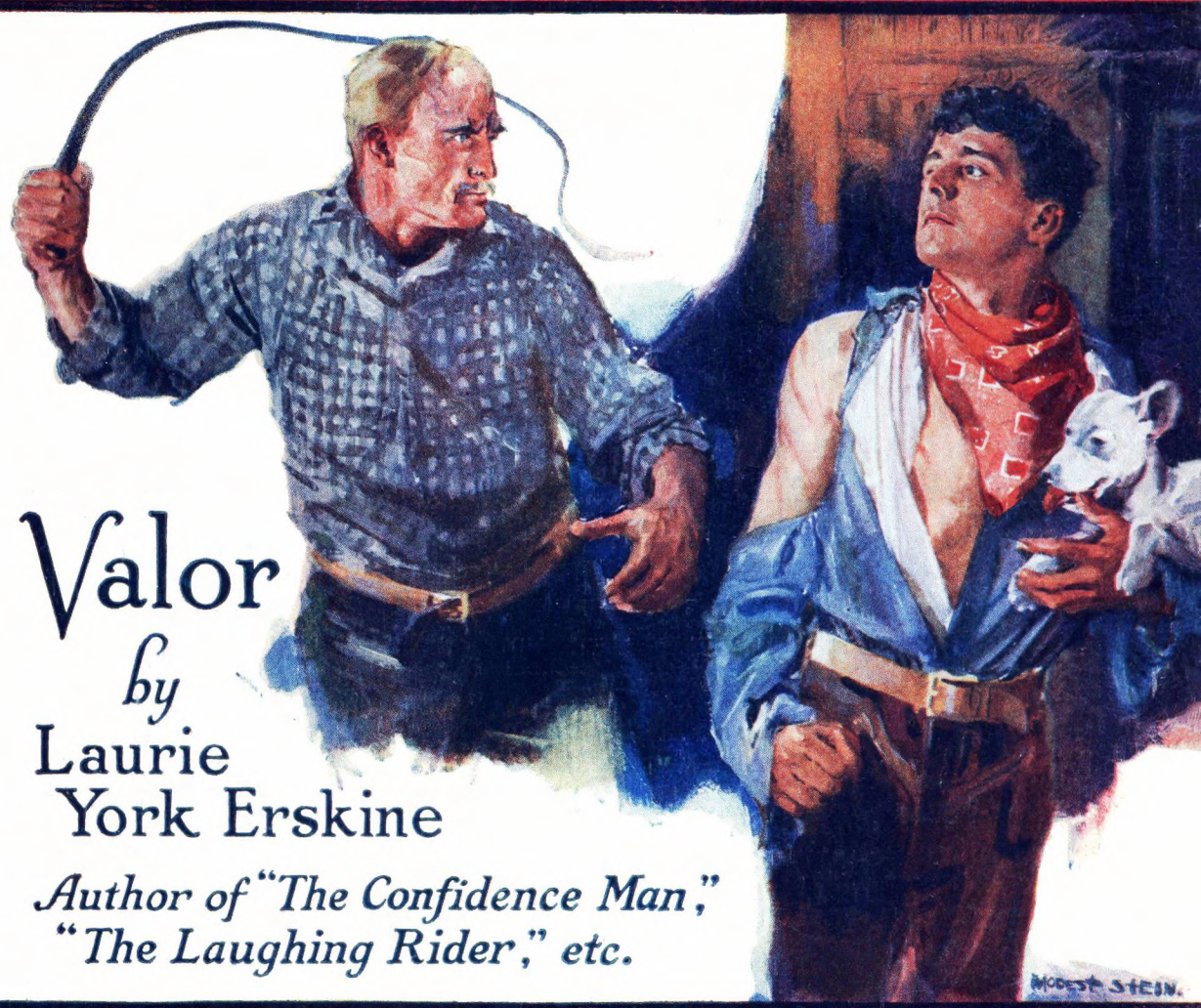
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Valor

by

Laurie York Erskine

Author of "The Confidence Man," "The Laughing Rider," etc.

10¢ PER COPY OCTOBER 25 BY THE YEAR $4.00

Special Offer

$6.98

Regular Value $10.00

Write for our free Bargain Catalog of men's, women's and children's clothing and shoes. Everything on small monthly payments.

$1.00 Down!

All Wool Heavy Jumbo Sweater Coat

Send only **$1.00** with the coupon for this **All-Wool** — heavy jumbo sweater. Money back instantly if you ask for it. Order NOW!

Heavy Pure Wool

This is a splendid big sweater at a bargain price. Every fibre pure wool. Heavy rope stitch. Large fashioned shawl collar. Two large lined pockets. Close knitted wristlets. Ivory buttons to match. Made in big, full size, in rich fast colors. Nothing so practical for fall and winter wear. Sold by most stores for $10.00, all spot cash. Sizes 34 to 46. Colors: Maroon, Navy Blue or Seal Brown.

Order by No. **F-12.** Send **$1.00** with coupon; **$1.00** monthly. Total, **$6.98.**

Six Months to Pay!

Buy the Elmer Richards way, on credit, as thousands of well satisfied men do. Everything you need in clothing or shoes and you pay in small monthly sums. Open a charge account with us. Let us send you this heavy all-wool Sweater. See for yourself what a big value it is—think how comfortable it will be on cold days. Then—if satisfied—pay only **$1.00** a month.

Send Coupon *before it is too late*

Don't miss this bargain. The supply is limited. You take no risk. We stand back of this sweater. Money back if you say so. Send the coupon now with $1.00. Don't be too late for this Special Offer. Send the coupon NOW.

Elmer Richards Co.
Dept. 7277
West 35th St., Chicago

Elmer Richards Co., West 35th Street Dept. 7277 — Chicago, Ill.

I enclose **$1.00.** Send All Wool Sweater, No. F-12. If I am not delighted with the sweater, I may return it and get my **money back.** Otherwise I will pay the bargain price on your terms; **$1.00** with coupon, and only **$1.00** monthly. Total price, **$6.98.**

Size .....
Maroon ☐
Navy Blue ☐
Seal Brown ☐

Name .....

Address .....

Post Office ..... *State* .....

I have lived in this town ..... *years And before that I lived in* .....

For ..... *years. Own or Rent* ..... *Nationality or Color* .....

Present Occupation ..... *Age* ..... *Married* ☐ *Single* ☐

Give names of merchants who know you personally

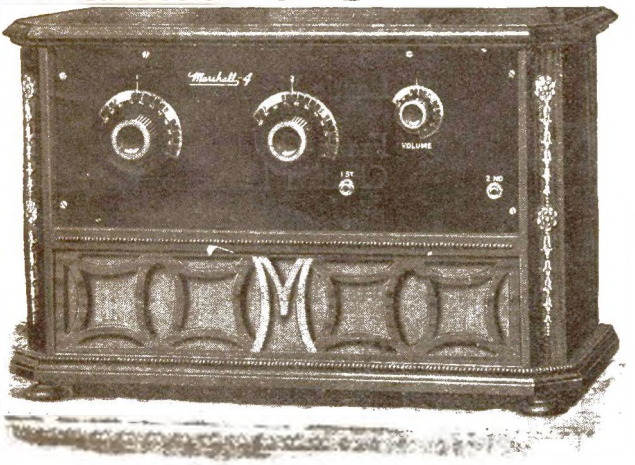
Name ..... *Town* ..... *State* .....

Name ..... *Town* ..... *State* .....

If you have ever bought goods ***on credit*** by mail, tell us from whom. If there is anything else you wish to tell us about yourself, write on a piece of paper and enclose it with this coupon. But the coupon alone, fully filled out, will do. **That's all we want to know and we're ready to send the sweater at once. No red tape. No C. O. D.**

Marshall 3-4 and 5 Tube Sets

The Greatest Advance yet made in RADIO



Receiver and Loud Speaker in Combination Cabinet of Solid mahogany

This Beautiful Marshall 4 Tube Non-Oscillating Receiver

only $5.00 DOWN

Complete with all accessories

WRITE TODAY for full particulars of this most exceptional offer. Marshall Sets embody the very latest improvements known to radio. The wonderful new principal involved is proving the sensation of the 1924-25 radio season. Zero Coupling—the problem which radio engineers have been working on for years—has at last been solved. As a result, the Marshall has no need of neutralizing condensers or other make-shift methods of avoiding internal oscillations which invariably reduce efficiency. The Marshall Tuned Radio Frequency Receiver brings to radio a new degree of musical quality. Its selectivity will delight the experienced radio operator. Yet it is so easy to tune that the novice will handle it like an expert.

Small Monthly Payments—2 Weeks Free Trial

That is the remarkable offer we are prepared to make you. Two weeks to prove that the outfit you select is everything we have said for it. If it doesn't make good our claims, back it comes, and your deposit will be cheerfully refunded. But if it fulfills all your expectations, you may pay for it in easy monthly installments. You don't risk a cent when ordering from us. You *must* be satisfied, or we don't do business.

Is it any wonder that radio buyers, the country over, are rushing to take advantage of such an offer? If YOU are interested, figure on getting your order in early, while prompt shipment can be made. Everyone predicts a serious shortage of radio supplies this season. Send for full particulars today.

Beautiful Solid Mahogany Combination

Compare the beautiful Combination Cabinet, pictured above, with the usual radio box and horn. Here the Receiver and Loud Speaker are contained in a single handsome cabinet. Or, if you prefer, we also have the Receiver in a separate cabinet of the same design. These cabinets are the work of a master designer—fashioned of solid mahogany. They will harmonize with the furnishings of the finest homes. In spite of the extra value, these Marshall sets are surprisingly low in price. Compare them with others which sell for cash. Then remember you can order a Marshall outfit on two weeks' free trial and pay for it on very easy terms.

Complete Outfits If Desired

In buying from Marshall, you have the choice of a set complete with all accessories, or the set alone. You have choice of dry cell or storage battery outfits. Unless you already own the accessories, you can buy them from us at less-than-market prices, with your set, on easy terms. Your outfit will come all ready to set up and operate within a few minutes—saving time and trouble—and saving money, too.

MARSHALL RADIO PRODUCTS, INC.
Marshall Blvd. and 19th St., Dept. 14-57 Chicago, Ill.

Send Coupon for Special Offer!

If you have any idea of buying a radio set this year, don't let this chance slip by. Our terms and liberal guarantees have set a new pace in the radio business. The low prices we will make you on a 3, 4, or 5 tube Marshall set will surprise you. A letter, postcard, or just the coupon will do. But send it today.

We also have a most favorable offer for radio dealers. Write.

Marshall Radio Products, Inc.
Marshall Blvd. and 19th St., Dept 14-57 Chicago

Please send me your special offer price, terms and full description of Marshall Radio Outfits. Though I may change my mind on receiving your proposition, my preference now is for a:

.....3 Tube .....4 Tube .....5 Tube (Please check)

Name .....

Address .....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXIV CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 25, 1924 NUMBER 1

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

Valor . . . . . Laurie York Erskine . . . 1
A Six-Part Story — Part One

The Dancing Doll . . . . . Frank Condon and Charlton L. Edholm . . . 48
A Five-Part Story — Part Two

Buccaneer Blood . . . . . Kenneth Perkins 81
A Five-Part Story — Part Three

Clovelly . . . . . Max Brand 109
A Six-Part Story — Part Five

The Snow Patrol . . . . . Harry Sinclair Drago . . . 134
A Four-Part Story — Part Four

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

The Lost Orange Grove . . . . . Loring Brent 21

Kakaua the Unconquered . . . . . Ellis Parker Butler . . . 70

Fortune Favors the Knave . . . . Johnn Holden 102

Good Buy . . . . . Eric Howard 126

Ashes of Barbary . . . . . Paul Deresco Augsburg . . 148

Packing a Punch . . . . . Arthur Lockwood 155

POETRY

The Bow of Promise . . Dow Wallace Tate 20
The Optimist . . . . . Chart Pitt 47
Autumn's Gold . . . . . M. Hancock 147
Women Brave . Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift 69
S O S . . . . . Austin Tarrant 133

Where were you at 8.30 on the evening of January 9, 1920? Don't you know? Can you find out? That's what the hero of our serial beginning next week had to do—his future happiness depended on it. If you have a sense of humor don't miss

WHERE WAS I? : : : By Edgar Franklin

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and LENNOX HOUSE, NORFOLK STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C. 2

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

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

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1924

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

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Blame Yourself

If This Message Doesn't Bring You A Big Salary Increase

Take any ten average men who are in blind alley jobs at low pay. Analyze each case without prejudice. You'll find that every one of them is solely and entirely to blame for his poor earning power. Every one of them has had a golden opportunity. They either have failed to recognize it, or, recognizing it, lacked the courage to follow it up. But now comes your chance. If this page does bring you a big increase in salary—quit you have no one to blame but yourself. By J. E. Green

LET'S be specific. What do you want in life? You want more money than you're getting. You want your own home, car, membership in a good club, you want to wear good clothes, educate your children and put away enough money to make you independent. If you are like other men, you want to be your own boss. You want to travel and meet the wide-awake people who are doing things. All right. I'll tell you a quick, easy way to accomplish all this. If you don't take it you are the only loser. You are the only one who will have to face the accusing finger of the man you might have been. If you do take it you'll thank me the rest of your life for putting this information in your hands. For now it is possible for you to quickly enjoy bigger earnings, and have all the joys in life that your bigger self demands. If this was a guess I couldn't print it. I know it to be a certainty. It is proved by the cases of thousands of other men who have done exactly the same thing. Listen

What It Brought These Men

For instance, A. H. Ward, Chicago boy, earned $1,350 last month. He averaged $1,000 a month last year. H. D. Miller, another Chicago boy, was making $160 a MONTH as a stenographer in July, 1922. In September, 3 months later, he was making $100 a WEEK as a salesman. W. P. Clenny of Kansas City, Mo., stepped from a $150 a month clerkship into a selling job at $500 a month. He is making $850 a month now. M. V. Stephens of Albany, Ky., was making $25 a week. He took up this training and now makes 5 times that much. J. H. Cash of Atlanta, Ga., exchanged his $75 a month job for one which pays him $500 a month. O. H. Malfroot of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training. All these successes are due to this easy, fascinating and rapid way to master certain invincible secrets of selling. But why continue here when I can send you hundreds of similar stories of success?

The Secret Is Yours

What you want to know is how it's done. I'll tell you. Although none of these men had ever sold a thing in their lives, we took them without experience or training of any kind, and in a short period of time made Master Salesmen of them. Then our Employment Department helped them to select the right position and they were off with a boom to the success they had dreamed of.

The National Salesmen's Training Association can do exactly this for you. If this big organization of Master Salesmen and Sales Managers had raised the salaries of only a few men, then you might call it luck. But we've been doing it for six-

that the jo
mind on th
remarkable

I

This boo
sands h
easy to
Secret
damen
onstr
near
the
lute

N

D

I
will
I can
sales
Sales
Asso

Name

Addres

City...

Age...

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

November 29th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Nov 1st

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter & Mfg. Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

27,000 PHONOGRAPH NEEDLES eliminated by one Everplay. Nothing like it. Preserves records. Abolishes scratching. Day's supply in pocket. $20 Daily. EVERPLAY, Desk F-10, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

LET US MAIL YOU A FREE Bottle of our Life Tonic Elixir, Face Powder, Vegetable Oil Soap and Terms to Agents. All Big Repeaters. LACASSIAN CO., Dept. 45, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—Earn $30 to $35 extra every week taking orders for our high class tailoring—during your spare time—made-to-measure suits from $14.95 to $39.50. Your own clothes at low wholesale prices. No experience needed. Write for our **BIG FREE SAMPLE** outfit. THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. [illegible]

only table room. We
k for us painting Land-
, outfit furnished. Free
Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

profit with our soap,
s. Get free sample
Louis, Mo.

POUND. Charges
old method cu-
CO., St. Paul.

Spare or Full
concern. IM-
io.

al Agents for
100.00 weekly
SELL, J2309

URE RE-
o. Crew
how to
ito for
o St.,

en and
System
fetime;
, N. J.

PIDLY.
G. CO.,

MADISON
ACTURER
PERIENCE
D BONUS.
K.

ps, Extracts,
CARNATION

ED. World's
and overcoats
Write for new
. Dept. 903.

OOD INCOMES
IRLESS HAND
uto driver and
s to Parks Cor-

HELP WANTED

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

WANT WORK AT HOME? Earn $18 to $60 a week RETOUCHING photos. Men or Women. No selling or canvassing. We teach you, guarantee employment and furnish WORKING OUTFIT FREE. Limited offer. Write today. **ARTCRAFT STUDIOS, Dept. D2, 3900 Sheridan Road, Chicago.**

MEN AND WOMEN WANTED EVERYWHERE to weave rugs, carpet, etc., at home; no previous experience needed. You can equal these earnings: Mrs. Morse $100, Mr. Rozsa $242 monthly. Rush Postal today for FREE LOOM BOOK, telling all about weaving and how to make money with our $9.90 and other wonderful looms. UNION LOOM WORKS, 486 Factory Street, BOONVILLE, N. Y.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—As a Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for TEMPORARY OFFER. INTERNATIONAL STUDIOS, Dept. C-145, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

MEN and WOMEN—Easy, novel way of making extra money without interfering with regular employment. Those at present employed preferred. Write today for FREE extra money plan. Home Supply Company, 131a Duane St., New York.

HELP WANTED—MALE

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., Buffalo, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, TRAIN PORTERS (colored). $140-$200. Experience unnecessary. 556 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

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

WANTED—LADIES TO EMBROIDER LINENS FOR US at home during their leisure moments. Write at once. FASHION EMBROIDERIES, 1520, Lima, Ohio.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. GOOD IDEAS BRING BIG MONEY. SUBMIT MSS., OR WRITE LITERARY BUREAU, 110, HANNIBAL, MO.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

20 ACRES OR MORE OF OUR BEST LAND IN MICHIGAN; close to town of 3000 people. Only $10 down; balance long time. Send postal for 52-page book FREE. SWIGART LAND COMPANY, Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Stories of the West~the Frozen North and China Seas

A Whirlwind of Action in These Breath-taking Tales *of* Adventure *and* Romance

12 Great Books!

Send No Money To Get Them!

1400 Pages Crammed With Daring, Thrilling Exploits of Hardy Adventures.

Don Quickshot of the Rio Grande, Stephen Chalmers. A thrilling story of life among raiding Mexican bandits, train robbers, Texas rangers, and a prairie fire.

Loaded Dice, Edwin L. Sabin. A romance of Texas, of the early days, when lives depended on quickness of draw. A tale of men who were jugglers with death.

Sontag of Sundown, W. C. Tuttle. An exciting story of the question of ranch ownership—which promoted bloodshed and a war of no mean caliber.

Spawn of the Desert, W. C. Tuttle. Where men lived raw in the desert's maw, and Hell was nothing to shun; where they buried 'em neat, without preacher or sheet and writ on their tombstone, crude but sweet, "This jasper was slow with his gun."

Arizona Argonauts, H. Bedford-Jones. Three adventurers whose fortunes lead through drought and danger to the golden goal they sought.

The Lure of Piper's Glen, Theodore Goodridge Roberts. It was the lure of the North, of plentiful game and of the clear wind from the great plains. Young Jim Todhunter heard it.

Apache Valley, Arthur Chapman. A story of a cattle war in the Southwest, with all it means—terror and blood feud; alarms by night and day; rustling and stealthy murder.

The Challenge of the North, James B. Hendryx. This is a story of the call of the great Northland; of purposes and cross purposes; of true men and of "bad" men.

The Second Mate, H. Bedford-Jones. Peril and mutiny on the China Seas. Two white women at the mercy of a villainous crew. Jim Barnes realized the desperate chance when he became mate of the **Sulu Queen.**

The Devil's Payday. W. C. Tuttle
A sky of brass, the sun a flame,
And the land no place to dwell;
A hunk of earth, so doggone hot
That it still belongs to Hell.

The Canyon of the Green Death, F. R. Buckley. Who were the devils in human form whose haunt was the lost barranca? Invisible, terrible, they brought the young officer of the law to a strange dilemma.

Sky-High Corral, Ralph Cummins. A yarn of the unending feuds between cattlemen and forest rangers; of the forest fires, grazing herds and bitter fights at timberline.

OVER 100,000 sets of these twelve gripping fascinating books have found their way into the hearts of live wide-awake folks who enjoy real smashing red-blooded tales. And here is your opportunity to get these twelve great books without a penny in advance. You can also keep them five days to decide for yourself if they are not the most daring, exciting books you ever read.

You won't stop reading a single one of these twelve live, interest holding books until you have finished the last one, for they are full of murderous steel knives brandished in the air, barking sixshooters, screams of beautiful women, moans of defenseless men, treacherous, blood-thirsty villains and gallant rescues. More thrilling than any play you ever saw or movie you ever watched.

If you want a different kind of entertainment don't let another day pass until you get these pocket size books written by famous authors who know how to tell all the thrills of pioneer days. Indian ambushes, stockade fighting, cattle stealing, and the joys and hardships of hardy adventures; famous heroic characters of present and past days.

Send No Money

Just think, you can get this whole library of 12 clean and wholesome books for about 16c each. The whole set will be sent to you now without a cent in advance. And when you get them you won't leave home a single night until you have finished them. There is nothing in these books that any boy or girl should not read and enjoy.

Every one of these splendid books has a striking cover in full colors and printed on good paper. Don't send any money, just your name and address on the handy coupon and mail it. When the 12 books arrive simply give your postman $1.98, plus a few cents delivery charges, and the books are yours. However, if you are not fully satisfied that they are the most fascinating of any books you ever read send them back within five days and your money will be returned in full. You take no risk. Treat yourself to some live entertainment.

GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING CO., INC.
Dept. W-1810, Garden City, New York

GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING CO., Inc.
Dept. W. 1810, Garden City, New York.

You may send me the 12 volumes of Western Stories by Hendryx, Tuttle, and other famous authors. I will pay the postman only $1.98 (plus a few cents delivery charges). It is understood that I may return these books, if I desire, within five days and receive my money back promptly.

Name .....

Address .....

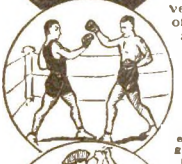
City .....State.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

I make Champs

I can do for you what I have done for thousands in every branch of athletics—whether it be for pleasure or as a profession. I can guide you. Ask Charles Daniels, champion swimmer, Tim Jordan, home run hitter, Oswald Kirby, former golf champion, Harry Babcock, world's champion pole vaulter, and a long list of others. They will tell you that my system always starts a man right and keeps him right. My system never fails. Over 25 years as a trainer in all branches of sport is my record—and I can still make the present-day record holders step some to keep up with me.

28 Champs to my Credit



"PEP UP"—Let Me Help You

Picture No. 1 is a photo of myself. It shows my perfect body development. I don't just develop you so that you can show off. I pep you up, so that you are better able to do your daily work. I don't try to make you do something you don't like. I let you pick the exercise or sport you like best—whether it be body development, boxing, golf, running, swimming, baseball or any of the fifty other sports. I tell you how to become perfect in the sport of your own choice. When you get fun out of something, you surely get all of the real exercise, body development and fun being up anyone needs. I actually guarantee to make you expert in the sport you select. You will find several sports pictured here, but these are only a few of the many I can help you in.

BOOKLET FREE

Write me telling what sport you are interested in and I will advise you personally, and send you a booklet describing your needs and my system. Do it now. My system never fails.

DR. P. M. SEIXAS

SEIXAS ATHLETIC SYSTEMS, INC.

DEPT. 110, 280 **BROADWAY, NEW YORK**

Please send Free Booklet by return mail. I am interested in.....
This obligates me in no way whatever.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Deafness

Perfect hearing is now being restored in every condition of deafness or defective hearing from causes such as **Catarrhal Deafness, Relaxed or Sunken Drums, Thickened Drums, Roaring and Hissing Sounds, Perforated, Wholly or Partially Destroyed Drums, Discharge from Ears, etc.**

Wilson Common-Sense Ear Drums

"Little Wireless Phones for the Ears"

require no medicine but effectively replace what is lacking or defective in the natural ear drums. They are simple devices, which the wearer easily fits into the ears where they are invisible. Soft, safe and comfortable.

Write *today* for our 168 page FREE book on DEAFNESS, giving you full particulars and testimonials.

WILSON EAR DRUM CO., Incorporated

273 Inter-Southern Building, LOUISVILLE, KY.

Earns Big Money

Making and Selling Popcorn Crispettes. Jacob Gordon says $4000 profit in 2 months. Ira Shook, Flint, took in $365.75 in one day. Mrs. Lane, Pittsburg, sold 8000 packages in one day.

