidate the two magazines and publish them every week that I was in a fever of anxiety till the magazine arrived.

I keep my old magazines just to read them over. Hoping this runs past the waste-basket siding.

J. A.

HIGH PRAISE FOR "GREEN SPIDERS"

Oakland, California.

I want to tell you how pleased I have been with Alfred Pettibone's remarkable sea story, "Green Spiders." I have traveled a good deal at sea, and have read sea tales by some excellent writers, but do not recall any who have written more vividly. He makes you almost sniff the salt air and hear the roar of the breakers. Mr. Pettibone's descriptive powers are really wonderful, and he certainly does understand the ship and the sailorman. In addition to knowing "life on the ocean wave," he seems to have a keen ap-

preciation of what he calls "the eternal question" (the sex instinct), and he handles it with tact and delicacy.

I am not a literary critic, and not able to pass judgment on Mr. Pettibone's style, but there is something very fascinating to me in his fine diction and rapid flow of ideas. There is not a dull page—"something doing" every minute and full of surprises. Surely the readers of THE ARGOSY are indebted to you for such entertaining tales. And they are instructive as well as entertaining. THE ARGOSY is clearly at the head of the list of story magazines.

A. D. CARSOAMAN.

THE STORIES CAN'T COME TOO FAST

Caruthersville, Missouri.

This is my first letter to the Log-Book. I just had to write and tell you how I liked that story, "Easy Garvin," by Rex Parson. It was one good story and then some. I am a farmer boy, and don't get much time to read in the daytime, but, believe me, I put in good time at nights and rainy days reading the good old ARGOSY, in my opinion the best magazine published. I read the continued stories first, then the novelette, and finish with the short stories.

I like some stories better than others, but I read them all. I can't agree with Willis L. Pond; they can't come too fast for me. Am now reading "The Duke of Chimney Butte," and it promises to be a dandy.

I commenced reading THE ARGOSY in 1911, and have been reading it ever since. I got interested in a story, "Vengeance Burned Away," by Seward W. Hopkins. I was sure sorry to hear of Mr. Hopkins's death. I liked all his stories. Since I have been reading THE ARGOSY the stories I liked best were: "Vengeance Burned Away," "The Shooting at Big D," "In the Name of the King," "With His Back to the World," "No Questions Asked," "Forbidden Trails," and "Easy Garvin." I hope Mr. Parson will write another soon. I will close by wishing the editor every success and three cheers for THE ARGOSY.

ARTHUR N. SIDES.

WHEN THE BIG FIGHT STARTS

San Francisco, California.

Just a few lines from a constant reader of THE ARGOSY, for I have been a subscriber of THE ARGOSY since I left school ten years ago, although this is the first letter I have written to show my appreciation of your wonderful magazine. I have always read the Log-Book before starting any of

the stories, for I like to read the different opinions of the stories.

I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but have lived in the golden West for the past ten years. Of course, I like the Western stories best.

I always buy the magazine on Thursday evenings on my way home; then the big fight starts, for as soon as our evening meal is finished there is a rush for the magazine, in which my father, sister, and I all take part.

I generally get there first, and sometimes I sit on the book during dinner to be sure I get it before any of the others, for the first one getting the book never stops until he has read from cover to cover.

Wishing you and THE ARGOSY a long and prosperous life,

WILLIAM S. HEY.

FROM ONE WHO HAS FOLLOWED THE FLAG FAR

A. E. F., France.

A few days ago I chanced to find an ARGOSY dated March 1, 1910. It was dog-eared from much reading, but it was an American magazine and an ARGOSY at that. Well, sir, I read that whole magazine, advertisements and all; and the last I read was a letter from a renegade Floridian, who signs herself "Mrs. C. E. Keith."

Sir, my home is in Florida—Arcadia, Florida—and I wish to state in the beginning that I am going to defend Florida and back her to the limit. Mrs. Keith says she certainly is glad to be back where the people move with "pep." Perhaps they have to have pep out West to make a living. She owns to living at one time in Las Vegas, New Mexico. I soldiered out there when we were chasing Villa, and all I found was mosquitoes, chaparral, horned toads, sand-storms, and greasers. The only farming I ever caught them at was raising onions. I know California is O. K.; but nevertheless when any one mentions home, I think of a home surrounded by orange, grapefruit, tangerine, mango, and satsuma-trees, way down in south Florida. I have followed the flag over more than half the world in the last four years, and of all the lands and isles I have visited, Pasco, Florida, is the dearest.