WE WILL START YOU IN BUSINESS

Furnish secret formulas, raw material, and equipment. Small capital, no experience needed.

BUILD A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

No limit to the sale of Crispettes. Everybody likes this delicious food confection, made with or without sugar. Write for facts about a business that will make you independent. Start in your own town.

PROFITS OF $1,000 A MONTH EASILY POSSIBLE

Send a postal for illustrated book of facts. It contains enthusiastic letters from others—shows their places of business, tells how and when to start, and all information needed. **Free.** Write now.

LONG-EAKINS CO. 1011 High St., Springfield, Ohio

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

Inventors—Write for our free Guide Book "How to Get Your Patent" and Evidence of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of your invention for our free examination and instructions. Randolph & Co., Dept. 419, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for FREE Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch of invention for Examination and Instructions without charge. Terms Reasonable. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 644 G ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

SONGWRITERS

SONGWRITERS! We advance $250.00 royalty upon publication of songs found suitable. Settlements quarterly thereafter. Send us your compositions based on popular sentiments or novel ideas for immediate consideration. Free Booklet, "Writing the Popular Song," sent on request. Equitable Music Corporation, 1658a Broadway, New York.

TYPEWRITERS

NEW AND REBUILT—$15 UP. UNDERWOOD, REMINGTON, ROYAL, L. C. SMITH. GUARANTEED 5 YEARS. Write for our Bargain Catalogue—1007C. Manufacturers Typewriter Clearing House, 193 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

WANTED—BUSINESS FOR SALE

IF YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR BUSINESS FOR CASH quickly and privately, we take the prospective buyer directly to you at our expense, no matter where located. We specialize in selling out-of-town businesses. If your business is worth $5,000 or more, write us. The Mutual Security System, 68 W. Washington St., Chicago.

BRADLEY BULLDOG

Guaranteed R. R. Watch

SOLID gold effect case guaranteed 25 years. Richly engraved. Railroad model with famous Leonard Regulator. Adjusted for absolute accuracy. Tested to run 30 hours on 1 winding! Backed by million dollar factory.

SEND NO MONEY

Pay postman SALE price **$3.97** and postage on arrival. Money back guaranteed.

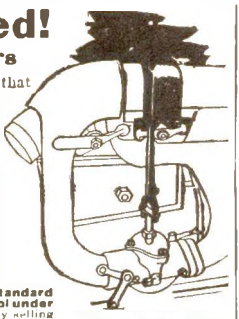
Bradley, W-220 Newton, Mass.

Be Lucky! LOVE AND WEALTH symbolized for you in this Mystic Hindu Ring. 14 Karat rolled gold plate. Fiery vermillion Hindu Ruby—brilliant and beautiful! SEND NO MONEY—pay only..... **$2.98** and postage on arrival. Guaranteed. Write Today. BRADLEY, H64, Newton, Mass.

Agents Wanted!

Salesmen—Distributors

to use and introduce attachment that makes Fords run on 3¢ air. THER-MOSTAT on exhaust automatically turns down needle valve as engine warms, exactly as Ford Manual says do by hand.



Blancke Auto Thermo

An Automatic Carburetor Control

Makes Fords start easier winter or summer—saves half gas and oil—cuts repair bills one-half—reduces carbon formation one-half. Sells on sight to every Ford owner as easily as giving him a $100 bill, because it saves $100 every 10,000 miles. **Cadillac now uses as standard equipment thermostatic carburetor control under Blancke license.** You can make Big Money selling this wonderful proven device. Experience not necessary. Blancke plan will start you without capital in a business of your own that makes you from $250 to $2,000 a month profit. *Write for free circulars Now!*

A. C. Blancke & Co. 602 W. Lake Street Dept. 482 Chicago

MAKE MONEY AT HOME

YOU can earn good money at home in your spare time making show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We show you how, supply both men and women work at home no matter where you live and pay you cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. Write to-day.

AMERICAN SHOW CARD SYSTEM LIMITED

202 Adams Building, Toronto, Canada

WANTED—RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS $1600 to $2300 Year. Travel—see your country. Every second week off—full pay. Common education sufficient. Write IMMEDIATELY for free list of Government positions now obtainable and free sample coaching lessons.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. R-267, ROCHESTER, N. Y.

30 Days' Free Trial

Select from **44 Styles**, colors and sizes, famous **Ranger** bicycles **Delivered free** on approval, *express prepaid*, at **Factory Prices**. You can easily save $10 to $25 on your bicycle. Prices **$21.50** and up. **$5 a Month** on any Ranger if desired. Parents often advance first deposit. Boys and girls can easily earn small monthly payments. Pay as you ride. **Tires** best quality, at factory prices, *express prepaid*. Lamps, wheels and equipment, low prices. **Send No Money, do business direct with makers.**

Mead CYCLE COMPANY DEPT. P-30, CHICAGO

Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvelous easy payment terms

RUBY FREE

To introduce our imported Mexican BLU-FLASH GEM, the only low priced gem exactly matching genuine diamonds, with same blue-white brilliancy and rainbow fire, guaranteed 20 years, we'll send free this beautiful, flashing fiery red Mexican Ruby. Just clip out this ad, mail with your name, address and 10c to partly cover handling cost and we'll mail FREE, with catalog of gems and special half price offer. Write today.

Mexican Gem Importing Co., Dept. A-5, Mesilla Park, N. Mex.

A BUSINESS FOR YOU!

A permanent business. Large, quick profits for Men and Women. Work anywhere, full or part time. Everyone a prospective customer. $25.00 to $45.00 weekly. Clean, dignified work. Learn in 10 lessons, no experience necessary. A real chance to build a permanent business worth while. We furnish outfit. Free literature.

TANGLEY CO., 102 Main, Muscatine, Iowa

"I'm Going to Send It in To-night"

"I'VE been drifting too long. . . . Two years ago, when Tom Adams took up an I. C. S. course, I determined to study too. But I put it off—and off—and off—

"Tom's manager of the department now and earning twice as much as I am. It isn't because he has more natural ability than I have, but because he's trained! That's it—*he's trained!*

"Me? Why I'm just one of a score of routine workers. Tom gets the big salary because the firm knows he's trained himself to handle work that I can't do.

"I've wasted two years, but it's not too late. This time I'm really going to send in that I. C. S. coupon too. The sooner I send it in, the sooner I'll be promoted like Tom."

Mail the Coupon To-day!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2144-D, Scranton, Penna.

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

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

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

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

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

Name .....

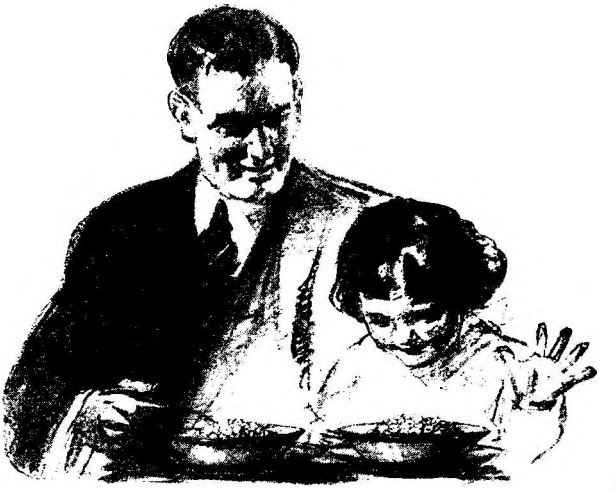
Street Address 3-6-24

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

Occupation .....

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

Each Grain an Adventure



Luscious and Enticing

To bring enchantment to the breakfast table

CRISP and flaky grains of selected wheat, puffed to 8 times their normal size, light as the air, and with the rich flavor of nut meats.

You serve with sugar and cream. Or in bowls of milk. And as a special allurement, with fresh or cooked fruit. No breakfast before has ever compared.

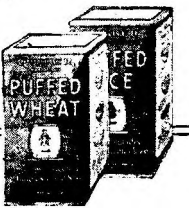
To children Quaker Puffed Wheat brings the nourishment of whole grains with the richness of a rare confection; to adults an almost perfect food. Quickly digested and assimilated; kernels steam exploded, with every food cell broken.

An energy food of fairy delight —yet with vitamines, bran and minerals in balanced combination..

Quaker Puffed Rice, Also

Whole rice kernels, steam exploded to 8 times normal size, like the Puffed Wheat. Dainty morsels so light and inviting you would never dream they could be so nutritious.

Quaker Puffed Wheat



Quaker Puffed Rice

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXIV SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1924 NUMBER 1

Valor

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The Confidence Man," "The Laughing Rider," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CHICKEN-HEARTED!

THE sun shone relentlessly that afternoon. It pressed with intolerable heat upon the vivid earth of the table-lands, and the earth sent that heat, quivering, into the air again.

The mountains loomed above the foothills through a palsied haze. Seen through that moving curtain, the high peaks took upon themselves the aspect of a wild fantasy; they were like the drop curtain of a dream.

David reclined upon the red earth with his back against the only tree in sight. It was a cypress tree, motionless, gnarled and twisted as though it had been turned to stone in a moment of agony. It was stunted for lack of sustenance, and the spread of its deep green branches gave the eminence on which it grew the strange appearance of a hilltop in the Orient. But it threw a deep shadow, and the outbuildings of the abandoned ranch house which lay beyond further deepened that shadow.

Because of that shadow, David had chosen this spot, and he had chosen it also

because from here he could look down upon the running water. The spectacle of that clear water rippling lazily in the golden sunlight below him soothed the boy's mind and helped him to think more clearly.

For David, at an age when boys of this world are occupied with such trivial matters as a place on the team or a monthly allowance, the results of an examination, or a raise in wages, was thinking that afternoon upon life and death.

Why was it, thought David, as he screwed up his brown eyes against the blinding reflection from the water, that in this place, out of all the civilized world, men should still consider life as worth considerably less than live stock and infinitely less than the power to rule? It was a harsh, red country, where the earth showed in bloody gashes and the ridges of rock armed the hillsides like the bared green teeth of a wolf. The rich gramma grass bunched gray on the parched red clay, and water was as scarce as the scorpion, lizard and serpent were all too numerous. Yet it possessed a beauty of its own, and it was rich.

Moreover, David had known no other place than this. It was his country. He loved it with a sense of possession that surpassed patriotism, and he loved the people in it.

It was a man's country, this, and with few women to leaven it, and, hardily, its people lived the life of men. But it did not seem reasonable to David that that life should be held so cheaply.

He had mentioned this to his father that morning, and Old Man Parmelee, sitting impassive as the hillside rock, had drawn his lips back and replied bitterly. David's father had always seemed to possess that bitterness against his son. It was as if some hidden spring of resentment and disgust lay under his father's worn shell, to be brought gushing to the surface by a word from the boy.

In his heart David knew that it was the burden of his words that did it. His father had fought through turbulent years for a hold on the countryside; he had won to his place through fearless and merciless battle in a day when the Pecos country knew nothing of quarter. And his place was boss of the range.

Did not the rough Mexican ranch hands of other outfits than his own call him *administrado?* He had won that recognition from the lowliest of the men of the range, and he had paid for it.

He had torn it out of the resisting monster which was the Pecos country of the past, and a man cannot battle monsters with impunity. Old Man Parmelee knew what manner of comrade Death can be, and he had entertained that comrade unceasingly for long periods; now he knew how death could share his life.

He no longer rode the range, carrying his mandates abroad from the high place of his long-limbed mare; his seat was an armchair now, and in it he sat all day, not unlike the figure of Death itself. But that armchair was made, by his stubborn, indomitable will, a throne. From all parts of this wide domain, which lay in the lap of the distant Pajaritos, men came to seek his counsel. He gave it to them, and his counsel was the law.

David had lingered there in the morning; lingered behind the throne, watching the men who grouped about his father's chair.

He never failed to wonder on these occasions at the mastery with which his father ruled; at the docility with which the hard-bitten men of the range, whose life was established upon an independence which would brook neither law nor order that did not conform to their code, willingly surrendered that independence without apparent protest before his father's will.

David did not know the principle whereon that dominance was founded. Old Man Parmelee, dominating them from his chair, did not know it himself. The boy who unconsciously resented it, and the man who ruled by it, did not know that an independence which made nothing of coöperation must inevitably seek a dictator. Yet it was an accomplished fact. For all men there must be a law, and for the men of the Pajarito country, Bartholomew Parmelee set forth its dictum from his oaken armchair.

As David had lingered behind the chair that morning, he had heard them deal with the destiny of Harper Preest. He stood there and looked upon the hard, brown faces, each one ready with a laugh for any manifestation of life which was hard, or death, to which they were not averse. Jud Dasent sat on his heels and played with a wisp of straw as he dealt with the difficulties of the trail in the red-hot sun.

"There won't be no fun for man or hawse, trackin' that rustler these days," he had suggested; and he regarded the old man with a gaze that David felt always smoldered, always held something back behind a docility which humored Parmelee in all his mandates. And the old man drew back his teeth.

"Get out and ride!" he rasped. His long hands slid back and forth upon the points of the chair arms. Except for that tireless, unabating movement, the words might have proceeded from a graven image.

Dasent, hearing his words, had arisen.

"Come on, boys," he had snapped sharply. "We'll ride!"

In this manner old Parmelee had ordered the man hunt. The men went forth to their horses, laughing, exchanging pleasantries, like boys on their way to play ball, like young men riding forth to war. Self-confident, unfearing, deadly. Then David had come forward.

"If they round Preest up, dad, there'll be shootin'," he said.

And his words again opened that well within his father's heart. The old man had looked at the boy with a peculiar intensity. He had drawn back his lips in that queer, mirthless smile which lifted his cheeks but did not light his eyes.

"Don't be scared," he said, "you won't hear the guns go orf." His voice had that indescribable quality with which a strong man bespeaks an insignificant opponent.

"But if he's been stealin' cattle, you could have him taken up by the sheriff," the boy protested. "There don't need to be any gun play."

His father's gaze dwelt intently upon the boy's face, and appeared to find there something peculiarly irritating. His lips suddenly closed into a thin, uneven line.

"You got the heart of a chicken!" he cried, and his voice was excessively bitter, but impersonal. It was as if he voiced a grievance. "David! You got the name of David. A fine name fer a woman!"

David had not replied to that. He had stood in front of his father and gazed at his hard lined, ruinous face with clear eyes that were puzzled rather than resentful. Then, without speaking, he had left the place and walked slowly to this hilltop.

He had walked through the searing heat of the sun over a country where no other man ever walked while his horse had life to carry him. And he sat under the cypress tree, thinking.

The look of puzzlement with which he had regarded his father was eloquent of the boy's thoughts. He held no resentment for the bitter, indomitable old man. He was only puzzled. He was puzzled by the unyielding resentment which his father had for him. He was puzzled by the blindness of this father and of all the men who shared that country with him, for the indisputable fact that they were wrong.

Aleck, of course, understood the things that appeared to David's mind so clearly, but save for Aleck, there was no other man in his world who could consider David's attitude toward life without arriving at his father's verdict; that he was afraid. Even Aleck, who understood him when he spoke the things that were in his mind, seemed unconvinced that they were sound. Aleck advised caution.

"Think just as you like," he would say, "but don't go shootin' orf language to a bunch of cow-punchers. You can think to yo'self, but you got to *live* with them." And he would regard David with that uncomprehending admiration which the boy had called forth from him since they had first met ten years before. Aleck could divine the spirit which lay beneath David's sensitive youth; he could understand its existence, but he could not fathom it. He could value it, though, and he could sense the blindness of Old Man Parmelee, who didn't.

But that didn't help David in this moment. He sat on his shaded hilltop, and with serene, unimpassioned countenance,

dealt with the problem in his mind, as he had been accustomed to deal with it for the most part—all alone.

"Oh, mister! Hey! Yoo-hoo!"

David turned in the direction whence came the voice.

"Oh, boy! Can you get me some water?"

And David sprang to his feet as a girl came hesitantly up the trail from the wagon road.

CHAPTER II.

WATER-BOY.

DAVID thought that she looked like a kid. She was in fact seventeen years old, but her short wide skirt, her trim, small form, and the freedom with which she moved, gave her the boyish aspect of a girl much younger.

She carried a tin pail in one hand, and walked over the stony, uneven pathway to the hilltop with a joyous disregard for dignity. Her white blouse revealed a brown triangle of throat, and two brown arms which gave off the sunlight as gold does; a wide-brimmed yellow hat of some cotton stuff concealed everything of her face but a delicate, rounded chin, wide red lips and a short freckled nose.

That is what David saw as he stood up beneath the cypress tree so that his head was brushed by the downsweeping branches, and his body, on the edge of the sunlight, was dappled with the shadow. He was abashed, for he met few women, and this girl was obviously not of the range.

For her part she saw a tall youth clad in corduroy trousers that were tucked into riding boots, a khaki shirt that was unbuttoned at the throat, and a bandanna which negligently hung beneath his chin. These articles of apparel, however, were not strange to her; she had been long enough in the cattle country to take them for granted; and yet to her the boy seemed strange.

She didn't know that it was strange to find in this country of men whose skins were tanned to the creased roughness of red leather, a youth whose cheek was biscuit brown and flushed with the blood that ran under a transparent skin. She didn't consciously reason that among a race of men whose limbs since childhood had been grotesquely twisted to the saddle, it was strange to see a boy standing upright upon straight, well formed legs with strong ankles and the sure-footed grace of an athlete. And when, instinctively she looked into David's eyes, she didn't know that what pleased her there was a serene wideness of glance which is seldom seen among plainsmen whose eyes are narrowed by the eternal protective squint with which they resist the sun. Yet it was these things which made David seem strange to her.

Without consciously realizing it she was looking upon a youth who was inexplicably different from all the men she had seen since she had come into the West. So for a moment she stood and looked at him, and David stood silent, looking back at her. It was his habit to speak only such words as the occasion demanded.

"Will you get me some water?" She held the pail out to him. "Please," she said.

"To drink?" he asked her.

"Well, yes. I've got some pups back in the wagon. It's for them. Why do you ask?"

"Because this water ain't for humans," he explained briefly.

"What's the matter with it?"

Taking the pail from her, he turned away toward the steep bank which fell away from the hilltop to the water.

"You can taste," he said.

She watched him as he started for the bank and then turned abruptly, retracing his steps to the cypress tree. Seeing her with her eyes upon him and divining her surprise, he smiled at her quickly, becoming instantly serious again as he picked up his sombrero and put it on. Underneath its wide brim his face became more boyish than ever, and she, the eternal woman, puckered her lips in an instant response to the youthfulness of him. The sombrero didn't seem his accustomed headgear, she thought; under its brim he looked like a boy playing at being a cow-puncher.

"Is that to preserve your complexion?" she called after him.

"I don't know," he answered her quite seriously, genuinely ignorant of her meaning. "It ain't healthy to have the sun on yore head."

He walked to the go-devil—the wire with the bucket on it which ran from the top of the bank to the middle of the creek—and letting the bucket run out on its line, he tipped it expertly with the controlling cord and stood there relaxed, waiting for it to fill. Without understanding the reason for her pleasure she was delighted by the graceful spring of his stride, by the lithe relaxation of his slim body as he stood there on the edge of the bank. Her pleasure found expression in a smile, and she smiled as he drew the bucket in, pouring its contents with solemn concentration of purpose into the pail she had given him. He brought it to her.

"Now taste it," he urged, and his red lips curled in a smile as he offered her the pail.

She hesitated for a moment, reflecting that his smile was sweet, then she sipped at the water. Instantly she gave violent protest. Her wide red lips contracted, her freckled nose wrinkled, and now that her face was close to his, he saw her blue-gray eyes disappear as the long lashes tangled when the lids screwed tightly together, and her little brows came down.

"Ugh!" she squealed. "What an awful taste!"

"Alkali!" he laughed.

"But the puppies will be sick!" she cried.

"No. Animals don't notice it much; not so little as this."

She gazed at him doubtfully.

"You'll see," he assured her.

"Will you carry it down to the wagon?" she asked.

He gazed down the hill to the wagon road; there was nothing to be seen.

"It's round the bend," she explained. "I saw the house from way around on the other side. When I found there wasn't anybody there I had to walk all round it. My, it's hot, isn't it?"

"Mmm," he admitted it, nodding his head.

She glanced sidewise at his sober, boyish face as they walked unevenly down the trail; she was very curious.

"How long have you been out here," she asked him.

"All my life," he answered flatly.

"How old are you?" she blurted out.

He looked at her very quickly, surprised at the abrupt interrogation. Then he smiled tolerantly. This was a woman, and a kid at that; also she was from the outside. She couldn't be expected to know better.

"Eighteen," he said.

"Do you live there?" She indicated the ranch house on the hilltop.

"No. That's the old Dasent ranch. Nobody lives there."

"Why not?" She sensed a romance; the tragedy of a deserted ranch. "Were they driven out?" she asked.

"No." David never wasted words. "My father took over the ranch from Jud Dasent. He wanted the water, because water's scarce in these parts. So he took it over."

"Bought it?"

"Yes—" David hovered on the brink of falsehood. "He took it over," he explained.

"And what happened to Jud—whatever his name is?"

"My father gave him a piece of work to do."

They had rounded the hillside now, and could see the wagon with its two somnolent horses standing, inanimate in the glowing heat. The broken country was piled around them in a gorgeous chaos of colored rocks and clay and strange plants, born of the sun's thin gold. The naked stem of a great cactus towered above them with a cluster of grotesque rock plants, like a family of evil children at its feet.

David noticed that as they passed this gaunt giant the girl appeared for a moment as something elfin, indescribably delicate and aerial, under its high bulk. The clay of the wagon road was somber red, and her slight figure stood in relief against it. Close as they were to each other, the quivering

heat arose between them, and she seemed to float in it, hardly touching the earth.

A question came to his lips. He would have asked her who she was, and where she came from; but the custom of his country provided that the stranger be accepted without question, and instinctively he yielded to that custom. At any rate, she, unperturbed by custom or restraint, would have been before him.

"It must be hard for a man who has run his own ranch to work as a common cowboy," she said. David wrinkled his brow.

"Well, it ain't just that way," he explained. "You see, dad's got a lot of business round the range, and Jud, he's foreman over at the Monkey-wrench."

"Where's that?"

"Monkey-wrench is just a name we got for a kind of brand that looks kind of like it. The Monkey-wrench brand belongs to Hendry's ranch. That's an outfit that's owned by people back in the East."

She looked around at him with a quick, searching look, and he smiled slowly, slightly. His smile was hardly discernible, but she liked it very much.

"That's funny," she grinned. "He works for your father, and he's foreman on another ranch."

But he was gazing at the wagon which, motionless in the sun's glare, stood on the trail before them.

"Looks like yore teamster ain't visible," he said.

She felt the decision with which he changed the subject, and it nettled her.

"You didn't answer my question," she maintained stoutly.

"You asked me a question?" He turned his calm boy's face directly toward her, and she could see no guile in it.

"I asked you how this Bud what's-his-name could work for two people at once," she insisted.

"Yes," he agreed. "It's certainly a queer thing. But this teamster of your's. Seems like he's lit out."

She regarded him with a new interest, and as she did so she appeared to become miraculously older, clothed with a dignity which surprised the boy as much as his guileless evasion had astonished her.

"I'm driving the team myself," she said coldly.

They walked on to the wagon in silence.

CHAPTER III.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE SEX.

THE wagon was a vehicle of rough pine boards, rudely put together and provided with neither springs nor cushion seat. A canvas hood, thickly coated with white paint which had long since turned dirty gray, covered the length of the body, and a pair of typical ranch work horses drooped in the traces. Altogether the equipage, as it stood unrelieved in the consuming sunlight, gave the effect of primitive desolation.

The boy and girl approached it slowly, incapable of haste in a heat which, as they strolled, drenched them with a perspiration that evaporated as quickly as it was brought forth. David placed one hand on the boards of the wagon as he reached it, and withdrew his hand abruptly. The wood was burning hot.

The girl noticed his gesture and relaxed her dignity with an impulsive smile; but at the same time she had noticed the shapeliness of David's hand, the satin brown skin which covered it, and flashed in the sun as he moved it; and she puckered her brow, incredulous that this boy could belong to the harsh country and could have spent his whole life there.

"It's hot," he remarked seriously.

"Poor puppies!" she exclaimed; and very nimbly she clambered up to the driver's seat. He, still holding the pail of water, stood beside her, ready to assist. She stepped across the seat, and for a moment disappeared beneath the canvas hood.

"Now let me have that water," she commanded, as she bobbed forth again. She held a dish pan in her hand. "What's the matter?"

He was gazing at her with a peculiar, grave interest. At her question he smiled his slow, good-humored smile.

"Nothing," he said. "You want to fill that with water?"

She watched him as he took the dish pan

from her and poured the water into it. His face, smooth and brown, guileless as the face of a schoolboy, betrayed nothing of his thoughts. She took the pan from him.

"Would you like to see them?" she asked him; and moving a little aside, she invited him to mount the wagon.

"I'll come in round the back," he said, and moved from her sight. So she climbed over the seat again and disappeared under the hood.

As he walked to the back of the wagon, David carried behind that serene brown countenance a troubled conscience. For he was heartily loyal to that grim, misunderstanding old man who was his father, and the first expert appraisal he had made of this strange girl's equipage had revealed to him that its horses carried the twisted, ugly brand of the Monkey-wrench. It appeared like he had said too much, reflected David, as he stuck his head under the hood at the rear of the wagon. He almost bumped it against the head of the girl.

This sudden proximity surprised David, and for a moment embarrassed him, but the emphatic darkness of the wagon's interior covered his confusion. Then a damp nose was thrust against his face and a limp tongue licked his chin frantically.

His eyes, becoming abruptly adjusted to the shadow, he saw that the girl was bending over three wriggling, white puppies, and then, seeing the little animals more clearly, he drew up his head in surprise. They were like no other puppies he had ever seen.

The girl laughed, thinking the pups had startled him.

"They won't bite," she chuckled.

"What are they?" he questioned.

Her eyes danced very close to his.

"That's the first question you've asked me," she said, and David was astounded to hear a note of protest in her voice. This incomprehensible female actually wanted him to question her! The realization struck him with the insistence of a warning. The boy drew into himself immediately.

"They're shore queer lookin' pups," he remarked.

David had never seen a dog like one of these upon the range, but he had a dim recollection of pictures which resembled them.

"My goodness! Haven't you ever seen a terrier before?" demanded the girl.

"Not that looked thataway," said David. "What yo' say they are?"

"English bull terriers." She bent over them and watched as they greedily lapped up the water, with a maternal pride. "They're thoroughbreds. I'd have had 'em before, only oo toodn't leave oo muzzer, tood oo?" This last question she addressed with gay absurdity to the puppies, sweeping down upon them with one hand and tumbling them over. Greedily they ignored her rough playfulness and scrambled back to their drinking. "I drove all the way over to White Oak for them," she boasted.

Again it came to his lips to question her; to ask who she was, and what had brought her to this barren country. But again his question was silenced by the etiquette of the range—and something more. David felt irrationally shy of this strange creature. Something within him was strongly urging him that he was just wastin' good time to waltz around thisaway with a kid girl. And she was a pilgrim at that.

David felt instinctively that this meeting could just come to an end whenever it wanted to. For all of him, it couldn't end too quickly. But he didn't talk about it. He merely gazed impassively at the puppies.

"Bull terriers?" he said idly.

"Yes. You don't mean to tell me you haven't ever even heard of them?"

"Shore," admitted David. "I've heard of them. Their jaws are right strong, ain't they?"

She nodded. "Strong as iron. They never let go when their blood is up."

"You mean they just hang on to whatever they lay hold of?"

"You bet they do. They're famous for that. If they ever get a hold on anything, no matter what it is or who, you can't break their hold; not unless you kill them or pry 'em loose with a crowbar, I guess."

He gazed at the puppies with a new interest.

"I like that," he remarked.

"Do you? Why?" Her dancing gray

eyes played upon him, and he felt again that instinctive resentment which warned him against her, but he defied it.

"It's right!" he cried with a sudden, unexpected fire. "It's right to hold on. If a man's got hold of a thing and he knows it's the right thing, he ought to hang on till he's shot all to pieces. Till he's dead! If the thing's right!"

She settled back upon her heels and was amazed.

"My Heavens!" she cried, looking down upon him. "I think that's fine!"

His fixed, determined face gazed directly at her. It was still the face of a boy, but it appeared to her handsomer and more aflame with the nobility of manhood than any countenance she had looked upon in her life. It came to her mind that this boy's face was like the face of some old time crusading prince.

"It's fine!" she cried, and the fire died out of his eyes as he realized that he had betrayed himself to a stranger, and a girl.

"That's the kind of a dog I'd like," he said simply.

"Hey, get yo' ol' head out of that wagon. It ain't supper time yet!"

A man's voice roared jovial greeting from the trail. David withdrew his head from under the hood and turned to discover a horseman on the trail behind him. It was a young man, typical of the cattle country, with firm brown features contracted by long and unyielding resistance to the elements, and the tough, slender figure of a tireless horseman. With graceful, apparently negligent ease, he sat astride a spirited piebald pony, and with one hand he held at his knee the bridle of a wiry little black mare.

At the sight of him the boy's face was illumined with the pleasure a boy has for only one human being in the world; it was the pleasure of comradeship.

"Hello, Aleck!" he cried. "Better take back that pony before they miss it."

But Aleck was not to be outdone.

"Where'd you rustle the outfit?" he grinned.

"Jus' passed my way," returned the boy. "Since when yo' taken to horse wrangling?"

"This mare here, she belongs to a kid named Dave Parmelee, and she's considerable of a horse. You'd better get up onto her, Dave. The old man's askin' about where you are, an' moreover, you didn't ought to go walkin' out over the range thisaway. You'll meet a bad cow one of these times an' walk right into trouble."

David grinned widely, and walking to the black mare, took the reins from Aleck's hand. The girl, having seen David desert her without a word of explanation, came resolutely around the wagon at that moment and was just in time to see the black mare discover an imaginary telegraph pole and try to climb it.

David, who had at the same time essayed to mount, brought down his raised foot to the earth, twisted expertly at the reins, brought the little mare back to earth in a swirling, dust raising chaos of hoofs, and leaped into the saddle with a splendid lightness and a quickness of hand that instantly had the mare prancing under firm control.

The girl liked that, but inasmuch as she hadn't come around the wagon to admire David, she didn't let him know it. She stood in the sunlight with her feet apart and her hands in the pockets of her skirt, regarding the two friends resentfully.

"I thought you'd got sunstroke and fallen off the wagon," she said acidly. David, appreciating the neglected niceties of the situation, swept off his sombrero and spoke regretfully.

"It was Aleck," he explained. "He just rode up, ma'am, and—this is Aleck." He introduced his friend.

"How do you do?" asked the girl crisply.

"I'm right fine, thank y' ma'am," grinned Aleck. He had been looking from David to the girl and back with a thousand speculations in his mind. "Nice day," he added, congenially.

"Aleck, he says, I'm wanted over to the house," the boy declared.

"Good-by," said the girl. She made no secret of the fact that she was highly offended.

"We'll ride along with you," suggested David.

"I said good-by," she pointed out.

"Sure, but we'll ride along your way," David smiled serenely.

An ominous light sparkled in her gray eyes.

"Just as long as you don't have to talk with me, I suppose?" she inquired sarcastically.

"Jus' for company," amended David.

"Well, I said just as plainly as I could that I don't want you to ride with me!" cried the amazing female. "So good-by, and the sooner you go the better."

David gazed down upon her with the most serious consideration.

"I didn't go for to rile you up, ma'am," he drawled softly.

"Perhaps not, only you'd just better learn manners, that's all. I'm going to wait here till you're out of sight," she said; and turning abruptly, and rather prettily, thought David, upon her heel, she walked back to the wagon and clambered nimbly to the seat. "I hope you're not going to keep me waiting all day!" she cried.

The two riders brought their ponies to her side.

"Better let's ride along together, ma'am," suggested Aleck amiably. "It'll shore rumple the kid all up in his feelin's if you send him off this away."

"You're keeping me waiting." She ignored Aleck completely, speaking crisply, and with frigid disapproval to David. In return David raised his eyebrows in complete bewilderment, decided that he was just wasting time, and turned his pony to the trail.

"Come on, Aleck," he said, and brought the mare up to an even canter. Aleck, still grinning followed him, and the girl, sitting resolutely on the wagon seat, watched them go.

They hadn't proceeded far, however, when her voice followed them.

"Wait a minute!" she cried; and turning they saw her hurrying after them with something in her arms. They reined in, and David would have dismounted, but she was at his side too soon.

"Here," she said. "It's for you. Take him with you." And with the gesture of a vestal virgin presenting burned offerings, she reached up and placed a wriggling, pink-eared, black-nosed puppy on his pommel. David was silent in his confusion.

"Ma'am?" was all he could say.

"You said you'd like to have a dog like that," she explained, and David was amazed to find that her voice was as uncompromisingly frigid as ever. "Take it." She turned back to the wagon again. He started his horse to follow her, but she waved him away. "Good-by!" she cried, pointedly.

He gazed at her for a moment, uncomprehending.

"She means 'so long'," explained Aleck.

And David, holding the puppy before him, rode homeward.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXECUTIONER.

THE Parmelee ranch occupied an ancient stronghold of the range. The widespread, one story building of dun colored adobe, seemed from a distance to hug the earth; seemed indeed a part of the earth, a hardly discernible mound upon the surface of the plain. But the walls were three feet thick at their base, and had been reared with Spanish craft to defy Indians, time and the sun.

While the land outside lay parched in the searing heat, beneath that thick sodden roof, held firmly upon giant beams, there was blessed shadow, and refreshing coolness. And this retreat from the oppressive sun had been artfully carried out into the open air by an extension of those great beams along the northern side of the house so that they bore the thick roof forth to cover an open terrace.

At a little distance from one end of this terrace was the covered spring which gave the rancho its water supply, and, allying that water with the cool shadow of the extended roof, the Castilian rancher had caused a garden of ferns and flowers to color the retreat and make its still air fragrant.

Old Man Parmelee had not encouraged such things as ferns and flowers with his approval, so that the veranda had fallen upon hard days and differed from the ancient rancho almost as strikingly as the interior of this strange household, which had possessed it before the invader came.

But neglect had not subdued the flowering vines that crept, weblike, over the walls and heavy upholding beams and as Old Man Parmelee sat there in the shadow, cheerlessly regarding the wide domain which lay parched beneath the sun outside, these vines wove a patterned frame about him while he brooded in ignorance of the picture which he made.

He was not old. The name by which the range had learned to designate him was derived rather from a custom which, bestowing it upon the boss of any single outfit, bestowed it upon Bartholomew Parmelee in a tacit recognition of the relation he bore to the entire district which he ruled.

His lank, sandy hair was not yet gray. His eye was bright. He was in fact not yet long past the prime of his life, and the hale activity of the open range should have given him many more years in the saddle. Indeed he expected nothing less.

In this sickness, this weakness which had torn his limbs with pain, and palsied his firm hand, he had never taken to his bed. "It will pass," he had said, and his words had been a command. He had commanded that sickness to pass. Yet for many weeks now he had hobbled painfully down to this chair on the veranda, to sit and wait for its passing; to issue his mandates while it passed. And it had not passed.

In the afternoon Snuff Tansey rode in from the sunlight to find the rancho deserted save for the kitchen hands and Old Man Parmelee, brooding in his chair. Drawing up to the veranda, he dismounted and approached with the familiarity of the range and the propitiatory respect demanded by the circumstances and the very presence of Old Man Parmelee.

"Jud Dasent, he's holdin' his hand." It was a characteristic of Old Parmelee that he forced the other by silence to explain his coming. "He's got Preest down in the bottoms of the Verdi."

"Rounded up!" Parmelee stretched his lips with a grin that brought a fierce glitter to his eye. He was a great hunter, was Parmelee, whether of man or beast.

"Shore, seems like. Jud's riders is cuttin' down to head him orf from the Rio."

The boss leaned forward in his chair.

"What you sayin' about Dasent holdin' back?" Tansey recognized the sound in Parmelee's voice, resembling that of a coarse file roughly drawn across bone, which signaled a warning of the Old Man's displeasure. "He's got him herded in, ain't he?"

Tansey had a wedge-like face, the lines of which were broken only by the sharp protuberances of his cheek bones; it gave him a general aspect of narrowness and craft, of foxy cunning. With narrowed eyes he observed the old man now, and tried to appraise his temper.

"Give me answer to that!" demanded Parmelee. The hard contempt he had for such narrow, appraising glances as men constantly turned upon him, was instinctive and unaffected. It was part of the man and his strength that he resisted appraisal as the naked rock rebuffs the elements. "Why ain't he pressin' 'em? Tell me that!"

"Well," Tansey was no diplomat, but he sensed the value of tact, "Westock's there," he said.

Parmelee drew himself up in his chair, clutching its arms with his long hands.

"Westock be damned!" he cried. "What's Westock doin' out on Dasent's job?"

"He allows that you gave out you wanted this Harper Preest, an' he's taken a contract to bring him in." Tansey grinned. "Westock he spills a whole lot of language about how he's sheriff of these parts and he's a lot set on doin' his dooty."

Parmelee considered that.

"An' Dasent talks down, huh?" he asked softly.

"Dasent, he don't see just how the cards lay. He holds up the game an' sits tight, till you call a new deal."

Old man Parmelee sat in his chair and ran his cold eyes over the man who leaned against the solid support of his veranda, and while he did so, he turned over this situation in his mind, as a gambler shuffles the cards; laid its component parts before his direct, unwavering vision, as the cards are spread on the table, and then, firmly, with a gambler's face and voice, he played his hand.

"Westock's out of this," he set forth

coldly. " You git out there an' tell him so. Fer twenty-seven years now I been clearing this range of rustlers, holdups an' cutthroats.

" You boys who've worked with me know how much sheriff's an' such like 've helped— They can get the man as good as anybody, but there's only one thing that'll cure him, an' that's a necktie party— You got to take him away from the sheriff to work that, an' it spreads talk—

" You go out an' tell Westock I want to see him. Tell Dasent that soon as Westock leaves him, he's to round up Harper Preest. An' I don't want there to be need for Westock to worry about it any more. If he don't listen to reason why I want Dasent should have Preest all swung up an' quiet before he can take any other action— Now remember that!"

He regarded Tansey for a moment in silence; his face held the death sentence of Preest; his lips were drawn with a grim intolerance for any interference; his eyes held the driving order to be obeyed.

" Preest an' his crowd could 'a' been with me if they'd like!" he cried suddenly in a high, discordant tenor. " Tell him that. They had their chance. And they missed it. Now Preest is the only one left. When you get him, before you string him up, tell him that!

" Tell him I said that every outlaw in the Pajarito valley was to get out or hang. An' he's got to hang. I said it. I promised it. And Westock's got to stay out of this. It's my game this is, and I want Dasent should hang that skunk before morning."

Parmelee's voice dropped suddenly. A notable silence fell after its grim discordance ceased, and Tansey found himself in the position of a man who has heard the mandate of a prince, and is dismissed to carry it abroad.

" I'll tell 'em," he said, and as he rolled away to his waiting pony, Aleck Sheffield spoke from his place on the threshold of the door which opened to the house.

" Looks like we're doo for a little peace," he said jauntily, as he advanced.

Parmelee turned upon him in much the same manner as a grizzly might turn toward an intruder. Old Man Parmelee might be occasionally surprised, but he was never startled. When a smaller animal surprises a grizzly, it is seldom the grizzly who regrets it.

When he recognized immediately the unexpected speaker, however, Parmelee's face visibly softened. His attitude toward Aleck had ever been unique. No other human being shared with this young cowpuncher a relationship with Old Man Parmelee that was so essentially human. His grin now was wry, but it seemed to admit the confidence of friendship.

" That don't happen," he remarked sourly. " With Preest gone, there'll be some no-account fool to take his place. Men are all kinds, but they split up into two lots; there's women folk an' fighters, and in this country all men are fighters. I want it so. I want a man should fight for me or against me. If he's agin me, I get him— but he's a man. If he's yellow, I set him feedin' hawgs. He's a coyote." The old man grinned. " When'd you come in?" he asked.

" Long about when you let Tansey know what was expected of *him*," said Aleck humorously. Parmelee closed up at that; shrank like a sensitive plant from the implied pleasantry, but he shrank into something resembling flint.

" Ef Westock bobbles this deal, I'm goin' to raise dust," he said. Then suddenly he spoke with a note that reminded Aleck forcibly of the unspoken terms under which he enjoyed this strange man's confidence. " Did you bring in that boy?" he rasped.

" Dave's in the kitchen," replied Aleck.

" With the women!" Old Parmelee narrowed his eyes and frowned. " What doin'?" There was no mistaking the command in his voice; no hint of any other relation but of master and man.

" Feedin' a pup," said Aleck; his voice remained imperturbable, and therein lay his hold upon the other. Parmelee had never broken Aleck Sheffield, nor had he ever broken with him. In nine long years that drawling baritone had never lost its humorous, bantering tolerance; but Aleck had never failed to obey. It was a peculiar complexity which the old man had never possessed the subtlety to question.

"What pup?" he demanded.

"Pup by the name of Grip, a white, short-haired dawg that aims to be a fighter."

"Where'd he get it?"

Aleck grinned.

"Why don't you ask him?" he suggested.

Old Man Parmelee turned to the doorway and saw David standing there. As Aleck spoke, the boy placed the puppy on the ground and it scampered clumsily forward.

CHAPTER V.

UNAFRAID.

"WHERE'D you get it?" Parmelee snapped out his order without pretense of geniality, and the boy replied with an even serenity which irritated the man by its suggestion of toleration.

"A girl in a wagon," David replied. "She came up to the go-devil by the creek. Wanted water for the pups."

"Girl?" Parmelee instantly became the alert man of affairs. "Who is she?"

"I don't know."

"What was the brand on her horses?"

"Monkey-wrench."

"Humph." It was an inarticulate dismissal of a problem solved. "What you goin' to name him?"

"Grip."

"Why Grip?"

"Cause he can hold on. He's an English bull terrier. They never let go."

Parmelee turned his attention to the dog, examining it critically. The little animal came and stumbled about at his feet. He leaned down and tumbled it over roughly.

"Shore enough," he addressed Aleck rather than the boy. "It's a fightin' terrier pup. Had one myself once." He turned suddenly to his son.

"David," he said, "you got to cut its tail and trim its ears."

The boy looked at him incredulously.

"Trim his ears?" he cried.

Parmelee had made the statement quite casually, but at the sight of his son's face the question seemed to become one of great significance.

"Shore," he cried impatiently. "Trim his ears. There ain't nobody has a long-tailed, flop-eared bull terrier. You cut 'em off."

A quick frown ruffled the boy's smooth brown as a sudden wind disturbs the surface of a lake.

"Not this dog," he said quietly. The effect of his words upon the old man created a sudden black calm. There came into Parmelee's face something of the menace that precedes a storm on the high seas. The irritation with which he had replied to the boy's questioning left his voice to give place to a metallic harshness which, out of a perfect restraint, bespoke an unfathomable anger.

"Take that pup out to the barn and cut off its tail an' trim its ears!" he said.

"It's my pup!" the boy announced quickly. His brow was unruffled now, and his face in the shadow appeared calm as the face of a thinking child. Only his dark eyes seemed to catch something of the sun outside and give that something back in a fire that blazed steadily.

"You do it with a knife, like you mark a calf," continued Parmelee's harsh voice. "For his tail you can use the shears."

"No," said the boy. That was all, but he spoke with a peculiar distinctness.

A silence followed for a space. Parmelee pressed himself back into his chair, his hands rigid on the arms of it. David stood a few steps from the doorway, having the appearance of slim youth against the picture of his father's broken age.

Aleck Sheffield, watching them, could not rid his mind of the obsession that this trivial incident was somehow vastly significant, and he knew then that it had been approaching through years of misunderstanding; that David, standing there in the doorway, was a creature who did not belong in his father's world. Furthermore, Aleck knew that the peculiar love, bound up in the loyalty of a blind devotion which he bore this boy, was derived from that singular effect of difference which the boy bore to his environment.

A boy of the range would have stood just as David stood before a command which he would not obey, but he would never have

appeared so light of limb, so serene of countenance, so vaguely imbued with a fair beauty of face and form, a delicacy of complexion and a radiance of clear intelligence as this boy did. Aleck looked upon David with the eye of the range, but unlike the men of the range, he could not contemn the boy for the alien charm he found in him.

When Parmelee spoke his voice had the startling quality of the growl of a beast.

"You do what yo're told," he rumbled.

"There ain't nothin' more for me to say," said David. "I said 'no.'"

With a sudden gesture Parmelee swooped down and lifting the puppy by the scruff of its neck, flung it into Aleck's arms.

"Aleck," he rasped, "you take that pup out an' do what I said. Better—Go an' git the shears an' trim it orf out here. I want David should see it."

Aleck stood with the puppy in his hands and looked from father to son. David had the aspect of being balanced on his toes, although his feet were firmly on the ground.

"It's my pup, Aleck," he remarked.

Parmelee reached out and took the animal himself.

"Go git them shears," he commanded, and Aleck went out through the house. A brief silence followed him.

"I'm goin' to show you how a man treats a dawg," said Parmelee grimly. "You got to learn, David." He settled in the chair with the puppy on his lap.

David, still seeming to reach upward from his feet, stood balanced in that manner and gazed at his father silently. There was something indescribably baffling in his unruffled, unwavering gaze.

"Why don't you answer me!" Parmelee's voice vibrated with repressed emotion.

"I can't think of anything else to say," admitted David.

Parmelee sneered bitterly.

"Y' can't think of anything a man would think of," he said. "You can't think of the sight you are standin' there an' whinin' like a woman about a puppy's bein' trimmed. You got no shame!" He blurted out the last words in an excess of disgust.

"That puppy is natural," David said. "Like he was made to be. There's no sense torturing him."

"Torture! Arhh!" Old Man Parmelee turned to Aleck who at that moment entered. "Here!" he held out the wretched puppy. "Trim him down!"

Aleck held the shears in one hand, and, taking the puppy in the other, turned to David.

"Just pull over that table, Dave," he said.

David stood motionless.

"That's my pup, Aleck," he said quietly. "I don't want you should touch a hair on his body."

"Shut up yo're talkin'!" ordered the old man. "You heard what I said, Aleck. Do it fairst."

Aleck, still holding the pup and the shears saw now that he must make a momentous decision. He turned from David to his father. He was about to appeal the case, but David decided it for him.

"I said 'no,'" he repeated abruptly, and suddenly stepping forward, he snatched the shears from Aleck's hand. Then, with an amazing demonstration of cool control, he flung them with great deliberation and perfect aim into the covered well, the roof of which, some twenty yards away, offered only a narrow aperture to his markmanship. The three of them heard the shears drop into the water and they heard the tinkle of the spray which followed.

"There'll be iron in that water, now," said David. And then he turned upon his father with his eyes seeming to crackle with the fire that they held.

"I said 'no'!" he cried. "It's my pup, an' I've got the decision! I said 'no!' And you wouldn't listen. Now I say it again. My pup ain't goin' to be cut or maimed or trimmed."

He stood silent then, but did not seem defiant. It was as if he had set forth an incontrovertible fact, and expected it to be believed implicitly.

His father looked at him with implacable resentment and disgust.

"David," he said, with the rasp in his voice, "yo're a plumb loco young fool." Then his voice suddenly arose. "What's more," he cried harshly, "yo're yellow as a coyote. Yo're my son! My son, by God, an' yo're afraid."

He leaned forward in his chair, his hands like claws, clutching at the arms, winding about the wood, tearing at it.

"Yo're afraid of men, and yo're afraid of animals, yo're afraid of the round-up, an' yo're afraid of the sight of blood. In all the years you've lived, I've never seen you shoot a gun. In all the time you've spent on the range, I never seen when you acted like a man.

"A woman, that's what you are. Why, you've got the hands of a woman. Look at them." He stretched out a claw and grasped one of David's slim, firm hands.

"Smooth and shapely as a girl's!" he cried. "An' clean of the mark of any man's work. You got a woman's face, an' a woman's heart. A chicken heart, afraid of blood or powder smoke.

"Like a woman you come to me this mornin' and whimper agenst the fear of fightin'. Do you think I made the place I have without fight? D'you think that the range hands a man his livin' on a silver platter? D'you think men can live without others die?

"No. You got to crawl for them, an' whine for them. An' God, it's a fine sort of man you whine for. Preest, a gunman and a thief!"

"There's a law to deal with him," said David. He was eying his father with a strange, dark gaze. He seemed to brood upon a problem which in his mind he could not solve. "I'm not afraid," he added.

"No. Yo're not afraid," sneered his father. "When the boys ride out to the round-up you skulk at home with the women."

"The round-up's cruel," said the boy.

Parmelee lurched forward in his chair, seeming as though he would throw himself upon the youth.

"Cruel as a man is to a man!" he snarled. "That's what a man must be. When I came out to this country, there was no law here then. The range belonged to the strongest, an' I had to fight like a wolf fights with the pack to win my place an' to hold it.