Mrs. Keith says she is glad she doesn't talk so niggerish. Listen, does not a Southerner speak soft? Doesn't it sound soothing and quieting to hear a Southerner speak in that soft drawl we have? And say, that soft drawl can hide a deadly menace to an evil-doer. We are slow and easy going; that is true. We take time to live; we do not hitch ourselves to a star of personal ambition and ride rough-shod over the lives of our neighbors in order to satisfy our own ambition to live a fast life and set a pace for the circle we move in. The Southerner opens his door of hospitality to all mankind. If a wayfarer in the South should stop at the lowliest home in "Dixie," he would be welcome to all his host possessed.

And right now, Mr. Editor, I wish to say that I have been in places in America where a man who failed would not receive a helping hand from his fellow men. They were too busy following the dictates of that pep to bother about one failure. They regard him as one more derelict on the road to personal success; one more wreck to mark the trail to worldly gain. He had tried

and failed; now he must drift, for were they to stop long enough to give him a helping hand, they themselves would be lost far behind in the race of the "pepites."

Were I to lose all my worldly goods, I would choose the South to lose them in, for I would receive a new start from the Southerners, who speak like negroes and have no pep, but in pure chivalry and brotherly love they are ahead. I am proud of the fact that I am a Southerner, and I shall never disown it.

I have, as before stated, been over a large portion of this world. I have lived under all manner of customs and heard all kinds of languages and dialects, and I learned long ago not to speak slightly of the customs of other nations and other sections of our country. You must remember that your manners are as laughable to them as theirs to you. I am sorry a daughter of Florida should throw mud at her native State. But be it so, the ninety and nine were safe; but one wandered in darkness. It shall ever be; the hand that fed was bitten. But in conclusion, I will say, should she ever need real friends, come to the State that she disowned and find them.

Thank you, Mr. Editor. I like your magazine. It has often published stories in which places were mentioned that I knew. "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea" was fine. I always read army stories with pleasure, and can spot a writer who doesn't know the army after the first few lines. They always have their hero doing something impossible. I read one not long ago where the hero saluted a sergeant. That wasn't right, for according to regulations nothing below a 2nd "loot" in rank rates a salute.

I hope to see America real soon. Every inch of her is dear to me. One doesn't know how dear, nor what it is to be an American until one is on foreign soil. The old flag is the holiest piece of bunting on earth. Several of my boyhood comrades are sleeping over here. They lie from Château-Thierry to The Argonne, and they died that Old Glory might wave, clean and honored by all nations. And sir, any man who claims America as his country and doesn't back her up in all troubles, no matter whether she is right or wrong, is a contemptible cur, and should be run out of America and kept out. I thank you.

MESS SERGEANT VERNON HURT.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

If Louis S. Dutton, Seattle, Washington, will refer back to the issue of January 18, he will note that Mr. Munsey expressly stated in his announcement that there would be no change in THE ARGOSY. Had Mr. Dutton sent his street address I would have answered his letter personally. Helen E. Stewart, of Springfield, Massachusetts, is informed that by now Clarence W. Dilley, of the U. S. S. Bella, must have more magazines than he can handle, thanks to the generosity of our readers. Incidentally she likes lots of good fighting in a story, and considers that in "Cold Steel" that was one time she got it. J. W. Drane, McCool, Mississippi, who says he could not do without THE ARGOSY, puts down his favorite authors as Achmed Abdullah, Edgar Franklin, Charles Alden Seltzer, Raymond S. Spears, and Loring Brent. Wants a story about the Civil War.

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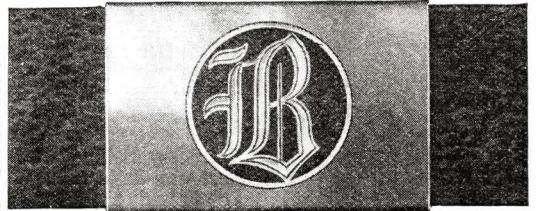
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