"D'you suppose I'm goin' to let the law take that away from me now? D'you suppose a louse of a cattle thievin' coyote can come an' take away the things I have fought for and worked for an' torn out of the desert with bare teeth? An' then I'm to let the law take care of him."

His voice arose of its own impetus to a terrible discordant level where it rasped on restrained with savage resolution from the frenzy which boiled in the heart of the man. He was pouring out a burden which his mind had carried overlong.

"Yo're my son! An' you grovel for a horse thief more yellow than he'd be ashamed to show. David! That's a fine name for a thing like you. David killed Goliath, didn't he? He fought with a giant, didn't he. An' he tore the big man down, an' ripped his head from his shoulders, an' waved it, bloody, in the face of his enemies. By God, that's funny, that is! And yo're named David. You, who're afraid of a puppy's squeal!'

"No," said David, "I'm not afraid."

"It was yo're mother gave you that name. She wasn't much better. She didn't no more belong in a country like this, than a Kentucky filly belongs on the open range.

"She shrank when the guns went off. She paled at the sight of pain. And she sickened an' died. It was her that called you David. She was strong on the Bible, an' such. David!" He gasped contemptuously.

"I suppose if a man struck you in the face, you'd turn the other cheek, wouldn't you? You'd lick his hand if he struck you, wouldn't you?"

"No," said David, "I wouldn't." He hadn't changed his position. He stood with his face darkened by the peculiar brooding in his eyes. He gazed on his father with a strange intensity.

When Parmelee had spoken of his mother, a glint of flame had appeared in his eyes and in his cheek. But his smooth, brown face remained calm, his satin skin unruffled. He stood with his hands at his side and listened to the aroused man in silence.

"You wouldn't!" Parmelee leaned forward, his eyes alight with anger. "You'd run away! That's what you'd do!" His voice changed, ringing with a deeper dissonance. "An' time comes heavy on me. The work I've done an' the fightin' press me

down! I got to give up this sometime. Sometime I got to go. An' who'll take it on?" He considered this for an instant in somber bitterness.

"Not you, by God! There won't ever be a yellow, chicken-hearted woman in the saddle of Bart Parmelee! You couldn't ride it. Like wolves they'd come down on you and tear out of yo're hands the things I've builded up out of blood an' sufferin'!

"That's how I stand. An' yo're all I got to lean on. Well, do you know what a man does with a rotten girth? Do yer know?— He throws it away! I've had men around me who've fought me, an' others who've played the snake. I know how to handle them. But you ain't got the guts to stand up an' fight, nor the brains to do the other. God gave me a son to lean on and when I need him, I find he's afraid!"

He bit off the words as a man spits out a foul mouthful. He poured from his eyes the glitter of a disgust that was almost hatred. As he spoke the last words he grasped with one arm the back of his chair and by an effort almost superhuman pulled himself to his feet. As he stood there, towering in the shadow, the boy appeared small before him, incredibly slight and boyish.

"I tell you what I'm goin' to do!" barked Parmelee, glaring down upon him. "Dasent knows me, an' what I tell him to do, Dasent does. To-night, Dasent an' the boys 're goin' to round up Harper Preest, an' when they've rounded him up, they're goin' to hang him.

"You an' Aleck will be there when Preest dances on the air, an' you, David, yo're goin' to kick him off! When you come back to me an' tell me how you did the trick, then I'll know you ain't afraid."

He leaned forward, as he spoke, so that he was directly above the boy, his face close to David's face, and his glance had in it something demoniacal. David felt that this man who leered into his eyes was not his father, but was some spirit incarnate of evil; yet his own eyes did not quail.

"An' if I don't do it?"

Parmelee's face darkened terribly.

"You got me to deal with then!" he rasped blackly. "Ask any man on the range what it is to deal with Bart Parmelee when he's mad." And his lips twisted back in a snarl.

"That's all I wanted to know, dad," said David. "Outside of that yo're all riled up, and don't know what yo're sayin'. But when yo're thinkin' clear again, just remember what I said. I said I wasn't afraid!" He smiled slowly, and the fire that had burned in his eyes when he cast away the shears came back to burn like a flame renewed.

"I'm not afraid of anything on earth!" he cried proudly. "You say that any man can tell me of what it means to deal with you. But it don't signify. I'm not afraid of *you!*"

Aleck saw Parmelee lunge toward the boy.

"Dave!" cried Aleck, but the boy didn't budge.

The father's clenched hand uprose, but at its height the tall figure swayed, and what inspired that gesture was never known, for Old Man Parmelee swung about and the arm dropped to grope wildly for the chair. It found a grip upon it, high on the back, and the chair tipped backward.

Aleck, springing forward, held it fast as Old Man Parmelee sank into it. David stepped to him, placing a hand behind his father's shoulder, but Parmelee pushed him away.

"You—yellow rat!" The man muttered the words with accusing vehemence, and the boy started up at them as though he had found his father's body cold. He started up with a sense of horror, but he uttered no sound.

He turned his large, grave eyes on Aleck as if in doubt; then he silently walked from the veranda out into the parched grasslands which were already tinted now by the variegated colors of the sunset.

CHAPTER VI.

A NECKTIE PARTY.

FOR long after David left them, Old Man Parmelee sat staring into a vacancy that blinded him to the vivid grandeur of the sky against which his face was set. Aleck reflected as he watched him

that if the man's face had not long since been burned a somber red, it must have now appeared ashen gray.

That deadly pallor under the sunburned skin gave him the strange bearing of a graven image. He sat motionless as some Indian idol, rugged and unrelenting as though carved from granite. Aleck pondered on the finality to which this cataclysm must lead. He did not dare break the silence which pressed upon them like a fog.

"He'll learn!" The colorless clamor of Parmelee's voice aroused Aleck like some wild alarm.

"Shouldn't wonder it would be best to ferget it a spell," he suggested cheerily. The old man ignored him.

"He'll learn what it means to deal with Bart Parmelee," he reiterated; and his voice was raised impetuously. "He'll learn right soon. Now!"

"It'll be different in the mornin'." Aleck was conscious of the absurdity of attempting to soothe this man. As well soothe an enraged rattlesnake. But he smiled good-humoredly while within him he fought an emotion he had not known before.

"I won't want supper," said the old man next. And he arose from his chair. Aleck would have lent him a hand, but it was brushed roughly aside.

"Coddlin'!" old Parmelee muttered. "The kid's a damn young idiot!" He strode precariously to the door, and on the threshold paused to turn and rudely bar Aleck from following.

"Save yo're coddlin' fer him!" he rasped vindictively. "You favor him!" It was an accusation. "You'll suffer fer that. If a hawse acts onery, I break him. Men I break likewise. You'll see yo're David broken now!" And turning he passed into the house.

Aleck for the second time that day sallied forth with the black mare at his pony's side to seek David. An unquenchable emotion within him demanded that he do this, although his reason struggled with it vainly. David had need of friendship, and it was demanded of him that he find the boy out and provide him with that friendship's aid. The high emotions of the love that touches comradeship and a loyalty to something which the boy possessed but which Aleck could not understand, ran riot in his being, and the faithful fellow trotted forth to find his friend with a troubled heart that was not for a moment concerned with himself.

He didn't find him. He returned to the ranch with the black mare and sat alone, playing dolefully with the puppy while from the bunkhouse emanated a medley of noises which proclaimed that the few men which the man hunt had left on the ranch were engaged in a round of poker. For the first time in his life Aleck discovered that this pastime was not, after all, an irresistible one.

The noise in the bunkhouse had ceased, the punchers, having retired, and Aleck was still sitting, sleepily now, in a rocking chair by the ancient fireplace, when David returned to the ranch.

"Dave!" Aleck's voice came unreasonably from the throat. He hadn't realized how troubled he had been. "Where you been?"

"Walkin'. Where's Dad?"

"Sleepin', I reckon. He turned in soon's you went. You goin' to make peace talk?"

"No." David spoke very sharply. His manner was always distinct, and he used few words. Aleck had anticipated that terse "no."

Aleck nodded, frowning.

"Shore." The word rumbled in his throat. "I been thinkin' a heap."

"Me, too. Dad said they're stringin' Preest up to-night. That right?"

Aleck jerked up his head.

"I heard him give it out," he said. "Dasent's got him rounded up. Westock tried to butt in. Yo're dad sent out Snuff Tansey to call off Westock an' proceed with the necktie party. He wants it run orf to-night."

David turned to the fireplace and gazed into its wide, empty maw. "That's bad," he said.

A rattle of hoofs answered him; hoof beats which clinked on the stones and brought up with a clatter on the sunbaked terrace outside. The door flew open and admitted a hard-ridden cow-puncher, cov-

ered with dust and armed with knife and low strapped gun.

"Gimme some water!" His voice came hoarse from a parched throat. There was a bucket on the sideboard with a dipper in it. David motioned to it and watched the man as he gulped down the gratifying draught.

"What's new?" asked Aleck cheerfully. The man grinned at him.

"Where's the old man?" he demanded.

"Snorin'," explained Aleck.

"Tell him we got Harvey Preest down at the Bitter Creek water hole. Tell him he swings to-night!" He made immediately for the door.

"Wait a minute!" David's command rang out with amazing clearness. It startled both the men, and the messenger stopped short.

"Huh?" he cried.

"When're you— When?" demanded the boy.

"Now," snapped the rider. "They was headin' for the water hole when I left 'em. It's the likeliest tree around. They'll get there right soon." He turned to the door again. "Ef I don't ride fairst I'll miss the party," he explained politely, and was gone. They heard the clatter of his horse's hoof beats on the clay. David turned upon Aleck with his eyes ablaze.

"Saddle up the ponies, Aleck!" he cried. "We got to be there."

"How's that?" Aleck stood dumfounded.

David took him by one arm.

"Quick!" he cried. "You heard what my father said! He said I was to draw the rope!" His teeth were tight shut, and he spoke through them with an effect of desperate resolution. Aleck had never seen a man's eyes burn so brightly. "Saddle 'em quick!" he cried, and waiting to see Aleck off to obey a command he could not resist, David dashed from the room and hurrying down a narrow passage, plunged into his father's bedroom.

He opened the door quickly, and as quickly closed it after him. The room was filled with light which poured in through a window near the door. It was moonlight and the color of moonlight, but having accustomed his eyes to it, David seemed at once to discern his objective, and strode to the head of the great wooden bed where his father lay stiffly on his back, asleep.

From a hook in the wall beside the bedhead hung suspended a cartridge belt which carried in a well worn holster the glittering body of a loaded forty-five. This David took deftly from its hook and turned to the door as he strapped it about his waist.

"What're you up to?" The harsh voice of his father tore the darkness, and David whirled on his heel to see his father sitting up peering through the moonlight at him.

"Yore gun!" he cried with a queer, hard lilt in his voice. "I'm usin' it!"

"Yo're crazy!" The old man leaned forward, one hand clutching the bedclothes before him, the other supporting him behind. "Come back! Where you goin?—" His eyes fought the baffling light as the door slammed shut and the boy disappeared from the room. With a great cry the man sprang from his bed. He stood with the bedclothes about his limbs, and then staggered to the door.

"Come back!" he yelled. "Back! You blasted fool! Come back!" He tore open the door and fell to his knees in the passage. He staggered to his feet again and groped wildly for the wall. He found it, and felt the blood rush to his head blinding him to direction, blackening his mind.

"What're you up to?" he cried into the darkness. Then he remembered that his chicken-hearted son had come into his room. He took a step forward, meeting the solid wall. "Come back!" he roared, as though he would dominate all the world by the weight of his voice, the crash and clamor of it as it rang in the narrow passage. He found himself facing his empty room again.

"What're you up to?" he roared. "Come back!" And there came to his ears the sound of hoof beats, the rattle of hoofs which thundered on the hard baked clay, which rang on the stone and beat in confusion on the grass: hoof beats which retreated and grew faint; hoof beats which left him in darkness, all alone.

"Come back!" he muttered. "You blasted fool! You, David!" And the bed-

clothes caught about his legs. A great weight tugged at him about the waist. He tried for his bed again. He sank upon the floor.

The men who had heard his cries found him there when they came in.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE UNCARING MOON.

THE two horsemen rattled and thundered over the landscape bathed in moonlight, which covered it with the color of death. The black mare galloped forward impelled by the urgency of her rider, and the piebald pony kept pace.

Both riders were well accustomed to the saddle, and Aleck Sheffield felt so much a part of his animal that the high speed at which they moved through the liquid glamour of the moon hardly intruded upon the thoughts which filled his mind. He constantly turned to look curiously at the boy beside him, but found the complexities of the situation too much for speech.

David rode with his eyes on fire and his smooth face fixed with a determination which for the first time betrayed to Aleck a suggestion of the father in the boy. But Aleck reflected that this was a bad business. The old man had spoken with a bitterness that Aleck, in his loyalty to the boy, felt still rankling in his heart; but he had spoken in great heat. Surely he had not meant that the boy should in reality go out and hang a man?—

And that brought a new light to Aleck's mind. He had never questioned before the right which lay in the old man's unrelenting might. Yet this matter of hanging a man in the night, anticipating the processes of law, now appeared to Aleck with the sickening aspect of a lynching, because a boy whom he loved with the profound devotion of a comrade was to have a part in it.

The thought swept the words out of his mind into sudden speech.

"Dave!" he cried, and for the first time in years he heard his own voice without a trace of humor in it. "The old man didn't mean it this way! Leave the dirty work to Dasent."

David didn't answer him.

"Dave," continued the man insistently. "You don't hear me?"

"I hear you, Aleck."

"Then turn back."

"Not to-night." The boy's voice sounded in the night air with a peculiar insistence; a quality of intense resolution that would not be denied. "We got to make time!" he said.

Aleck changed his tone.

"Dave, you an' me don't belong out here. This party is for Dasent to handle. Yore dad didn't mean for you to project out thisaway. Come on back."

No answer. The boy leaned forward in his saddle, his face lowered and blackly shadowed by his sombrero.

"When he stampeded with all that war talk, he was mad clean through. He's sick. He didn't mean it. Come back, Dave!"

David turned suddenly toward him. Aleck's face fell gravely as he caught the boy's tense countenance.

"Go back if you want to, Aleck," he cried, "but not me. I can't go back!"

"Dave, you don't understand it! Yore dad don't understand. Yo're ridin' blind, kid! Blind as a locoed pony! *You can't hang a man!* You ain't that kind!"

At that David pulled his mare, and suddenly Aleck found that they were close together, knee to knee, and the boy's face was close to his, his voice athrob with the possession of a vast emotion; and his eyes burned in the moonlight.

"No!" rang that clear, insistent voice. "I can't! But I can save him from being hanged!"

"Dave!"

"If we get there'n time!"

"Dave! Fer God's sake!"

"Shore. That's one reason! Fer dad's sake, too!"

Aleck's pony skipped out of his pace, shying from a fancied terror of the moonlight, and for a moment the two riders were parted. As they came together, they saw at once the red glare of a torch in the sky before them. It was a torch carried by a man on a hilltop.

"Oh, God!" groaned Aleck. "It's gun play, Dave! They'll shoot you to pieces."

"If they don't," gasped the boy, whose eyes were on the torchlight, "Preest won't hang."

Aleck came then to the realization that this thing must be. For the first time in his life he knew at the same moment what fear was. He was afraid that this night David was to die. It seemed that the boy's alien spirit was carrying him to certain death, but not if Aleck Sheffield could prevent it. Not if his life could stand between. He gave his mind to lightning thought. His hand dropped to his gun, fingering its butt, making sure it was loose to his pull.

"What's your scheme?" he asked unexpectedly, and humor had come back into his voice again.

David, his eyes on the flame, muttered his answer.

"Ain't got none. Just ride in an' stop that hangin'," he said.

Aleck, dumfounded, did not reveal it in this new mood to which he was abandoned. In warfare Aleck was never surprised. In the split instant of silence that followed the boy's amazing confession, Aleck swiftly reviewed his position. Perhaps after all, the boy's plan was best.

"They'll know we're comin'," he set forth. "Dismount under the hill an' leave the hawses with me! Hail 'em first, so's they won't shoot orf the hip. Then—God help you, kid!" That was all he could say, and as he reached the end of speech they found themselves at the bottom of the same hill as that on which, in the afternoon, David had met the girl. On it was the only tree in sight, and under that tree limned in the moonlight against the black outline of the barn was gathered a cluster of men who moved with few words about a sinister business.

David and his friend dropped from their horses as they reached the hollow under the hill. Aleck seized the reins of both animals, and David, without a thought for the past or future, turned his back upon them to dart up the hill with the unwavering directness of a homing pigeon.

Harper Preest sat on a bare backed pony with his hands bound behind him and his back to the pony's head. About his throat was the noose of a rope which had been secured to the topmost limb of the crooked cypress tree. In that position he had addressed his executioners with a voice that rang sharply as the sound of a hammer upon tin; a voice that was keyed above the breaking point, for Harper Preest, faced by the veritable fact, was afraid of death.

The silent men who were grouped on foot beneath his perch listened to him with a grim regard for this last hint of lenience which their victim was ever to enjoy, and while they listened he cursed with vivid, simple words the body, the soul and the life of Bartholomew Parmelee. He knew well that the willful, unrelenting figure of the old man loomed darkly above this travesty of justice; he knew that primarily, before his offenses against the laws of the land or the unwritten laws of the range, he was now to die because of all the men of that harsh countryside, he had most insistently opposed its self-made autocrat. These things he set forth as he sat on his living scaffold and faced a future that offered him no hope.

His executioners listened with ill-concealed impatience. They harbored against Harper Preest in that moment a grudge which was established upon the fact of his surrender. If he had resisted them; if he had offered the merest scintilla of an excuse for a swift, effective bullet, this painful scene would have been avoided. It was because he had ridden forward with his hands aloft and given himself over to them for this business that they in their hearts upbraided him; and that resentment was the measure of their remorse.

Preest had explained that meek surrender. He had a case! he had cried. Put him in a court of justice, he had declared with passionate profanity, and he would show up Parmelee for the skulking, thieving hound he was! And Dasent, hearing him, had known then that he could best serve his master by having the thing over promptly. For it was Dasent's game to serve. So he cut Preest off curtly as he finished his wild arraignment of his enemy.

"All right!" he snapped. "Swing him orf, boys."

The two men stepped forward, but halted as Preest turned upon them furiously with a cry that curdled the blood and brought the gaunt figure of tragedy to stalk among them.

"Not yet!" he shrieked, and he turned on Dasent. His hard face was green as the moonlight caught it. His teeth were tightly clenched, and as he spoke his lips writhed over them like the twisting lips of a man dying after long torture, and the sweat poured from his forehead, rolling down in glistening rivulets into his eyes. with the frenzied snarl of an animal that fights with death upon it, he poured out a streaming, vitriolic denunciation of the man who ordered his doom.

"—You lick his boots now, you— But wait!— Two skunks can't play without fightin'— One of you's got to go! An' when you've got Bart Parmelee's teeth in yore throat remember me! Ah, my Christ! My God! If I could be there!— Two of you— Two—!" His tirade ended with a rasping shriek as Dasent plunged forward and raised a quirt to cut the bare backed pony into the action which would break Preest's neck.

"What's that?" a single voice cried out from the silence which held the grouped men in a trance. And that was the clatter of hoofs which announced the coming of David and his friend.

"Hold up, Jud! The old man!" And Dasent, transfixed by those words, held his hand to see stride from the liquid transparency of the night a figure which had the aspect of an avenging angel.

David stepped forward with his father's gun clasped in one hand. That group of men, who would have showered forth instant death to meet a dozen others who intruded in like manner, stood rigid before the fire in his eyes.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE BOW OF PROMISE

SMILE when you're happy and smile when you're sad;
Smile when you're lonely at joy you have had.
Laugh in the sunshine, smile through the rain,
Trusting the bow of sweet promise again.

Smile in the gladness that nature has wrought.
Laugh down the sadness that folly has bought—
Walk in the sunlight, the shadow disdain,
Trusting the bow of sweet promise again.

Smile o'er the music that lingers in life;
Laugh at the discord of folly and strife.
Smile from the mountain, through valley, o'er plain,
Trusting the bow of sweet promise again.

Smile in your sorrow; through hope and desire
Touch the soft notes of eternity's lyre.
Laugh—and envelope the heart in the strain—
Live in the bow of sweet promise again!

Dow Wallace Tate.

The Lost Orange Grove

By LORING BRENT

Author of "Vingo's Roving Romeo," "Ain't Women Peculiah?" etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

AS a hiding place for hunted people, for fugitives from justice, for men who wished to forget the world or to be by the world forgotten, Vingo could not easily have been improved upon. I thought so in the very beginning, when I first took over the Vingo commissary, and to-day, some years later, I still think so.

Vingo, what there is left of it, occupies a little clearing on the main line of the railroad. On one side of the tracks are a dozen negro shanties, and on the other side are my house, the commissary, and a handful of tumble-down dwellings which are, from time to time, occupied by transients. They are ownerless houses, technically owned by the State because of unpaid taxes.

Twenty-five years ago Vingo started out with brass bands and speeches to become an agricultural Utopia, but the project failed, and the weeds, so valorously beaten down, have sprung up again. Out of sight in the jungles and hammocks, from a mile to three miles away, are the industries which prevent Vingo from perishing entirely—the two rock quarries, tie camps, a shingle mill, "cracker" farms and turpentine stills.

In Vingo, a wanted man has only to step off the back porch of the house he is temporarily occupying and he is embraced by a wilderness of jungle and swamps which automatically render him as difficult to find—and sometimes as dangerous—as a water moccasin concealed in a patch of broom

sage. Even bloodhounds have been known to fail. It is hard for a bloodhound to track a man through swamps, harder still when the man is well supplied with snuff.

I had never heard of the snuff trick until a young man with wistful eyes and a girlish smile vanished from Vingo with a sheriff's posse and two bloodhounds in hot pursuit. Mack Saunders, alias Jerry Stinson, the foreman of a tie camp at Cypress Spoon, was wanted for having shot through the heart with a rifle a man who had blown out the brains of his brother with a shotgun.

When the high sheriff and his posse and bloodhounds reached Vingo, the murderer was in the swamps and traveling fast. Adding myself to the posse, I learned, for the first time, of the snuff trick. If you are ever pursued by bloodhounds carry plenty of snuff. At intervals along the trail, our quarry liberally peppered his footprints with snuff. After an hour of it the bloodhounds' nostrils were raw with snuff, and they were in a state of thraldom from sneezing. They lost the trail entirely, and we gave up the chase.

Suddenly I learned that the murderer made his escape down the St. John's River, eventually reached the Everglades and took passage on a rum runner's boat from Palm Beach to the Bahamas. Wherever he may be, he still owes me $18 for rations, including a large order of snuff; and his check, mailed in care of this magazine, will not fail to reach me!

That experience should have taught me a lesson, but it did not. One morning Samuel K. Tillitson, a genial, gray-haired man who ran a turpentine still near Cypress Spoon and traded regularly at my store, brought me a cashier's check for $150 on a Jacksonville bank. I had to borrow from my post office funds to cash it. He then borrowed my flivver to run down to Majolica to purchase some needed hardware supplies for the still; and that was the last I saw of him or the flivver or my $150. I was notified a few days later that three Northern cities wanted Kenneth R. Ransom, alias George P. Nagle, alias Samuel K. Tillitson, alias John P. Ashley, for check raising.

My original suspicions were now confirmed. Vingo was an ideal place for a fugitive from justice to hide until the hue and cry had subsided. For a while I wondered if Gene Bantry, the rock quarry superintendent, hadn't perhaps been at one time a safe cracker; Phil Newman, the sawmill man, a train robber; and Pa Babcock, foreman of the section gang, a second story worker. I even suspected old man Lindstrom and his plump, blue-eyed wife of being a team of confidence workers; but Vingo's crime-wave passed, and we settled down once more to producing sugar cane, crude turpentine, cypress shingles, railroad ties and coquina rock. But I looked upon every newcomer suspiciously.

And one night the three Pomeroys came to Vingo. It was bedtime when they arrived; I was sitting on my screened-in front porch, smoking a last pipeful, watching the fireflies and listening to the whine of the mosquitoes and the low, distant mumbling of the Atlantic as the long swells broke on the beach six miles away, when the headlights of an automobile approaching Vingo from the Dixie Highway, silvered the camphor trees in my front yard. The whirring and muttering of the motor came along presently on the light trade wind.

The headlights became dim and stationary; and I knew that the occupants of the car had stopped for a consultation at the unposted fork a half mile away. By easy processes of deduction, I was now aware that the car was a Ford and that its occupants were strangers. Both tines of the fork led into Vingo. One came in over high sandy ground, the other wound through low swamp land. One we used in wet weather, the other in dry.

The headlights presently brightened and moved, bearing off to the right, or toward the swamp. Suddenly they were extinguished. No car yet manufactured can go through that swamp when our rainy season is in progress.

I switched on the porch light and awaited developments. Soon a tall, thin man came shambling down the cement walk which leads from the commissary to my house—the only sidewalk in Vingo. I was both curious and dubious. Visitors to Vingo after dark are rare.

This one stopped at the foot of the porch steps and continued slapping mosquitoes.

"What town is this?" he called up in a gruff, tired voice. A wide-brimmed black hat made it impossible for me to see his face; but his accent was not Southern. It had a nasal twang. I suspected New England.

"Vingo," I told him.

"Never heard of it," he said promptly. "Ain't on the Dixie Highway, is it?"

"You're off the road five miles," I said.

He cursed in a weary, irritable voice.

"We're bogged down in a swamp. Water's up over the exhaust. Wheels are hub deep. How're the chances to get somebody around here to give us a pull out?"

"I'll pull you out with my mules in the morning," I answered.

He looked up at me for some seconds in silence, absently whacking mosquitoes. The screen between us reduced his face to a vague, pale spot. I felt, rather than saw, his hot black eyes glaring at me. Tourists always glare at the innocent bystander who corrects their mistakes, as if he were personally to blame.

"I'll give you five bucks to pull me out to-night," he snapped.

"That swamp," I replied, "is full of touchy alligators and irritable water moccasins. I wouldn't tow the queen of Belgium out of that swamp to-night. You'd better come inside the screen. Some of those mosquitoes are malarial, and the rest are dengue."

He hesitated, then climbed the steps; and I held open the screen door for him, brushing him off with a palmetto frond as he came in, and waving the mosquitoes back.

The big black hat gave a somewhat desperate note to an otherwise ordinary tourist get-up. He wore a khaki shirt and khaki pants, both stained with the grease of automobile travel and gray with dust. His face was gaunt and pale, hairy with a ten-day growth of beard; and his eyes were set in powdery dark sockets. His pallor alarmed me, for it was the waxen pallor, the unmistakable pallor of a jailbird.

His bloodshot black eyes darted about the porch and into my sitting room before he swung them around to my face, as if he might be estimating what was worth stealing. Then, when he stared hard at me, I became still uneasier. My shotgun, loaded, was standing just inside the door; and I was tempted to walk past him and get it, to let him see that I was not to be trifled with.

He jerked a dirty thumb over his shoulder without removing his staring, bloodshot eyes from my face.

"You own that store back there?"

I nodded. His dusty eyelids seemed to lower a little. He was young, not more than twenty-five or six; but the scraggly beard on his face made him look older.

"Well," he said irritably, "I can't leave them sitting out there eaten up by these damned mosquitoes. Where can we put up for the night?"

"The nearest hotel," I told him, "is twelve miles away. Majolica."

Again his glance roamed into the sitting room; and I knew, of course, what was in his mind. The laws of hospitality in places of Vingo's character are rigid. You welcome the stranger at your gate unquestioningly, but this stranger—and his friends—I could not take in. I always kept the commissary and post office money in the house; and I decided, looking at those staring, bloodshot black eyes and his prison pallor, that he must have got wind of it. There was a disquieting note in Phil Pomeroy's bearing that cannot be put into words. My instinct, right or wrong, simply warned me that he was a bad egg.

The next development caught me unprepared. After glancing for a second time into the sitting room with that unspoken thought in his mind, he opened his thin, anæmic lips and took a sudden step toward me. A thick gurgling sound issued from deep in his throat. He lifted his arms as if he were about to embrace me; fell forward to hands and knees, rolled over loosely on his back and lay still.

I have seen poleaxed cattle go down like that, but never a man drop, literally from exhaustion, as if he had been blackjacked.

His eyes had told me that he had been driving himself inhumanly, but, as I looked at him lying there, I could not feel sorry

for him. It might be a genuine fainting spell, and it might not. One thing, however, was certain. He was unquestionably, or had recently been, a convict. His hat had fallen off in his plunge to the porch floor; his black hair was bristled.

I felt his heart; and it was beating slowly, dully, as the heart of an unconscious man should beat. With that assurance of his sincerity, I went into the house for whisky and a glass, and when I returned he was struggling to sit up. I helped him into a chair and held the whisky to his mouth. After one sip he pushed it away and coughed, then dropped his face into his hands. He sighed heavily and looked up without lowering his hands.

"Been drivin' since five this mornin'," he wheezed. "From Brunswick, Georgia. My brother and sister are out in that swamp. I guess you don't want to put us up, do you?"

Before I could speak he said: "I don't blame you. I guess I look pretty tough. Well, I could stand it and my brother can get along all right, too, but my sister isn't used to it. She's almost dead, she's so tired. If you'll fix her up for to-night my brother and I can flop out there on the grass. I know I look like a bum. I don't blame you for wanting to get a gun; and if it wasn't for the kid—" He paused and stared at me.

There was, of course, only one answer to that. The laws of Southern hospitality wouldn't tolerate any other answer.

"My wife and children are away," I said, "and I can accommodate the three of you without any trouble. While you go down to bring them up I'll see about bedding. You'd better bring all the stuff in your car that's worth stealing. These blacks work fast."

He was shambling off down the cement sidewalk before I had finished; and he had not uttered a word of gratitude. I was to learn that Phil Pomeroy parted freely with only one emotion—hostility.

My preparations for the return of the convict with his brother and sister were, for the most part, the sort of preparations that a man might make who is confidently expecting burglars. All small objects of value in the downstairs rooms I removed to my bedroom. A rifle and two shotguns I placed in my bedroom closet. A .32 automatic pistol I shoved under my pillow.

The commissary and post office money worried me. A new gang of negroes had recently been put to work in the Vingo Rock Company's quarry, and they had spent their first two weeks' pay as they always did for money orders to Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward. I had between $300 and $400 in the house, mostly in small bills and silver. This small fortune must be properly concealed. I concealed it by placing the various canvas bags in a large clean paper sack and burying this in the bottom of a half-empty flour barrel.

When the Pomeroys arrived, I was prepared. Having been forced to be hospitable, I decided to play the part of a genial host. I was at the screen door with the mosquito fan to welcome them when they trudged up the steps, laden with the paraphernalia of travel.

The brother I dismissed with a glance as they wearily introduced themselves. His name was Bert and, where Phil was pale and thin, he was swart and heavy—a dark, forbidding man with thick brows and straight, thick black hair, but with the same probing black eyes and ten days' growth of curly black beard; a man, I guessed, of the soil.

But the sister was cut from different material entirely. She was no more than nineteen, a brown-eyed girl with curly chestnut hair, bobbed quite short, and a nice smile. Her boyish motoring costume of khaki shirt and knickers, only revealed her girlish contours. Her cheeks were pink with sleepiness or embarrassment; and the tip of her small nose was smudged with powder, a concession, I imagined, to her inhospitable host. Even through their fatigue and dustiness I could glimpse the hostility that was waiting to reflect mine.

But I was as gracious, as host-like, as I knew how. I seized their suitcases and lumpy bundles and thrust them into the sitting room; cordially urged them to sit down and rest a moment before going to their rooms; begged them to let me make them some sandwiches.

"We ain't hungry," the big brother said wearily, with a tight, short smile. "We're just all in. We don't mind settin' a minute, though."

They sank wearily on chairs, all but the girl — Suzanne. With the resiliency of youth, from some deep well of reserve she had drawn a fresh supply of energy to meet this new situation. And I watched her with great interest. A woman is a pretty sure social index of her male companions.

This woman defied my powers of analysis. Her large brown eyes, her short curly hair, her rosy color, her small, slightly tip-tilted nose, her slender, red, well formed lips made her undeniably, a singularly pretty girl. But lady crooks are pretty—and know how to smile innocently, too.

I put some casual inquiries to Suzanne.

"We were going to Vero," Miss Pomeroy said in a husky, rather caressing young voice. "And I thought we never were going to reach the bottom of that swamp! Are there alligators in there?"

I nodded, enjoying the play of emotions about her mouth, the light in her lively eyes.

"I knew it!" she cried. "I threw a match box at a black snout and it simply went. Not a ripple!"

Her brothers were eying her stolidly. unsmilingly and, it seemed to me, with something akin to puzzlement.

"You are wintering in Vero?" I said politely, as any host might.

"We are going to buy a farm," Miss Pomeroy answered. "We're from Connecticut—near Hartford." She glanced hastily at her elder brother, as if she had let something forbidden escape, but he only nodded solemnly. The convict, however, was staring uneasily at me.

"Can't grow anything up there but rocks," he said, grimly funny.

"And mortgages," Suzanne laughed. "Is all Florida as sandy as this?"

"It grows anything," said I; and the brothers at once became alert, fixing me with their penetrating black eyes. I was growing more and more puzzled. Their attitude was that of men waiting—waiting for what?

"I've raised potatoes, corn and watermelon, one crop after another, in the same field with some fertilizer. It looks like gray sand, but it's richer than black loam. This was all river bottom. The river's off there—" I waved—"a mile."

The brothers exchanged glances, said nothing and looked at me solemnly. I still had that sense—it had grown a little—of something about to happen.

"In the old days, long before the Revolutionary War," I went on, "Yorkshiremen grew indigo, cane and cotton over there on the river. The old sugar mill—it ran by mule power—is so thick in jungle you can't get near it without an ax; but the old plantation house is on hight ground. It's almost as it was."

"Why'd they quit?" Bert Pomeroy wanted to know.

"Indians," I said, and watched the girl's eyes widen and sparkle.

"Been farmed around here much since?" the convict asked.

"Twice since. Forty years ago a young fellow and his bride started an orange grove —no one has ever seen it. The man wasn't much of a fruit man, and the girl didn't live. Anyhow, the jungle got the land back. In our times, promoters tried to put Vingo on the map as a farming paradise, but it was badly managed and they had hard luck. I still think they'd have won out if they'd stuck. We can grow potatoes and yams, as many barrels to the acre, as they do up in Hastings. Of course, they've spent a fortune on drainage."

"We went through there," the girl interrupted. "It was the town after East Palatka. Don't you remember those barrels, Phil? They had pink and blue rims."

"I remember," Phil said dully, and the girl's smile faded as she looked at him.

I let it go at that. Heaven only knew why I was telling them all this about Vingo, putting its best foot forward as if I were a real estate salesman! It's a habit you fall into, though, living in a place that's on the toboggan. I hated those jungles, creeping and crawling up about Vingo more thickly, more tightly each year strangling out of it the little life that was left as constrictors might strangle the spark of life out of a dying man. I didn't want the Pomeroys in

Vingo; and apparently they might settle anywhere, on the flip of a coin. Criminals enough came to Vingo without giving them engraved invitations!

The elder brother caught Suzanne Pomeroy's eye and slightly, significantly, lowered his thick black brows. Something was going to happen now. It did.

The girl gave me a queer, hard little smile, then plunged her hand down inside the bosom of her khaki shirt. A pearl-handled revolver leveled squarely at my heart would not have surprised me. Well, they would have to torture me before I would tell them where that money was cached; and it was easy to imagine the dark brother in the rôle of torturer.

Her hand reappeared with a black cotton sock, a man's sock. The leg was knotted and the foot was a fat lump.

Suzanne untied the knot and slid her hand into the sock, removing the lump. I gazed blankly at more money than I had ever seen outside a paying teller's window; a plump roll of green and yellow bills.

"We want you to keep it for us overnight, as an evidence of our good faith," she said. "We know we look like pretty desperate characters; but we've been on the road for days. We don't blame you for being suspicious." She put the money into my limp hands.

"Count it," the convict whispered.

I mechanically counted it, but my mind was on other things. The recent derelictions of Mack Saunders, alias Jerry Stinson and of Samuel K. Tilliston, alias Kenneth R. Ransom, alias George P. Nagle, alias John P. Ashley had made me strangershy. I wondered if I hadn't been oversuspicious of the Pomeroys from the very beginning, yet even now I suspected a trick or a trap. Was this, I wanted to know, only a clever disarming gesture, the first step in a dark plan, or simply the naïvely ingenuous act of three honest New Englanders anxious to correct my impression of them—to put me at ease? Where had all this money come from?

"Three thousand—even," I announced.

The three Pomeroys nodded. I started to return the money to the girl, but she waved it back.

"We want you to keep it for us. It will be a relief to have it keep somebody else awake for a change."

I looked from her pretty, flushed young face to the pale face of the convict and then at the dark older brother with his stubborn jaw and compressed red lips.

"I'll lock it up," I promised, thinking of the flour barrel.

"I guess you don't get many burglars through here," said the convict with another grim smile.

"Nor much of anybody else," his brother snorted.

"No," I affirmed. "Vingo is a sort of pocket, a blind alley. Strangers are rare."

Again the brothers exchanged intelligence with their intense black eyes.

"Of course, we have several trains a day—and the mail," I added, to let them see that I knew what was going on behind the scenes.

"That makes it handy," said the convict indifferently.

"But it's so far off the beaten track that you ain't likely to be bothered by people buttin' in on you," his brother added.

"Yes," I agreed, "if that's the kind of life a person wants. It gets pretty lonesome here, with trains going through all the time and nobody getting on or off."

"I should think that would make it less lonesome," Suzanne put in. "Trains going by make you feel that something's going on. They really don't bother you."

"I like lonesome places," her dark brother backed her up earnestly. "I like to be where every Tom, Dick and Harry won't come buttin' in and pesterin' me. I like to be off by myself. That was the trouble with the farm we just sold. Too much pesterin'. The first lonesome kind of place we find we're goin' to buy, if the price ain't too steep and the soil's likely. The lonesomer the better." He shot a sullen look at me from heavy hanging lids, and declared with sudden passion: "I hate people!"

I cleared my throat uncomfortably. The convict was staring blankly at the floor. Suzanne was stealthily regarding me. Said she:

" Do you have a sheriff or a constable here? I suppose nothing ever happens, though, in a quiet little place like this."

The convict lifted his eyes with a jerk. His brother stopped breathing through his mouth and fixed me with that uncomfortable black stare of his.

" I'm the deputy sheriff and game warden, State and county," I said, and was not surprised at the way they stared.

" But you—you don't have much to do," Suzanne gasped.

" The crackers are always shooting quail and deer out of season," I corrected her, " and about once a week some negro puts away too much ' mule ' and has to be locked up in Majolica on an assault and battery charge, usually preferred by his wife. Yes, there's plenty to do. A murderer and a check raiser slipped through my fingers in the past month. They didn't seem like criminals to me—I liked them both."

" Don't you think," Suzanne asked breathlessly, " that some crimes, punishable by law, are excusable? I mean, don't you think that an officer—you, for example—should use your own judgment, rather than follow the actual letter of the law, in dealing with—with criminals in a place like this?"

" Murderers?" I asked.

" Well, I happened to be thinking of people accused of stealing. Would you arrest a man here for stealing—on circumstantial evidence?"

" I have," I said.

She bit her lower lip and frowned, as if I had disappointed her.

" How about moonshiners?" the convict asked. " The woods must be full of them."

" I let them alone. The poor devils have a hard enough time."

The convict grinned bleakly. " Then, you use your judgment in enforcing laws?"

" A law ain't a law any more!" the dark brother snapped. " It's just what you personally think. She's right!" His heavy dark jaw was protruding; he was glaring at me.

" The whole country seems to be up in the air on that very question," I said.

" Is it fair?" he blazed. " Is it right?"

" Hush, Bert." Suzanne smiled apologetically at me. " When Bert gets wound up on the law, he'll argue till he's hoarse."

" You bet I will! It's a rotten condition when a man—"

" Oh, Bert, hush! You know how it upsets me and Phil when you carry on this way. Look at poor Phil. He can hardly hold his head up."

The convict grinned. Suzanne sleepily smiled, and the look she gave me was almost friendly. She rose, stretching up her slim young arms. In spite of her fatigue and the dust of travel, just to look at her made a man's heart race a little, she was so appealing, so soft and warm looking.

" If you'll excuse us," she said, " I think we all ought to go to bed. We've driven over three hundred miles since daylight—that's been our daily mileage, even through that red clay. Phil's a wonderful driver."

The dark brother snorted emotionally. " He sure can tool a flivver around these bum roads!"

" I'll lock up this money," I said. And when I returned from the flour barrel, I took them up to their rooms and prepared for bed.

My last act before turning out the light was to see that the pistol under my pillow was loaded, with a cartridge in the firing chamber. Common sense told me that it was foolish to feel this way. Hadn't they given three thousand dollars into my keeping as an evidence of their good faith? Could a girl of Suzanne's type be anything but honest and innocent?

But you know how distorted thoughts can be when you're lying abed in the dark. Those two men had filled the house with a black cloud. The jailbird with his waxen skin and bristling black poll and his ominous stare; and the older man with his smoldering hatred of law and people, his sinister wish for loneliness, were disturbing influences. If this dark thing that they radiated was not evil, then they were writhing in some kind of torture; smarting, savage, in a murderous mood, over some wrong of which the convict, I supposed, was the victim.

It all boiled down to a mystery; and the

boiling kept me awake for hours. Through the thin pine partition I heard one of the brothers groaning and cursing in his sleep. Outside the screen, tree toads and cicadas made the night shrill. A cricket chirped at measured intervals in the clothes closet. I heard Thirty-Seven rattle north, and knew that it must be almost four o'clock; then a long through freight from Key West pounded me to sleep. The next thing I heard was a girl singing.

II.

THE sun was not yet up, but the sky was full of wonderful color—shading from dark red on the horizon, through pink and violet and some nameless paler shade to the deep and dark but brilliant blue of the night sky, which was dappled with tiny, feathery clouds luminously yellow as they caught the first rays.

A damp, cool wind was blowing; it had shifted during the night, and the surf, six miles east, was pounding dully. That meant rain. When it pounds that way, as if it were only a few hundred yards distant, so that you can fairly feel the ground trembling, Vingo is sure to have rain. The camphor trees and the eaves were dripping with dew; and the air was full of the fresh, clean smell of the camphor leaves.

Then, sleepily, I realized that the singing issued from the kitchen. With one thought for the flour barrel, I leaped out of bed and dressed.

The singing stopped when I entered the kitchen. Suzanne was kindling a fire in the wood stove; one of the family suit cases was open on the kitchen table, and from it packages and cans had been removed.

A fresh-looking starched blue dress had taken the place of the khaki shirt and knickers of last night; her skin glowed from a recent scrubbing, and when she turned from the stove with a friendly grin she might have stepped right off a magazine cover. With the dark cloud of the two brothers removed, even by a thin pine floor, she was a different girl, jolly and sparkling, willing to flirt a little with her big brown eyes out of the ebullience of youth and because she knew she was attractive to any man.

"This is our treat," she cheerily informed me. "I need something to break eggs in. Did the Pomeroy family keep you awake?"

"I slept like a log," I lied, and fetched her a glazed brown bowl. "How do you like Vingo?"

"Great," she said earnestly. "I've been prowling around ever since the first streak of light. I want you to tell me about something. Wait till I put this percolator on."

She went briskly out through the front door and into the yard, I following; stopped when she had reached the fence. The trade wind blew fragrantly in our faces.

"Wait," she said softly, with her small, tip-tilted nose in the air. "Smell that?" she demanded suddenly. "Like narcissus, but different?"

I sniffed.

"Orange blossoms," I announced. "You see that big green mass? That's jungle. It comes from there. When the wind is blowing as it is this morning, we smell them. It's nearly the end of orange blossom time, you know. I've never seen those particular trees. That's the lost orange grove I was telling you about last night."

Suzanne was staring with wide, softly glowing eyes at the jungle.

"The lost orange grove!" she whispered.

It seemed strange, and then again it did not, that those remaining lost half-strangled trees should mean romance to that girl. They had never affected me one way or another until then; and then I inhaled that faint perfume, so to speak, through her nostrils, and saw the romantic tragedy of the planter and his fragile bride through her eyes, their enterprise choked with tropical growth, and leaving, after forty years, nothing but a faint, sweet breath to remember them by.

"The poor dears!" Suzanne breathed. Then she excitedly wanted to know if I had ever tried to find the grove.

"You wouldn't recognize it if you saw it," I answered. "It has become part of the growth, and that thicket is almost impenetrable. The ground is solid brier. Even hunters don't go in there."

Her eyes were still glowing dreamily.

"I'd love to live here," she said suddenly, and when I asked why, shook her head vaguely and said: "It's interesting. Those Yorkshiremen you told us about—they *knew*. So did those poor things who started the orange grove. And the men who tried to make this place a farming paradise. It's different, somehow. You can't get away from indigo and cotton and lost orange groves and—and Utopia, can you?"

"Indians, drought, cloudbursts, dengue fever and jungle were the practical things they couldn't get away from," I replied, thinking of her brothers.

"You're pretending," she said disappointedly. "You feel the same way or you wouldn't be here. It's having your back to something solid—and good instead of—well, to something new and touristy."

I was puzzled.

"Somehow," I said, "I can't picture a girl like you caring for this sort of thing."

"Like me?" she sweetly caught me up.

"A girl your age," I corrected myself. "A girl your age isn't usually interested in things that have died on the vine."

She laughed. "Can't you see the romance of those two poor things fighting that jungle, trying to get their grove started—that poor girl dying?"

"I can't see any romance in penning up a young, pretty girl on a Florida farm—the kind your older brother seems to want."

"He hates people," she said gravely.

"How about you?" I boldly asked.

Her large brown eyes were sober. "I have a sense of duty."

The color suddenly drained from her cheeks.

"I guess I can stand it!" she cried. "You don't know what we've been through—what my brother Phil has been through."

"He looks like a man who has suffered," I encouraged her.

"Suffered!" she gasped, then clamped her lips together and looked at me defiantly; and I knew that my efforts were being wasted.

The family secret of the Pomeroys, the mystery of the convict, was not going to be betrayed by Suzanne.

The humming and chattering of a motor interrupted us, and I resentfully watched the rusty top of a car sliding along the tips of the broom sage in the field across the road.

Gene Bantry, superintendent and part owner of one of the Vingo quarries, parked his Ford roadster outside the gate, observed that the kitchen door was open, and wanted to know where in hell I was. Then he caught sight of the slim, dark-eyed girl in blue beside me under the camphor tree.

"Oh, I b-beg your pardon!" he stammered.

"It's all right," Suzanne said cheerily. "I've used the word myself."

Gene came over, embarrassed and a little bewildered, and I introduced them. Suzanne shook his big brown paw and looked up at him demurely. She seemed to be enjoying the situation immensely. Gene was a tall, sunburned, awkward, good-looking youngster with dazzling blue eyes and spiky straw-colored hair. He was, without any question, the hardest working man in Vingo, and we were great friends. It was the first time I had ever seen Gene with a girl as pretty as Suzanne Pomeroy, and his embarrassment was delightful. He looked from her to me with a ferocious grin, and his eyes were dazed. Gene had once confessed to me that women frightened him.

"Miss Pomeroy and her two brothers have toured down from Hartford, Connecticut. They lost the main road last night and got bogged down in Little Cypress. If you want a job you can pull the car out."

"Sure!" Gene eagerly agreed. "I'll run down to the quarry for a team of mules."

"You Southerners have certainly got a corner on hospitality," Suzanne said.

"We aren't Southerners," Gene told her. "Buck here's from Ohio, and I'm from Saginaw, Michigan. Are you thinking of locating in Florida, Miss Pomeroy?"

"We're thinking of buying a farm," Suzanne replied. "We heard there was some pretty good land around Vero and Cocoa, and we thought we'd drive over to see Kissimmee and Orlando, too."

Gene shook his head vigorously. "They have run up the prices out of sight, Miss

Pomeroy. What's the matter with Vingo? You can buy a fine farm here for a song."

"The sheriff just finished telling me," said Suzanne, "that nothing grows in Vingo but lost hopes and hard feelings."

Gene snorted mirthfully. "Just because a New York commission dealer trimmed him last month on a carload of potatoes, he blames Vingo. I'll tell you what I'll do, Miss Pomeroy," he went on energetically. "I'll just beat it back to the quarry, get a team of mules and pull your car out, then we'll all go down and have a talk with old man Bell. He owns four hundred acres of the finest land in Florida, and you can have it at your own price. That patch of jungle over there is part of it. I've prospected for rock all along the edge, and if it's cleared off it will grow anything from cane to grapefruit."

"Did you see the lost orange grove?" Suzanne eagerly demanded.

"No, ma'am, but it's always had a hold on my imagination, and some day, when I catch up to myself, I'm going to find it. What there is left of it is probably somewhere in the heart of the growth—where a grove would naturally be planted. Those people grew oranges before people knew what oranges were.

"Now's the time to plant orange trees. You could protect them on three sides, and there's a pond in there fed from underground springs that would keep frost away. That patch of jungle takes up about one hundred acres. There is some rock there, but it's ojus. Otherwise, that patch would be worth a fortune. Ojus is soft, crumbly stuff, and what we want is hard coquina—that is, for road and building work.

"All this section was under the Atlantic at one time and there is a ridge of rock running through here as far south as New Smyrna, maybe farther. Both ojus and coquina are a composition of tiny sea-shells naturally cemented together in ledges sometimes as thick as ten feet, but usually less. In the ojus, the binder didn't seem to take. Ojus is no more valuable than so much sand.

"Coquina is the most practical road and building rock there is for this climate. I'm working on some experiments now, making bricks of it. Simply mix ground up coquina with water and mold it. Those bricks are almost as hard as kiln-baked bricks."

Gene was gazing at Miss Pomeroy eagerly, and her large, soft brown eyes were glowing up at him. Gene was an eager, enthusiastic young man, but his excitement now made me wonder. Those coquina bricks of his were a secret; he expected to make a fortune with them. Suzanne's dark-eyed, pink-cheeked beauty had evidently intoxicated him; he was babbling like a child.

"My quarry—rather, the quarry I'm part owner of," he resumed, after studying her a few seconds, "adjoins Bell's jungle. I can tell you all you want to know about the land. Shall we run down and talk to him?"

"But you must be busy," Suzanne objected.

Gene laughed. "Time, as my black cook says, is something I ain't got nothin' else of but."

"I want you to talk to my brothers," Suzanne said suddenly, and ran into the house.

Gene Bantry released his breath in a long, fragile sigh, and shifted dreamy blue eyes from the empty doorway to me. He placed his two large sunburned hands on my shoulders and waved me gently back and forth, staring at me somberly.

"Buck," he said in a hushed tone, "have you just been listening to the music of the spheres?"

"It sounded to me," I replied, "like an essay on coquina rock. It seems to me you are getting pretty careless with your bricks."

He grinned excitedly. "Isn't she the loveliest thing you ever laid eyes on?"

"She's a cute kid," I agreed.

"Cute!" he groaned. "I want to know—as man to man—did you ever see such eyes in your life? Did you see the little specks of gold in them? Did you notice how they grew bright, then dark, then bright, time after time, as if clouds were passing over them? Did you see how big the irises were when she got excited?"

He lowered his hands slowly from my

shoulders, and shook his head as if baffled. He looked up sharply.

" Couldn't a man work his fingers to the bone for a girl like that? Did you notice how she fixes her hair? Hasn't she the sweetest damn smile? Did you notice how little her hands are? Honest, Buck, I'm pretty hard boiled, but I'll admit when I'm walloped. I've been looking for that girl all my life! I'm going to marry that girl!"

" Whether she'll have you or not."

" Laugh if you want to," he said. " But the minute I saw her—" He stopped and said " Hell," very softly. " Are *those* her brothers?"

The Pomeroy brothers were descending the porch steps. Bathed, shaved and rested, they looked a little less dangerous than they had the night before, but no less grim and, somehow, no less tragic. I had not, after all, imagined the dark cloud. The face of the convict was as waxen, as white; the eyes of the older brother as sullen.

Suzanne introduced them to Gene Bantry, but her happy mood was past. Under the dark cloud she seemed to grow sedate, repressed.

Gene answered their questions courteously, but he was obviously puzzled. Well, who wouldn't be puzzled? There was as much difference between Suzanne Pomeroy and those two brothers of hers as there is between sunlight and darkness. She stood for everything that was happy and gay and joyous, and in them was the threat of lightning and thunder and volcanoes.

" Aside from the patch of jungle," Gene told them, " which would take time and lots of hard work to clear off, there's twenty acres of pine and ten of cypress and about three hundred acres of fine open land, mostly fenced. It's fine potato and corn land. Where the jungle is, the soil is richer, of course. But if you decide to take the place, you're welcome to use two or three teams of my mules any time."

The look Bert Pomeroy gave him was a surprise. There was no gratitude in it, nothing but suspicion and doubt. From Gene he looked at Suzanne, who was smiling up into the quarryman's sunburned, eager face, and something about Bert Pomeroy's eyes tightened. Gene's admiration lighted up his whole face, and Suzanne's elder brother sharply disapproved of it. And Gene, sensing this hostility, sobered.

Having had experiences of my own with Gene's stubbornness, I was prepared for interesting developments. And Gene, with the sensitiveness and cleverness of a lover, shifted his attack. Gene was determined that the Pomeroys were going to settle in Vingo.

" I hate to see that old Bell farm go to seed the way it has," he energetically resumed. " Bell hasn't the strength left to farm it, and there's nothing I'd like better than to see two men like yourselves take it over. I've never lost faith in Vingo, and I want to see it come back. And you can pick up Bell's place for next to nothing."

" How much?" Bert interrupted.

" What buildings are on it?" the convict added.

Gene Bantry looked smilingly from one to the other, but his eyes were hard.

" There's a house you couldn't put up to-day for less than four thousand, a good sized barn, and a lot of chicken houses and runs. They've never been painted, and they all need a lot of work. Bell paid twelve thousand for the works. I'm pretty sure he'd let it go for two."

The brothers exchanged glances.

" What I want," Bert Pomeroy said, " is a place where I won't be bothered with people. I don't like visitors."

Gene chuckled, but his whole body was stiff; and I knew that he disliked the Pomeroy brothers even more than I did.

" You won't be bothered," he said. " I would be your nearest neighbor, and I'm too busy minding my own business to butt into other people's. The Bell farm will give you one hundred per cent solitude. Do you want to look it over?"

The Pomeroy brothers silently consulted each other. Bert Pomeroy presently spoke.

" Yes, we'll give it a look."

" Well, I'm going down to the quarry now for some mules to pull your car out. I'll be back by the time you've finished breakfast. Buck, let me have the commissary key. That's what I came for. My

boiler man smashed his thumb, and I want some iodine."

I accompanied Gene to his roadster, and when we were safely out of earshot, said: "You're letting yourself in for a mess of trouble. Those two are bad eggs. One's either an escaped convict or they've just let him out."

Gene nodded. "Yes, I got that, but don't you see, Buck, I've got to make them settle here? Somebody has to watch out for that girl, and I'm going to do it."

"You know what's likely to happen," I warned him. "If the younger one is what we think he is, his photograph and Bertillon measurements are going to come in the mail some day soon."

"Let's not jump that fence," Gene said grimly, "until we get to it. That girl needs somebody like me around. I can't look after her, can I, if they slip away to Vero or Kissimmee?"

"After looking over the rest of the family, you're still determined to marry her?" I asked.

He grinned. "You know me, Buck, when I run into opposition!"

III.

Breakfast with the Pomeroys was an affair of grim and ominous silence. My questions concerning their Connecticut farm were met with long-pondered, unenlightening answers. But that breakfast at least provided me with a slightly wider acquaintance with the three Pomeroys' characters. The convict ate sparingly, but his table manners were above reproach. Bert, on the other hand, only confirmed my original impression. He handled his knife and fork as a farm hand does. He devoured his food, drank his coffee—three cups of it—slowly and with relish. He was of the breed that does not talk when it eats.

When he had finished he pushed his chair back and lighted a cheap cigarette. He then asked me who Bantry was, and I told him.

"Gene came to Vingo shortly after the war and went to work in Lockhart's quarry as a timekeeper. He's a hard worker. Saved his money and bought a part interest. He will buy Lockhart out eventually. Gene's going to be one of the big men of Florida some day. He's a fanatic on good roads. Of course, his quarry is supplying most of the rock for the new State highway. His two passions are good roads and coquina rock."

"I think he's a peach," Suzanne exclaimed, and promptly subsided, the smile dying on her lips, the light fading from her eyes.

The reason: Two pairs of black eyes filled with puzzlement and disapproval leveled at her like the muzzles of four pistols.

"I wouldn't trust that fellow any farther than I could throw a cow by the tail," Bert Pomeroy announced.

That irritated me. "Why not?" I asked. "I've known him for five years. He's one of the few men who've come to Vingo who haven't stung me with a bad check or run off owing me for rations."

"He's too smooth," Bert said stubbornly. "I don't like his looks."

I should have kept my temper, but didn't. "Do you like anybody's looks?" I snapped.

He only stared at me, not murderously, as I might have expected, but gloomily, darkly, with a sour curiosity.

"Not very many," he said thoughtfully. "People are out to do you. They're slick and sly and double-faced; they talk big when they're with you, then they stab you in the back. Give them a chance, and they'll break you—they'll break you and stamp on you!"

"But there are exceptions," I suggested.

He shook his black head, snugged down his thick black brows.

"I ain't met any," he said curtly.

I looked at Suzanne, but she was staring out of the window at the purple bougainvillae vine by the side gate. The cool glare of the early morning lighted her profile, which was that of a sober, unhappy girl. I was vaguely sorry for Gene Bantry.

When the brothers went upstairs to pack their suit cases, and Suzanne busied herself at the kitchen sink, I slipped into the pantry, removed the Pomeroy fortune from the flour barrel, and presented it to her. She stuffed the roll absently into the bosom of

the blue dress and looked up at me with the clear, steady gaze of puzzled girlhood.

"I suppose you think things are—queer," she said in a soft, low voice.

I told her I had tried not to be curious, and that I could not let her brother say what he had about Gene Bantry, knowing Gene as well as I did. Suzanne pushed a lock of curly chestnut hair away from her temple with a slim forearm, and bit her lip.

"I'm sorry it happened," she said. "When he takes these sudden dislikes, he loses all sense of judgment. I don't think we'd make very pleasant neighbors." She plunged a plate into soapy water and washed it lackadaisically; leaned the plate against others on the drainboard, and placed her moist hands on her hips.

"Look here," she said with severity, "if we should buy a farm here, will you try and be good friends?"

I waited in silence.

"You think my brothers are bad men. They have never done a wrong in their lives. They've been victims of persecution—so have I! I didn't intend to say this much, and I can't say any more. But I want you to know why they act so—strangely. When we started for Florida we solemnly agreed that our past was a closed book. We want to forget our past. If you'll be our friend—in spite of the way Bert acts—it will help. I mean, if something out of our past—"

"Out of Phil's past?" I interrupted.

She was, for some seconds, unable to go on.

"If anything should bob up out of our past," she said in a frightened voice, "won't you—won't you—"

"Keep my mind, for example, on the lost orange grove?"

Her eyes brightened hopefully.

"You want me to forget my solemn oath of office?" I said sternly.

"I want you to be just. After all, it was such a little thing—such a trivial thing!"

"Well," I decided, borrowing Gene Bantry's words, "let's not jump that fence till we come to it. You haven't bought the Bell place yet. You may go on to Cocoa or Kissimmee."

Suzanne Pomeroy shook her head. "We will stay here. I know."

She was right; and a Florida summer rainstorm was responsible. While the three Pomeroys and Gene Bantry called on old man Bell in the rescued and resuscitated flivver, I opened the commissary to the throng of negroes who were patiently waiting to buy rations, snuff, and cigarettes. The rain wind had come with the Pomeroys, and the clouds that rolled up from the southwest that morning might have been some emanation of Bert Pomeroy's sullen spirit. It rained steadily all afternoon, all night, all next day. By morning Vingo was a dreary swamp, and the rain frogs were shrilling for more.

Gene Bantry rode up on a mule in the evening to inform me that the Pomeroy brothers had been dickering with old man Bell all day long. They had been looking over the farm when the rain started, and had intended to pull out for Vero; being shut up in the house with nothing else to do, Bert had begun haggling with old man Bell over the price he was asking, had beaten him down from twenty-five hundred to seventeen fifty. They were going to Majolica as soon as the roads were navigable, to sign the necessary papers.

Bert Pomeroy's first act on assuming ownership had been to request Gene to stay away from the property, using his pet phrase, "I don't like people buttin' in on me." I reminded Gene that the path of true love was notoriously rough and full of detours.

"We will be married," Gene said dreamily, "inside of three months."

"Is Suzanne aware of it?" I asked.

"She has an inkling," Gene dryly admitted. "We went into quite a few things before that cinnamon bear handed me my walking papers. She told me about the talk she'd had with you, and just between you and me, Buck, I want to know what you're going to do about it."

"If that fellow's wanted for murder, what can anybody do about it?"

"It was something else; she told me so. For her sake," he pleaded, "give those two grouches an even break. They're hard workers, and if they farm that land right,

Vingo may come back to life. Why can't we grow as big as Hastings?"

"It's unlucky land"—I quoted the superstition of the negroes—"there's been too much blood let into it."

Gene didn't take stock in that belief; it was voodoo stuff, yet, as far back as Spanish days, the negroes declared, Vingo land had been "sorcered." At night, down by the alligator wallows near the river, you could sometimes hear the groans of those old Spanish "haints." When St. Augustine had been a peaceful village, Vingo was being drenched with the blood of Indian victims. The French were similarly unfortunate and, later, the English—the Yorkshiremen with their fields of indigo "like the sky turned upside down." Since those early misfortunes, American farmers had failed for one reason or another. The Utopian experiment was the latest and probably the grandest failure. So the venture of the Pomeroy brothers was watched with curiosity.

Their methods left little room for bad luck; they labored too diligently. And they brought with them the frugality and honesty for which the Connecticut Yank is celebrated. They traded at the commissary only when they could not buy supplies more cheaply in Majolica or from the mail-order houses; and they paid spot cash. Thrift was their watchword. Their ingenious restoration of the farmhouse and outbuildings was an example.

These structures had never been painted, and dry rot was setting in. No one but a New England farmer or a Frenchman would have hit upon the scheme they used. They picked up a hundred pounds of reddish-brown paint pigment for practically nothing at a fire sale in Majolica, then made a tour of the garages and collected fifty gallons of old oil which had been drained from crank cases. The oil cost them nothing. They filtered it through cloth and mixed it with the pigment. With this cheap mixture they painted their buildings. It made fire traps of them, but it stopped the dry rot, and the result, from an artistic point of view, was surprising. As the oil soaked in, the color changed from a raw reddish-brown to a soft tint.

When Phil or Bert came to the commissary for rations or tobacco, they had little to say. They were "making out;" and I was glad of this. I liked neither of them, but it was impossible not to admire them. They were doing the work of five men—repairing fences, clearing land, plowing, planting, digging out the old drainage ditches. But it was from Suzanne that I learned that they were going to plant most of their acreage to pecans.

Pecans are a seven-year proposition, and they don't begin yielding profitably for nine.

"We're thinking of the future," said Suzanne.

They had been in Vingo then about five months, and Gene Bantry's prophecy was no nearer fulfillment than it had been that day when he had met Suzanne. He told me one night in the darkness of my front porch that Suzanne loved him. They had talked it over.

"I told her I couldn't live without her. Well, she will never leave those two brothers of hers as long as they need her. And they can't get along without her. Planting pecans! Seven more years! Why in hell weren't they satisfied with potatoes? And they won't let me see her; and she isn't the kind who will sneak off and meet me somewhere! Can you guess where I popped the question, Buck? In the back seat of her flivver in Bill's garage while she was getting a tire fixed! Oh, it's rotten. Everything is wrong. Everything's been wrong since those two came here. They're a pair of hard luck guys. They're poisonous!"

Denied the companionship of the man she loved, Suzanne was looking for romance in another direction. When household duties permitted, she was making a path through the jungle toward the lost orange grove. I asked her one time what her brothers thought of her efforts, and was surprised when she said that they wanted her to find it.

"Did you smell it last night?"

I had. It was February, the month of orange blossoms, and the air had been filled with the sweet breath from the hidden grove.

"What do you expect to find when you get there?" I wanted to know. "Trees loaded with oranges? They'll be sour and little, you know."

She knew; but her eyes were glowing. The lost orange grove, I think, corresponded to some mysterious and cherished thing in Suzanne's girlhood—some fragrant and wonderful hope. Her quest was the hopeless one we all carry through life—the quest for a mysterious, indefinable something.

When Suzanne finally reached the heart of the jungle, she found there a solitary orange tree, a gnarled old giant, drenched with fragile, waxy-white blossoms, enmeshed in clinging creepers and bearded with long gray moss. She laid about her with an ax, freed the giant of parasites and brought down small trees and underbrush about the trunk until a clearing was made. Of the grove, this tree alone survived. Under the twisted branches she built with her own hands a little bench, and this was Suzanne's retreat, and Suzanne's alone. It was a green, hushed place, penetrated by no other sound than the distant, muffled crunching of Gene Bantry's crusher; and when the tree was in bloom, it must have resembled a corner of paradise. To this sacred place of green twilight Suzanne came when she was unhappy, and, I suppose, when she wanted to think things out.

There were soon plenty of things for her to be unhappy over. The bad luck of the Pomeroys started when they had been in Vingo about a year, and it was heralded, so the negroes said, by the black mosquitoes. These mosquitoes descended upon Vingo in swarms, and they might have been dipped in India ink. They had the pendulous flaccidity of overripe grapes. They drooped. They clung. They were offensively damp, but they did not sting. They reminded me of unhappy thoughts with wings; any one walking in the evening, even in the open, was attended by a mournful halo of them. They could have come only from dismal swamps.

IV

A NEGRO from Cypress Spoon, who had been running a tie camp in Big Cypress Swamp, came into the commissary one day and paid his bill. He was through tie cutting; the railroad tie inspector had just come through with heartbreaking news; the price of seven by nine cypress-heart ties had been lopped from one dollar and seventy-five to one dollar and thirty-five; there was a corresponding drop in seconds—six by eights—and culls.

That was really the beginning. The Pomeroy brothers had set out ten acres of pecan plants and had put thirty acres of well worked over land to potatoes. While this latter crop was maturing, they were getting out ties from the cypress swamp on the southern L of their property. They had hired negroes and mules; had been in the swamp for a month and had stacked up more than six hundred seven by nine ties to be hauled to the railroad when the news came of the drop. Wages would be cut accordingly; but each of those ties represented a loss.

Thus the Pomeroys' hard luck began. The usual rains did not come. That was, from any but the farmer's point of view, a delightful spring, a season of brilliant blue skies and playful, cool breezes. Every noon little patches of cloud would swim to the zenith; feathery rainbow plumes would extend downward, stairway fashion, from one to another, and from the lowermost a brief, misty shower would settle to earth. Not enough rain fell in these noon showers to film over the dust; water lay in tiny globules, evaporating almost instantly. The fields turned brown, then yellow, then gray. The swamps dried up. Moccasins and alligators migrated from drying hole to drying hole, eventually crowding the deeper railroad ditches. The crow-foot tracks of an alligator that must have been fifteen feet long were cameo clear in the road dust before my house one morning. He had passed silently, some time in the night, driven by a wonderful thirst.

The Pomeroys' potato crop would be small—if the dry weather continued. If the rains came, the crop would be a total failure. The rains came—long, gentle rains—and the potatoes rotted. The fields turned green again; the hardy weeds grew, it seemed to me, a foot in a night.

The Pomeroys planted ten acres to table corn. It was half grown when a herd of Florida cattle broke through a fence and trampled it down. The fence laws of Florida protect the cattlemen; a farmer's fences are supposed to be in order. Presumably, the Pomeroys' fence was weak.

But the Florida growing season is blessedly long. There was still time for another crop. The Pomeroys plowed the corn field and planted it to watermelons. The light rains continued for weeks; the melons ripened. Perhaps three days, perhaps a week, before the watermelons were ripe enough to pick, a cloudburst, five hours in passage, swept up the east coast of Florida. In five hours eight inches of rain fell.

I was wakened during the night by water cascading through the wooden ceiling above my bed. A high wind was blowing. Every window in the house leaked. Floors upstairs and down were puddles. A small river was flowing from the dining room into the kitchen and splashing down the back porch steps. The sitting room was the only dry room in the house. I spent the night there, wakened at short intervals by the slashing of rain and the explosions of wind.

Morning came grimly, a nightmare of orange light and black columns of shadow reaching up to angry yellow clouds; of tossing flood. My house might have been an anchored ship. Vingo's deserted dwellings were individual islands; one had collapsed.

I dressed, omitted breakfast, and hastened to the commissary in hip boots. In some places along the cement walk the water was a yard deep. The commissary, on high land, had not been injured, but the walls inside were so wet that they glistened. Corn meal and grits, in paper bags, could not be salvaged. I spread out rice and sugar to dry.

The rain had stopped. A little after ten the wind dropped, the clouds parted upon a blissful sky, and the sun came out with a blaze. Gene Bantry dropped in a little after noon. His mule was wet half way up its gray belly. His eyes were staring; his normally deeply tanned skin was as white and oily as a peach kernel.

"I guess I'm through," he said. "This flood just finishes everything."

Both pits were eye deep. He had been track walking along the spur which led from his quarry to the main line; it was going to take three weeks to fill in the washouts. Half the track was invisible.

"A three weeks shut down—on top of everything!"

His wild eyes alarmed me. The past year had been a difficult one for Gene. A year ago he had become, by virtue of an abiding trust which the loan board of the Majolica bank had in his ability and honesty, the full owner of the Lockhart quarry. He had bought new machinery and enlarged his pit gangs — all with Majolica bank paper. To meet those loans when they fell due meant uninterrupted production.

The Vingo Rock Quarry, an active competitor less than a quarter of a mile from his own, was making his life miserable. It was constantly changing hands, being sold by one set of bankrupts to another set of enthusiasts whose first act upon taking possession was to cut the price of rock below cost—and going broke as their predecessors had done. This happened three times in one year. To secure contracts, he had to meet their prices, or cut dangerously close to his own production costs.

In that year Gene lost twenty pounds in weight and gained ten years in age. The boy was being whipped out of him; and a grim, gaunt, bitter stranger was taking his place. The Pomeroy brothers had become an obsession with him. They had brought bad luck, he insisted, to Vingo. He once boiled his opinion of the dark brothers into one searing sentence: "The skids to hell are greased by the Pomeroys in this world."

This morning, after inspecting his flooded pits and track, he had paid the Pomeroys a visit, whether for a heartening glimpse of Suzanne or to gloat over this newest disaster of her brothers, he did not say. The dark brothers were plunged so deeply in despair that they had ignored him. He had waded out to the melon patch with Suzanne. The melons were, he said, like so many bloated dead fish lying in the water. The water would drain, and the sun would burst them, or they would simply rot in the mud.

I have often wondered if the black Pomeroy mood was not a magnet for disaster. Misfortune continued to make them her playthings. The loss of the melon crop exploded their last hope, and left them almost penniless. They sold their Ford, and one of their mule teams. With the remaining team they endeavored to supply the winter tourist demand in Majolica for firewood. Within a week of their starting, firewood dropped from six dollars a strand to three seventy-five, but firewood was their only salvation, and all that winter they sawed and chopped and hauled.

With a negro hired by the day, Phil worked in the woods, and Bert, with the team and a ramshackle wagon, hauled load after load to Majolica. They lived, it seemed to me, on practically nothing, and Suzanne, I suspected, was a frequent visitor to her retreat under the old orange tree. And I wondered if Suzanne was not finding romance the will-o'-the-wisp it usually becomes when reality stalks.

She, too, was changed. On her rare visits to the commissary, I found her a sober, thoughtful girl. Her gayety, her love of life and romance had some way been mislaid. Her appealing slimness had become thinness. She still retained her lovely coloring, and her eyes, larger with a perpetual wonder, were beautiful. Her brimming youth could be translated into terms of optimism with slight encouragement.

"We've had a run of bad luck," she said one day, shortly after the watermelon disaster, "but I think it's over. Everybody's been having bad luck. We haven't any corner on it. Those farmers at Hastings were hit harder than we were. One man had thirty thousand dollars in late potatoes wiped out that night. They were going to begin digging and sorting the next day. Our pecans are doing beautifully. Only five more years until they begin bearing, and next spring, every cent we save on selling firewood is going into new plants. How is our credit going to be?"

"The sky is the limit," I said, not thinking that she meant it seriously.

Suzanne smiled. "Well, that's a bridge crossed. How's Gene? I haven't seen him since the day of the big rain."

"Gene," I said, "is feeling pretty low. The bank is yelling for money; his south pit hasn't drained yet, and his engine went off the track again yesterday. That means another day's shutdown, and he tells me the railroad inspectors are going to refuse to allow their gondolas on his spur if there are any more accidents. Gene has changed."

"Terribly!" She looked at me with steady, wistful eyes.

"Why," I said boldly, "don't you give him something to be happy about?"

"My brothers—" she began.

"I'm beginning to think," I cut her off, "that no self-sacrifice is worth while. Gene is miserable without you."

"And he'd be just as miserable with me," she said with spirit. "Gene has troubles enough now without taking on another. My brothers, without me, would just go to pieces. I'm not worrying about Gene. Some day he will be rich and successful. And some day my brothers will be successful, too. Gene and I can wait."

"Until the pecans are bearing," I said.

"I'll only be twenty-six," said Suzanne.

The promptness of her reply made me realize that Suzanne was gambling everything on the pecan grove. It was wonderful, of course, to be young enough to make and remake your plans so easily, not to be crushed by misfortunes, but to use each as it occurred as the stepping stone for glorious hopes; and it was tragic, too. The flexibility of youth is so easily turned brittle.

V.

THE following fall, at planting time, the Pomeroys secured with some difficulty a small mortgage on their farm. This, with the profits from their woodcutting, they put into seed potatoes and two more acres of pecans. When the planting was done, they turned to telegraph pole cutting in their wood lot to carry them over the spring. Suzanne, taking my word at its face value, proceeded to run up a staggering bill at the commissary; and the dark brothers no longer were visitors. Being in debt hurt them. Suzanne said, more cruelly than anything that had happened so far.

The spring was dry; not so dry as the previous one, but soon the fields were yellow. Only the swamps remained moist. Cowboys rounding up cattle left a cook fire burning at the edge of a pine hammock which faced upon a field of broom sage. I was locking up the commissary for lunch when the blaze started. A column of yellow smoke tinged with black and streaked with shooting sparks, rushed, slanting, into the sky.

The sullen roar of a Florida bush fire is one of the most ominous sounds I have ever heard. There was no time to think of where the wind would blow the fire. With the help of negroes I started backfiring, first at the commissary, then at the house. The original blaze ate its way in all directions; leaped dry drainage ditches, even spanned, in one place, a road. We spent three hours fighting the fire back, and by that time the whole of Vingo seemed to be in flames.

Two of the old deserted houses went up magnificently; and not until that evening, when Gene Bantry, black and blistered, dropped in, did I learn of the damage elsewhere. The fire had swept like a red battalion across the sage brush field toward the Pomeroys' two-year-old pecan grove. The Pomeroys had had no experience with bush fires; help came too late. When the smoke cleared, the plants were caricatures in carbon.

I said wrathfully: "Poor Suzanne!"

"I guess that means they're through," Gene said wearily. "Well, it looks as if the blacks are right. This land is cursed."

I wanted to know if he had seen Suzanne.

"Nope," he said. "When she saw what was happening she probably beat it out to that damned orange tree. A funny place to go for comfort and consolation. Wouldn't you think she'd come to me? What do you suppose will happen next? Do you think the sky will break into chunks and fall on those poor devils?"

But the sky, when it broke into chunks, fell first on Gene Bantry. Less than a week after the fire he was, as far as we could make out, a ruined man. The crash came without any warning.

New owners, a businesslike trio of Jacksonville men, had taken over the other quarry; and one of their first acts was to hire civil engineers to run a survey. No survey had been made in years, not since both original owners had bought the land. The boundaries had always been very definitely understood—a fence, a road, a line marked by trees agreed upon. Gene had taken Lockhart's word for it, and the Vingo Rock Company's land would supply rock for a hundred years.

The survey showed that Gene Bantry had been mining rock on the Vingo Rock Company's land for more than six months; he had taken out considerably more than three acres of rock that was not his own. And this was not the worst. Gene Bantry's rock area was entirely exhausted; the rest of his land contained nothing but valueless ojus, and twenty-five acres of hard coquina that he thought belonged to him was the rightful property of the Vingo Rock Company. He had just taken on a large contract to supply rock for a new State road; and had finally found a man who would furnish capital for manufacturing coquina building bricks on a large scale.

Gene Bantry stopped quarrying; shut down his crusher and paid off his men. There was nothing else to do.

Then, one bright afternoon, vengeance and calamity in the person of one Lee K. Dimlock came to Vingo on the accommodation train from Jacksonville. After three years dedicated more or less to forgetting, the past of the Pomeroys was come to life. Like an old wound, it was brutally torn open and exposed for every one to see.

Lee Dimlock was a heavy, square built man, with square feet, square hands, a square face and a square jaw. His hair was of the color which, in horse circles, is described as strawberry roan. His eyes were small and palely, angrily, blue. His air was that of a prosperous farmer. He looked to me like a mean man, and his age, I guessed, was about forty. His pale skin and the way he squinted in the strong June light hinted that he was from the north. And when he spoke it was with the pronounced nasal intonation of New England. He wanted, brusquely and harshly, to know where the Pomeroys lived.

I watched him go down the road toward the old Bell farm with a vague uneasiness. There was a grim determination in his bearing that did not bode well for the Pomeroys. A New Englander looking for the Pomeroys! Three years had passed since the Pomeroy flivver had taken the wrong road and been bogged down for the night in Little Cypress. In that time no visitors and no mail, save for an occasional parcel post shipment from the mail order houses, had come for them, and I had decided that Phil Pomeroy, if he had once been a convict, had served his time and was entitled to be as free as any man. A rank growth of straight black hair had taken the place of the close-clipped poll; his pallor had given way to a sun-baked brown; he was now but a younger edition of the elder brother.

Lee Dimlock had been gone an hour when Dan Melville, a negro who was employed by the Pomeroy brothers to skin telegraph poles, came loping down the road to the commissary. He was, at first, incoherent with terror. I gleaned that there had been a fight, that Bert Pomeroy had shot and killed the stranger from the North.

On our way to my house to get my flivver, Dan spurted details. The Pomeroys were finishing lunch when Lee Dimlock arrived. There was a great deal of cursing, Dan said, and then a fight, starting at the porch steps and ending by the front gate. The Pomeroys had beaten the stranger almost insensible when he drew a revolver. Bert snatched it from his hand and, as Dimlock staggered backward begging him not to shoot, had shot him in the chest.

When I reached the Pomeroy house, the brothers were waiting on the porch steps.

Bert Pomeroy stood up and said: "We ain't goin' to give you any trouble. We'll go quietly."

The man from the North lay just inside the gate where he had fallen, and Suzanne was kneeling beside him. She was deathly pale and her dark eyes were enormous, but she smiled when I jumped down and came toward them.

He was not dead. The bullet had gone in just above his heart, and the hole was bleeding a little, but not seriously. He was not quite unconscious, but his eyes were glassy and he did not know me and could not speak.

"We must get him to a hospital," I said. "If he dies, this is going to be mighty serious."

The dark brothers gazed at me with a strange, dull curiosity almost childlike, as if they were trying to understand.

"You had him licked," I said. "Why didn't you let it go at that? Why in the name of Heaven did you shoot him?"

"I hated him," Bert Pomeroy said simply.

"He had no right coming here this way," Suzanne added in a low, lifeless voice. "We've had enough to bear—without him."

I was too indignant to argue, and even when I learned the ugly part that Lee Dimlock had played in their lives, I could not forgive such folly. Deliberately shooting a beaten man! Florida juries deal harshly with men who give way blindly to their passions, for Florida is wearying rapidly of her reputation as a backward commonwealth.

The Pomeroy brothers went with me peaceably to the Majolica jail. Lee Dimlock I left at Dr. Rawlins's hospital and, in the dark, cool waiting room, while the operation was taking place, Susanne sat beside me on a sofa and told me, in a monotonous, colorless voice, all about Lee Dimlock.

VI.

THE Pomeroys and Lee Dimlock had owned adjoining farms near the village of Nardon, Connecticut. Lee Dimlock lived alone in an old weather-beaten house. He was a widower, without children, and one of the most successful farmers of the district. He was known everywhere as a thrifty man; a hard man in a bargain, a mean man to work for, a bad man to cross. He was, and had been as far back as Suzanne could remember, a selectman and a man prominent in church affairs.

He and her family had never been on very friendly terms. An incident occurred when Phil was ten or eleven which transformed this old animosity into flaming hatred. Dimlock beat Phil almost insensible with an oak stick for swimming in the

creek which ran across one corner of his farm and which he had forbidden the boys to use. And when Bert, then seventeen or thereabouts, had gone to Dimlock to have an accounting, the widower had pushed him off the porch and threatened to beat him if he did not get off his property.

Bert swore to get even with him, but nothing came of his threats. As the eldest of three children left to shift for themselves, he was fighting then for their very existence. Their only heritage was a worn-out farm, a decrepit horse and several cows of doubtful lineage.

When I learned of the life that Bert Pomeroy had led, trying to retain the farm and to bring up his brother and sister, I understood readily his hatred and suspicion of people—all people. In him pride of family amounted to a passion. He defeated sundry attempts at placing his sister and brother in the county home for children, the orphan asylum; he tolerated the visits of well meaning but inquisitive women and even men who inspected and condemned his housekeeping.

He was only sixteen then, but he was determined to keep his family intact, to accept no charity. Single-handed he farmed the worn-out land until Phil was old enough to help. He was determined that Suzanne and Phil should have the advantages he had been denied; and he put them through the Nardon grade school and the high school.

After the swimming hole incident, the Pomeroys next clash with Lee Dimlock was over Suzanne. It happened when Suzanne was fifteen. She was gathering windfalls in the apple orchard one day when Lee Dimlock stole up behind her and seized her in his arms. He held her and kissed her, and when Suzanne finally broke away from him, her clothing was half torn from her body and Dimlock was bleeding from scratches all over his face and threatening horrible things.

Bert went calling on him with a shotgun. Dimlock frantically insisted that he had intended no harm to Suzanne; that he loved her and had made up his mind to marry her. She was, he declared, old enough.

Why, Bert, with that black temper of his, did not shoot Dimlock was a mystery, as was the remainder of the conversation that took place between them. But from that conversation, the systematic persecution of Lee Dimlock dated, and it continued until the Pomeroys fled from their farm, disgraced and dishonored.

He circulated evil rumors through the countryside until decent people would not speak to them and others leered when they went by. And whenever the opportunity was given him, he spoke to Suzanne about marrying him. The intensity of his hatred for her brothers seemed only to sharpen his hunger for her.

He would gloat over her with his pale eyes when they passed in the village; he would slip up to her in crowded places and try to fondle her hand or arm. He wrote countless letters to her, quoting Scripture and making fabulous promises; and Bert Pomeroy burned with helpless rage. But his time was too valuable to be wasted in prison. Lee Dimlock was powerful in local politics; he was a dangerous man to monkey with. And Bert Pomeroy was compelled to deny himself the luxury of vengeance, of striking the man—preferably in public.

The persecutions continued. Little things happened. Mean little things. Maddening things. A watchdog was found poisoned. A calf was found strangled strangely with a rope. Time after time the gate of the poultry run was found mysteriously ajar, the chickens scratching in the truck garden.

It was Bert Pomeroy's habit to hire a man to help him during harvest time. One hired man after another, Lee Dimlock bribed or frightened away. One morning when the brothers were in the fields and Suzanne was in town shopping, the Pomeroy bull was mysteriously released from its pasture, and before it could be caught, had attacked and demolished a buggy owned by a neighbor and stamped a valuable hunting dog to death. The bull's escapade cost Bert Pomeroy over a hundred dollars.

The winter following was bitterly cold. One night when an icy gale was blowing, Lee Dimlock executed a master stroke. At dawn, a sheriff, a deputy, and Lee Dimlock were demanding entrance into the Pomeroy house. When Phil and Bert went down to

let them in, Phil was handed a warrant of arrest, charging him with the theft of a yearling heifer belonging to Dimlock. The boy was dazed. The stolen heifer, Dimlock declared, was in the Pomeroy cowshed at this moment.

Phil could say nothing. But Bert's mind went to the correct conclusion at once. Some time during the blustery night, Dimlock had brought the heifer to the cowbarn and placed it inside. He was so sure that the heifer would be found there that he said:

" I found the heifer freezing outside the house last night. I put it in to keep warm. Are you goin' to arrest my brother for a neighborly act?"

Dimlock called him a liar. He had witnesses to prove that Phil had stolen the animal. He had been seen stealthily leading it away on a rope the evening before.

" I closed up the barn myself last night," the dazed Phil insisted. " Your heifer wasn't there. I did not steal your heifer!"

The sheriff suggested that they take a look in the cowbarn. And there the heifer was found.

When Phil's trial came up, two of the town's drug store corner loafers took their oaths and declared that they had seen Phil Pomeroy stealing Lee Dimlock's heifer. Its markings were unique. It had a white patch resembling the map of South America on its off-side; they would recognize that heifer among carloads. They had seen Phil Pomeroy leading the heifer on a rope through the elm trees that ran in a thin grove across the back of the two farms; and they had remarked upon the furtiveness of Phil Pomeroy's actions. Yes, sir, he had been leading the heifer *away* from Mr. Dimlock's place.

The lawyer Bert had hired to defend his brother sealed the boy's fate with what he stupidly believed to be a stroke of forensic genius. He had five heifers led past one of the court room windows, and he dramatically dared the two witnesses to identify the one that belonged to Lee Dimlock. Few people in the crowded court room did not say " Ah!" rapturously when the heifer with the map of South America on its side was led past.

Phil Pomeroy was sentenced to eighteen months for grand larceny.

A year later, in the spring, Bert had placards printed announcing that the farm would be auctioned off. Immediately more rumors were heard. The farm was utterly worthless. The house was on its last legs. The roof leaked like a sieve. Last summer's caterpillar blight had ruined the apple orchard. The soil was so thin and poor it would not nourish a blade of grass. There was nothing in the house but junk.

The farm was worth about nine thousand dollars. It carried a three thousand dollar mortgage. Bert should have netted upward of six thousand dollars for the farm and buildings, and perhaps a thousand additional for the contents and live stock. The proceeds of the sale were less than three thousand five hundred dollars.

Lee Dimlock stopped Suzanne as she left the Nardon post office next day and asked what her plans were. She admitted that she and Bert were going away, and she refused to tell him where. Dimlock said that he would die without her. He tried to grab her hands, but she ran down the steps past him, jumped into her flivver and drove away.

She and Bert left that night for Hartford without saying good-by to any one. They waited there a week at an obscure boarding house. Phil had the address and would meet them there if he could effect the escape he was planning. And at the end of the week he joined them, leaving six months of his sentence unserved. Florida, they had decided, was the best place to go; and they drove south day and night, taking turns at the wheel and sleeping as best they could in the car.

Then, after three years, a Nardon family, touring through Majolica, had seen Suzanne, made inquiries there, and from them Dimlock had learned where the Pomeroys had fled. He had come to Vingo, intending to take Suzannne away with him—or report Phil's whereabouts to the authorities.

VII.

SUZANNE'S monotonous voice ceased, and she looked drearily out of the window at

a magnolia tree in the hospital yard. Suddenly she turned to me, with dilating, terrified eyes.

"If that man should die!"

"I think he's going to pull through," I said vigorously.

"But they're taking so long!"

"Finding bullets isn't easy," I said. "Dr. Rawlins is one of the best surgeons in Florida. And Dimlock has the constitution of a horse. He'll pull through!"

Suzanne had torn the handkerchief in her hands into shreds. She was twisting and untwisting it now about one thumb. She relaxed slightly and settled back with a weary sigh.

"We made a great mistake," she said huskily, "in not waiting for Phil to finish his sentence. Even if that man recovers, things will be terribly complicated, won't they?"

"You can depend on Gene and me," I said brusquely, "to the limit."

Her eyes softened. "Poor Gene!" she whispered. "How can he help any one? Well, I must make plans, mustn't I?"

"If Gene has anything to say about it," I said, "you'll have your life plans cut out for you by to-morrow night."

Suzanne slumped down on the sofa.

"The sister of men who—who may go on trial for murder?" she whispered.

"You know what Gene would say to that," I said sternly.

"Yes, I know. He has a great future, and I am not going to spoil it. Oh, isn't life rotten! Wasn't it cruel—the way those surveyors simply ruined everything? With that new road contract and his brick plant already to be put up, he would have been successful. I—I could help Gene, if my brothers would only let me, if they didn't dislike him so. There's coquina rock on our land, but they won't let him have it on any terms."

I said unsteadily: "How long have you known this?"

"Just a few days."

"Does Gene know?"

"What's the use of telling him? They won't let him have it. I think they'd starve rather than let him have it. They wanted him to go away. They were afraid of losing me. Well, they needn't have worried. No, I will never marry Gene." She was silent, thinking, some seconds.

"I am going away," she announced. "I am going to change my name and start life all over in some new place."

I said nothing, but I was glad that Suzanne had at least not lost her wonderful ability to be romantic no matter how trying the circumstances.

She turned to me again and gasped: "Buck! If that man should die! What would happen to Phil and Bert? Honestly, don't you think a jury would be kind, after they'd heard the story? Don't you think—"

Dr. Rawlins entered the waiting room with a serious mouth and tired eyes. Suzanne sprang up, with fists gripped at sides.

"Is he dead?" she wailed.

The surgeon shook his head. "Not quite."

"Is he—going to die?"

And Dr. Rawlins replied: "I can't say for sure. The bullet did not touch his heart, but it clipped the edge of one lung. We found it lodged under a rib near the backbone. My only hope is the man's tremendous vitality. He may live for hours; he may die before night. By this time to-morrow, if he is still alive we can begin to hope—perhaps!"

"You know what will happen to my brothers," Suzanne panted, "if he should die!"

"Yes, Miss Pomeroy, I know; and you can be sure that no effort will be spared to save him."

Outside the hospital, on the way to where my flivver was parked, I asked Suzanne what she would do meanwhile.

"I'll go home, of course. I don't want to be near people. I—I hate people!"

I told her I didn't like the idea of her staying in that house alone.

"You'd better put up at some hotel, for to-night at least."

But Suzanne would not stay in Majolica. The hospital would telephone me at Vingo if—if anything happened, and I could drive over and notify her at once. So we drove back to Vingo.

Gene Bantry was waiting on the porch

steps when we alighted at the Pomeroy house. Suzanne evaded him when he held out his arms; she went up the steps; paused in the doorway.

"Please," she whimpered; "just leave me alone."

"You're not going to stay in this house alone," Gene said energetically. "I'm going to send Ma Babcock down here to take care of you."

"Very well," said Suzanne listlessly.

Ma Babcock was the wife of the section foreman, a capable, energetic woman, and a crack shot with a pistol. We secured her promise to start for the Pomeroys immediately, then went on to my house, where we entered upon an all night discussion of ways and means. At midnight I called up the hospital and was told by the night nurse that the patient was still living: his pulse was regular and firm; there was, so far, no sign of infection; he was sleeping fitfully. He could talk, but refused to.

"Is it still a matter of life or death?" I asked.

"It is," she said crisply. "He may be dead when I go back upstairs. A hemorrhage would, without question, be fatal. I'll phone you if there is any change."

Gene Bantry and I watched the sun come up. After several cups of strong coffee we drove to the Majolica jail. The dark brothers were in adjoining cells and the warden, at my request, left us alone with them. Their attitude was suspicious and hostile. They seemed to resent our visit, but were relieved when I told them that Ma Babcock was staying with Suzanne.

"Dimlock may pull out of it," I said. "He's still on the border line, but if—"

"He deserves to be dead," Bert Pomeroy interrupted sullenly.

"If he dies, you two are apt to hang," I reminded him.

"We expect that," he said with indifference. "We've never had a square deal in our lives. Why should we expect one now? We've been accused of things we've never done. We've been lied about; we've been—"

"Have you thought about a lawyer?" I broke in. "You're going to need a good one, whether he pulls through or not."

"What are we going to hire him with?" Phil snorted. "We're broke. We're dead broke. Where can we raise money to fight the case?"

"From us," Gene broke in quietly.

The two brothers stared at him curiously, then suspiciously.

"Why?" Bert rasped.

"Because," Gene said in the same quiet tones, "we don't think you've been treated fairly. Buck, here, told me the whole story. I know all about Dimlock and what he did to wreck you; and if you think we're going to stand by and see you handed another rotten deal, you've got another guess coming."

The Pomeroys did not grasp it at once. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, two human beings were aligning themselves with them, and not against them.

"You're broke yourself," Bert growled finally.

"I'll sell off my machinery, whatever isn't mortgaged," Gene said briskly. "And I guess I can raise a pretty fat retainer. Buck is going to stretch his credit at the bank until it cracks. We're going to hire the best legal talent in the State of Florida: if you fellows don't get a square deal, it won't be our fault. We know you're on the level. We're with you."

"Look here," Bert said in a strange, harsh voice, "you mean to say you're goin' to do all this, after how we've acted and all?"

"No hard feelings at all," Gene said uneasily.

A strange, softening expression settled upon the dark face. Something like a smile twitched at the corners of his hard mouth.

"Phil," he said gently, "did you hear that?"

"Yes," said Phil. "I didn't know there were people like that in the world."

"If—if we ever get out of here," Bert said thickly. "If we ever do, I want you to know—I want you to know—" He stopped again. He couldn't get the words out. Well, it was the first time in his life he'd ever had occasion to use that kind of words.

Gene grabbed his hand through the grating.

"You bet," he said energetically. "But

it's hell to have to go *through* hell to get to be friends, isn't it?"

"If we ever get out—" was all that Bert Pomeroy could say. And when we went away, a few minutes later, it was with the curious sensation that a cloud, a dark, forbidding cloud, had been lifted; for the two dark brothers were grinning when we left them.

Gene and I killed the rest of the day sitting on the upstairs porch of the hospital, smoking our pipes and waiting for developments. But there was no change in Dimlock's condition; he still lingered in the borderland. Several times we pleaded with the head nurse. Could we look in on him? We could not! If Dimlock died we were going to Jacksonville and hire a lawyer; if he did not die—

There were complications to be thought of in the latter event—difficult ones. Phil would have to serve the remainder of his sentence, then, perhaps, he would be returned to Florida to pay the penalty as a material witness.

Dimlock's condition was unchanged when we left that evening. On the way home we stopped for a word with Suzanne. Ma Babcock met us at the door and said that Suzanne was too ill to see any one. She had been having hysterics since last night, but was gradually growing calm. By tomorrow night, perhaps, she would be herself again.

Gene spent the night with me and, early next morning, we drove to the hospital. Dr. Rawlins met us at the door with a tired, wry grin. He had been trying, he said, to reach me by telephone for the past hour.

"Dimlock has turned the corner," he announced. "The wound is healing nicely; there is no sign of infection, the inflammation is subsiding, and the danger of hemorrhage is past. The fellow's vitality is amazing. He ought to be on his feet in a couple of weeks. Since a little after midnight," the surgeon added softly, "he has been calling, so my night nurse tells me, for Miss Pomeroy."

"Ah!" Gene breathed.

"What I have done," Dr. Rawlins resumed, "or, rather, what I have left undone, may or may not come under the head of unethical practice. I have refrained from telling the patient that he will recover!"

His sharp gray eyes were twinkling.

"But he must be told soon. If Miss Pomeroy will come to his bedside, she may obtain some statement from him that will help clear her brothers; and I'm willing to be unethical, say, until ten o'clock—"

"Look here," Gene broke in anxiously. "Suzanne is having hysterics and can't possibly come. It seems to me, doc, that this is something for a couple of hard-boiled bushwhackers to handle, anyhow. Why not give me and Buck a crack at the old reprobate? How sure are you he wants to make a statement?"

"From what the night nurse told me," Dr. Rawlins answered, "I have gathered that the patient is a highly religious man and that, in common with most of us sinners, he entertains hopes of going to a beautiful everlasting reward. Draw your own conclusions, Gene. At ten o'clock, when I return from breakfast, I'm going to tell Lee K. Dimlock that he has considerably more than a fighting chance—unless some one does so earlier."

"Doc," said Gene grimly, "lead us to him."

Dr. Rawlins shook his head. "Not in that spirit. Dimlock is a mighty sick man. He must not be upset or frightened or antagonized or aroused in any way. You cannot go in there unless you promise not to excite him or let him talk too much. The limit is ten minutes. I'm going to time you!"

We nodded grimly and Dr. Rawlins took us upstairs, opened a door and led us into a small, sunlit room with pale gray walls.

Lee Dimlock's face was gaunt and pale against the pillow. His strawberry roan hair had the limp, lifeless look that hair assumes when its owner has been very ill. He turned his head as we entered, fixing us with his small, pale blue eyes.

His journey into the valley of the shadow had in some way changed Lee Dimlock. His mouth was drawn and pinched looking, and in his eyes, as he surveyed us, was the suffering, the sincere terror, of the man who cannot contemplate death courageously.

"These gentlemen," Dr. Rawlins intro-

duced us, " are the two best friends Miss Pomeroy has. She was too ill to come, and sent them in answer to your message." And with a grave nod in our direction the surgeon left the room and closed the door; and I saw that he had his watch in his hand.

Gene and I pulled up chairs to the bedside and sat down.

Lee Dimlock drew a deep breath.

" I am going to die," he announced in a broken voice. " And I must put my house in order. I must make my peace with Suzanne Pomeroy and her brothers before—before I go. I cannot face my Maker with what is on my conscience. You will find a sheet of paper under my pillow. I want both of you to sign it as witnesses. Read it aloud."

Gene's large brown paw dived under the pillow and returned with a folded sheet of hospital stationery. In a fine, deep voice he read:

" Majolica, Florida, June 18, 1924.

" I, Lee K. Dimlock, on my deathbed, do solemnly swear that Phil Pomeroy did not steal from me the yearling heifer for the alleged theft of which he was brought to trial in Nardon, Connecticut, in the month of March, 1919, and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. I myself placed the heifer in the Pomeroy cow stable on the night of January 16, 1919, during a windstorm and hired Jeff Withers and Sam Cloyer to perjure themselves in order that Phil Pomeroy would be sent to prison. For this cruel and unchristianlike act I wish to make full atonement.

" I do further solemnly swear that, in shooting me on the afternoon of June 15, 1924. Bert Pomeroy acted purely in a spirit of self-defense and was wholly justified in shooting me because of the attitude I have taken for years toward Suzanne Pomeroy.

" This statement I make of my own free will, in a sound state of mind, in the presence of witnesses, because, when I leave this world, I want to go before my Maker with clean hands.

" Lee K. Dimlock."

Gene uncapped his fountain pen and scrawled his signature as a witness and handed paper and pen to me to do the same.

Some of the terror had ebbed from Lee K. Dimlock's pale blue eyes but he still seemed anxious.

" You won't use it unless it's absolutely necessary?"

" No," said Gene.

Lee K. Dimlock sighed. An expression of peace stole over his gaunt, hard face.

" I can go before my Maker now," he said in a soft, whispery voice, " with a clear conscience. That's all. You two can go now."

" Hold on," said Gene. " Aren't you trying to wiggle into heaven without buying a ticket? Bert Pomeroy sold his farm at a big loss because of you, and Phil Pomeroy lost a whole year in prison. How are you going to square that with your Maker?"

Lee Dimlock had always been a hard man in a bargain, a shrewd trader, and his lifelong habits prevailed now.

" I've done enough!" he snapped. " That sheet of paper in your pocket is worth a million dollars to those Pomeroys! You know that."

" What is it worth in the eyes of God?" Gene answered. " Are you going to get anywhere, do you think, Dimlock, trying to drive bargains with Him?"

" That farm of theirs wasn't worth the price it brought," the New Englander muttered. " I—oh, I'll be generous. I'll allow Phil Pomeroy five hundred dollars for the time he spent in prison, and I'll throw in another five hundred to cover everything else. You'll find my check book in that top drawer."

" Wait a minute," said Gene energetically, as I found the check book and returned with it. " What was it the Bible said about a rich man's chances of getting into heaven? Didn't it say that a camel could pass through the eye of a needle easier? Gene glanced anxiously toward the door. He was worrying, I knew, about the ten minutes that Dr. Rawlins had allotted us. " Are you going to let a few thousand dollars stand between you and eternal peace and happiness? You can't take any of it along, can you?"

" I'm not a rich man!" Mr. Dimlock snapped.

" Then that settles it," said Gene, reaching toward his hat.

" Don't go yet," the wounded man irritably halted him. " I want to be fair and

just to all concerned. What price do you think those Pomeroys ought to get?"

"Five thousand dollars," Gene said crisply.

I expected Lee Dimlock to open his mouth and cry aloud, but he only grumbled, glancing at the stubbs in his check book. "I haven't got that much. I haven't got much more than three thousand."

"Then why not make it for three?" Gene gently suggested.

Lee Dimlock wrote the check—for three thousand dollars—and Gene waved it to and fro to dry. When it was dry he folded it and arose.

"Mr. Dimlock," he said cheerfully, "you have done a noble thing. I am now going to repay you. I am going to make you the happiest man alive."

Lee Dimlock was staring at him.

"You are going to get well," Gene energetically proceeded. "And as soon as you can travel, you are going away from here. The Pomeroy boys will not be held for trial, because you will not appear against them. I do not intend to take unfair advantage of you with this signed statement, unless you refuse to do what I'm telling you to do. If you make any attempt to have those boys sent up for shooting you, or if you stop payment on this check, or if Phil Pomeroy is hauled back to Connecticut to finish that sentence, you'll hear from me. Otherwise you have my sacred word that it will never be made public.

"Come on, Buck, let's ball the jack. We have lots to do. Good-by, Mr. Dimlock."

I opened the door. Dr. Rawlins was standing there, watch in hand. Gene looked at the watch and grinned.

"Time up, doc?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dr. Rawlins, "forty minutes of it!"

We stopped at the jail to acquaint the Pomeroy brothers with their good fortune, then drove back to Vingo.

Ma Babcock, knitting a sock on the porch, shrilled that Suzanne had gone out for a walk an hour ago. Wouldn't we sit down and wait, and how was that low-down Dimlock makin' out?

We answered her questions, and hurried on down the road afoot. We both guessed, simultaneously, that Suzanne had gone to her orange tree for solace, comfort, and to rest.

It was the first time either of us had followed the narrow, twisting path that Suzanne had made to her retreat. The scent of orange blossoms became sweeter, heavier, as we penetrated the jungle.

Suzanne was seated on the bench with head bowed, hands clasped, a waxen-white petal occasionally falling near her or upon her.

She glanced up at the sound of a snapped twig; leaped to her feet and ran to meet us.

"Is he dead?"

Gene produced the signed and witnessed statement and the check.

"Nope," he said gravely. "He's going to pull through. Read this."

He held the check under Suzanne's pink, tip-tilted nose. She read it and gasped.

"Now—this."

Suzanne read the other and gasped continuously. Then she leaned against the harsh, gray bole of a water oak and began to cry.

Gene attempted then to take her in his arms, but Suzanne pushed him away.

"No, Gene," she said in a hardened little voice. "No, Gene. Even when they are cleared, this will hang over our heads like a cloud. You have your future to think of. I intend to protect you from your own foolishness. You are going to be a great man some day. I would never be anything but a millstone—"

"Suzanne," Gene interrupted her gently, "do you see that rock over yonder?"

Suzanne gazed listlessly at the rock toward which he was pointing, and her face suddenly lighted.

"That rock," Gene proceeded, "is very porous and soft, but it must weigh about forty pounds. If you say one more word about protecting me from my own foolishness, I am going to pick up that rock and I'm going to heave it—"

"I'd forgotten all about that rock," Suzanne breathlessly stopped him. "If you want to heave it at me, you'll have to use a derrick, Gene. It's coquina outcropping!"

"It's ojus!" Gene snorted.

"Kick it," Suzanne invited.

Gene kicked the rock—and almost lamed himself.

"It seems to run under the entire hundred acres," Suzanne informed him.

"That ought to make this jungle worth a lot of money," said Gene. "You Pomeroys are just rolling in luck. Well, Buck, let's be ambling."

"Where are you going?" Suzanne cried.

"Over to the west coast, around Tampa somewhere," Gene replied. "I hear they're yelling for good road men. I'll drop you a post card, Suzanne, when I get located."

"You won't do anything of the kind, Gene Bantry!" Suzanne snapped. "You're going to stay right here in Vingo!"

"And I'm pulling out on Twenty-Nine this afternoon," Gene added.

Suzanne's large brown eyes were blazing.

"You're just trying to humiliate me—before Buck!" she accused him.

Gene walked slowly over to her, with hands on hips, and looked down into her flushed, angry little face.

"Look here, Suzanne," he said in a voice that seemed to rasp. "I'm getting wise to you, I think, at last. I've put in three hard years trying to make you love me, and I'm finding out this morning, for the first time, that the only thing you can love is a damned old worn-out orange tree. The lost orange grove!" he snorted. "A half dead thing that yields half a peck of lemons twice a year! That's why I'm going."

Suzanne stared up at him wretchedly, her eyes slowly filling with tears. Suddenly she threw her arms around Gene's neck and clung to him. Then, in his arms, she wept, and, presently, admitted that it wouldn't be necessary to apply chunks of rock to her reason; and, as far as she was concerned, he could blow up the sole survivor of the lost orange grove with giant powder this very afternoon. He would have to do it before long anyway because the jungle, if she had anything to say about it, was going to be a wedding present from her brothers. She hadn't ever really been in love with the tree. It only stood for—it only stood for—Who could explain what a dying orange tree, relic of a dead romance, stood for?

I trotted back to my flivver. Duty was calling. The commissary porch would be sagging with negroes and crackers, patiently waiting to purchase rations, tobacco, snuff and postage stamps; and a charming young man from Georgia who had recently reopened the old turpentine still at Cypress Spoon bore, as I suddenly recalled, a striking resemblance to a half-tone photograph I had received a few days before of a man who was wanted for arson in Palatka.

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE OPTIMIST

DON'T fret o'er the briers at the side of the trail;
Just smile when calamities fall.
Hard luck loves the sound of the pessimist's wail,
But has no use for laughter at all.

The night is no darker than thousands before,
And each brought a dawn at the end.
If you cannot add silver and gold to your store,
You can hoard up the smiles of a friend.

A flower of sunshine plant once in a while
In the garden where tears used to grow.
Hard luck is afraid of the man who will smile
While staggering under the blow.

Chart Pitt.

The Dancing Doll

By FRANK CONDON and CHARLTON L. EDHOLM

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

"HAPPY GEORGE" MARCANDA narrowly escapes being knifed when he refuses to kill Lieutenant Joe West, of the New York police, at the command of "Nick-in-the-Blade," leader of a gang with which young Marcanda has been involved. A raid by West, who is intent on avenging another slain policeman, results in the capture of several of the band, but George, with the aid of Tina Bianca, daughter of a fence, escapes. Learning that the gangsters have laid the murder of the officer to him, and that Nick has sworn a vendetta, George flees to Rio de Janeiro, accompanied by Tina, whom he regards as a sister.

In Rio George works hard and acquires a partnership with Gian' Bori in a café. He engages as entertainers the Dancing Dalbys, a team consisting of Guy Dalby, whose dissolute habits make him unreliable, and his ward, Margot, "The Dancing Doll," a girl with real talent. To Margot, George confides how Lieutenant West saved his life in France, but he does not tell her anything of his life in New York. George is puzzled by Tina's rather hostile attitude toward Margot.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE HILL OF THIEVES.

TINA was early at the café the next morning. She came so early that even the waiters had not appeared and the old pianist was still asleep in his back room.

"Wake up, wake up, Father Pierre!" she cried, and when the old man appeared at his door rubbing his eyes, he was astonished to see Tina all dressed in filmy white chiffon, with a pink flower in her hair.

"What's all this? You look like a bride! Is this your wedding day?"

Tina twirled on her toes so that her light skirts stood out all around her.

"No, Father Pierre. It's not that! I'm feeling good. I want to dance! Will you play for me?"

The musician staggered out to the piano

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 18.

and struck a few notes while he watched Tina sway and balance her slim young body on the platform.

"Play me the same tune that you play for Margot, you know 'The Swan.'" Once more Tina began to dance.

Presently the old man stopped suddenly. "Why are you so gay? Why do you wish to dance? Why are you dressed in white instead of your black and red costume?"

"I can confess to you, Father Pierre. It is that Dancing Doll! Yesterday she said: 'Some day I will go to New York!'"

"Ah ha! And that pleases you!"

"Of course. I thought she was going to stick around here forever!"

"And is that why you dance? Is that all?"

Tina was embarrassed. "I guess you'll think I've got my nerve but I thought—well, I just thought if I began to practice now—perhaps when Margot has gone, I might do a turn in the café. Of course I'm no raving beauty but I'm not exactly a dried prune, am I?"

"Far from it! You're enchanting with those black eyes and the coral lips and that wild dark hair—but, *mademoiselle,* you are making a mistake!"

"How so?"

"You are trying to be another Margot. You dress like her. You try to dance like her. You ask me to play her melody, 'The Swan.' Now, my child, that is not the way to succeed. You must be yourself. Margot is a snow fairy from the north. You are a gypsy from the south. You are a wild thing. No one has tamed you. And your dance must be wild—a flame! A whirlwind!"

Pierre Vigney struck dramatic chords on the piano and then swung into a gypsy air that was all fire and passion. "Like that!" he exclaimed.

"Can you teach me any steps?" asked Tina, her eyes brightening. She swung her slender hips in rhythm to the wild melody.

"I have it!" exclaimed the old Frenchman. "What you should do is the dance of the apache. That would suit you perfectly. Listen!" And he dashed into a wild shivery tune that stretched the nerves. "That's it! That's the way they play it on the Butte Montmartre! How many times in the cellar cafés have I seen them dance to that, those cut-throats and their girls! If you could do the dance of the apache in the café you would make more sensation than Margot."

"I wonder whether George would like it as well as 'The Swan,'" suggested the girl timidly.

"George will like anything that draws trade. He's a business man," affirmed Pierre Vigney. "Aside from that, anybody with fire in his veins will go wild over this dance. It is primitive—of the jungle—yes, the jungle of great cities."

So every morning after that Tina practiced the dance of the thieves' dens of Paris. And old Pierre found a young Frenchman, a ne'er-do-well from some ship, as a dancing partner. Jean Lenoir, he called himself. A shady young rascal who might have learned something of the apache dance at first hand.

In a short black shirt, rolled black stockings, a red handkerchief about her bare throat and a scarlet flower in her dark hair, Tina looked the part and played it. It needed little acting for her to fall into the rôle of a gangster's girl. It was part of her recent history.

And Tina arranged it so that Jean Lenoir was taken on as a waiter in the café so as to be always on hand for rehearsals.

It was understood that all this was to be a secret from George until the day when the Dalbys should finish their time and go elsewhere. Tina would fill the gap, dance triumphantly before the patrons of La Scala and bow to the sound of wild applause and the jingle of coins about her feet.

As George came late to the café, it was not difficult to keep it a secret from him.

But one morning Pierre Vigney said: "Tina, this is good, this little dance of yours, but it is not quite the real thing. People who know Paris will understand that you've never seen the real thing."

"Tell me what I shall do?"

"It can't be told. It must be seen. Listen, child! Go some moonlight night to the top of the hill where Louie the apache hangs out. They dance there in the flat

space before the huts. That will be the real thing, for there are plenty of rats from the gutters of Paris who have drifted to Rio. You'll find them all up there."

So that night Tina did not come to the Café La Scala. She sent word that she was sick. George would have to put somebody else at the cashier's desk.

And as the moon rose full and round over the sea, the girl muffled herself in a black cape and left the house. Soon she was gliding silently up the dark and narrow alleyway where George had fought off the hill gang.

There were few houses on the slope and the lights were dim and far apart. Cautiously the girl stole through the shadows and as she neared the top of the steep hill she bent down and assured herself that the knife she had thrust in her stocking was still there. The faint sound of guitars and a violin drifted down from the thieves' colony on top of the hill.

She could hear the noise of shrill laughter and hand clapping and occasionally there were whistling and catcalls. Evidently it was a party night at Apache Louie's and the party had begun with a bang.

As the ascent became more gentle, Tina decided that she had better leave the path, so she took the first dim trail that led between the scattering of huts, and worked her way to the summit by a roundabout route.

Only a few squatters, black, coffee-colored or pallid, lounged in the doorways of the cabins. They paid no attention to her, and Tina breathed easier.

Guided by the light of a bonfire she gradually approached the cleared space where the party was in progress. The riff-raff of Rio was there. Black shadows clad like scarecrows in old rags and tattered straw hats were silhouetted against the firelight. Their backs were turned. No one noticed Tina. Moonlight flooded the hilltop and its sprawling shacks of irregular outline. Here and there a royal palm rose against the luminous sky and below the wide bay, with its promontories and peaks, extended like a vast mirror.

Breathless with the splendor of the scene, and the thrill of her escapade, Tina watched the dance, a mad race of whirling couples, their rags flying in every direction.

No doubt some one in that crew had stolen a cask of brandy, for everybody was more or less hilarious and the liquor was still flowing. Tin cans and cocoanut shells were circulating from hand to hand and from mouth to mouth. As Tina looked on with wide fascinated eyes, Louie, the apache, was crouching in the center of the cleared space, walking with cat-like steps round his partner, a tawny, panther-like quadroon girl, who imitated his movements. One might have thought it was a duel with knives; they circled round each other like cautious fighters watching for an opening.

Suddenly they sprang at each others' throats as if they were about to claw and bite, but instead of that they spun round and round like leaves in a whirlwind, and threw themselves apart and snatched each other up again in the fury of the dance.

All at once the girl seemed to go limp and Louie seized her fiercely by one ankle and one wrist and whirled her round and round, so that she swung clear of the ground, her hair flying and her scanty skirts whipping the air.

Then he had her in his arms and they were clinging closer than ever, whirling to the wild music of the fiddle.

Again they flung apart and this time when they met, Apache Louie had his companion by the throat and was shaking her as if he had murder in his heart.

As the music crashed to a frantic finish he flung her far from him and she lay a panting heap on the ground. That was the apache dance!

Shrieks of laughter, hand clapping and a clatter of tin cups full of brandy was the applause that the hill gang gave to Frenchy as he glanced arrogantly about him, sweating and panting, his lank hair clinging to his forehead, for it was dripping with the speed of the dance. He looked like a puny but exceedingly vicious pirate as he poised on his toes, his torn shirt open at the throat, his baggy trousers and the red sash that supported them, picked out by the flickering firelight.

Somebody tossed him a rose. He thrust it back of his ear and advanced to the

girl who had challenged him—a white girl this time, dregs of Paris, no doubt—and seizing her thin wrists he swung her into the whirlpool of the apache dance.

Presently she too was exhausted and he threw her aside so that she crawled out of the firelight, groaning. They were realistic, these hilltop dances! Often they ended in bruises, sometimes with a broken bone.

But Louie was insatiable. Girl after girl he caught up and threw aside and still he seemed tireless.

Presently he had to stop. No one challenged him.

He strutted about and cried contemptuously: "What's the matter. Are you all scared, you girls? Sacré name of a pig! If I were in Paris there would be twenty girls ready to dance me down."

But at that moment a flaming gardenia fell at his feet and he picked it up with a pleased smile. A girl had flung herself at him out of the shadows and Louie exclaimed, "Ah ha! A new one! Well, never mind, we shall soon be acquainted," and the next instant Tina was flying in wild ecstasy. She did not know how it had happened. The impulse had seized her and there she was!

She had never before felt anything like this fury, this speed, this blind passion for combat. As she crouched and stepped menacingly about her partner she imagined that she wanted to spring at his throat, to drink his blood. It did not seem like make-believe. She felt the lust for murder in her blood. And when she swirled frantically in his embrace, she seemed to be no longer human. They were wild feline creatures of the jungle.

Then in the middle of it, the apache thrust back her head, bent over her face greedily and kissed her full on the mouth, a cruel, sensual kiss that stung.

That was more than Tina had bargained for. The spell was broken. With a fierce cry the girl darted at him and fastened her sharp teeth in his throat.

Cursing, he put all his strength into a thrust that sent her reeling. She stumbled, lay for a moment crushed and gasping, then as the cheers and catcalls rose with deafening fury all about her, she struggled to her feet and ran, crouching and limping into the darkness.

Louie, the apache, swore that he would find that tiger-cat and subdue her if he had to tear down every hut on the hilltop.

He was disappointed. No one could tell him where she had gone. No one knew who she was.

But Tina had learned the *Danse des Apaches!*

CHAPTER XI.

A MOMENT OF TERROR.

AFTER that wild night with the hill gang, Tina watched Margot's dance with the eyes of a critical rival.

Compared to the abandon of the apache dance, the girlish loveliness of Margot's performance seemed a little tame.

Tina believed that when her chance came, she would astonish the patrons of La Scala, just as she had won applause on the hill top. She only feared that George's infatuation would go so far that he would not part from the Dancing Doll. When she danced he looked on with the glowing eyes of a lover.

One evening he hurried to Tina's desk with a glance over his shoulder and said: "There's a guy from New York in the house. See! At the table near the piano."

Tina looked at the stranger, a ruddy faced, well-built chap in clothes that said emphatically, "Broadway."

"My God," she exclaimed. "He's not a dick, is he? Do you think he's after us?"

"No. He's in the show business. Got a vaudeville circuit. It's Jim Harbison, a fellow I met at the Grotto."

"Are you going to speak to him?"

"No. It's taking a chance. Harbison is a white man, white all through. But he might let it out in New York if he recognized me, not meaning any harm. There would be hell to pay if the bulls got on my trail."

"Don't worry. He'll never know you in that beard. Besides your figure is heavier, and your clothes are different. He'll never guess that George Marchand is the old Happy George Marcanda."

But George watched him anxiously. He did not want to take any chances with the law now that he had got a start in Rio. The old days of running with the gang in Slaughter Lane and ducking at the sight of a uniform seemed like a bad dream.

But Jim Harbison had no thought of anything but Margot.

As usual she was carrying the act alone, for Guy Dalby had not appeared for several nights. She was superb. As she finished her dance, the patrons of La Scala shouted, "Brava! Brava!" and there was a storm of clapping hands.. Coins and even jewelry were flung on the platform as the girl lifted her skirts and made a low bow.

Harbison's face was impassive, but even he applauded and beckoned Jean Lenoir, who waited on his table. He talked to him earnestly, glancing to where the girl sat.

Tina felt a little spasm of jealousy. She was certain that her own dance would make that New York theatrical man sit up. At the same time she was hopeful that Margot's work might result in an offer. Who could tell? Her rival might be sailing north in a week.

Lenoir came hurrying to George with Harbison's card. "That gentleman wants to talk to the manager," he said.

"What's the matter? A kick about the service?"

"Oh no, sir," Lenoir assured him respectfully. "It's about Miss Dalby. He wants to talk to you about her wonderful dance."

"He does? Well, you tell him I'm out!" exclaimed George. "And it won't be a lie, for I'm going to take a little walk right now! I don't want to see him."

"Shall I tell him that?"

"No—that would sound queer. Tell him that Guy Dalby is her manager. Let him talk to Dalby, that is, if he can ever find the poor fish when he's not tanked." And picking up his cap, George hurried out of the café, hoping that Guy would stay away from La Scala as usual. He loathed every line of that cocksure, impudent face. Of late he wanted to punch it at sight.

For in spite of Margot's defense of her guardian, George was more and more convinced that Guy Dalby was a bad egg.

He had failed to show up time after time, for when he found out that his dancing partner could carry the act alone he ceased to worry. The money came in just the same. Why should he work?

Guy was seen constantly at the green tables of the Monte Carlo Club. He won and he lost, but he never brought his winnings home. There were too many ladies of the Mademoiselle Fifi type who got their hands into his pockets first.

He was regarded as a capital fellow, a good spender and a companion with no foolish notions by the officers, politicians and young bloods who frequented the club.

But his particular running mate was Don Pedro Valdez, owner of a coffee plantation that paid like a mint, and a boss who stood high in Rio politics.

Don Pedro was in his thirties but looked older. Many trips to Paris had left pouches under his eyes and wrinkles on his heavy face. His hair had thinned, but not his waist. In fact he looked and dressed the part of an elderly Parisian roué.

The Brazilian was a patron of the art of dancing, and he was willing to subsidize the *artistes*—all for the sake of Art, of course.

"Ah, your ward, the lovely Margot!" he exclaimed that evening at the Monte Carlo. "Why you don't make me acquaint with that superb creature?"

"Nothing easier!" exclaimed Guy. "Come around to the café and I'll introduce you to-night, old dear."

A few minutes later, Tina sitting at her cashier's desk saw Guy Dalby and the Brazilian millionaire jostle their way into the crowded café. Presently George came in from his stroll and she called him.

"Happy," she said. "That fellow, Dalby, is here. He acts like he owned the place. Ordered the waiters to bring up a table, right to the platform.

"That table next to Harbison?"

"Yes, that's him. And look, he's got Margot between him and his fat friend. He called her off the platform. The show has stopped while they are lapping up champagne."

George was pale with fury. It was the limit! He strode over to the table and laid a hand on Guy's shoulder.

"Why, it's my old friend, George," exclaimed Dalby. "Want you to meet my pal, Señor Don Pedro Valdez, one of the best!"

Don Pedro arose with a greasy smile. His manner toward the café proprietor was condescending. Margot seized the opportunity to wriggle out of his grasp. She hurried to the platform, where Pierre Vigney was tearing out jazz, and ignored Guy's command to come back.

"What do you mean by hanging around here?" demanded George. He thrust aside the bejeweled hand of Don Pedro and scowled at Guy.

"It's bad enough to let that girl do the work you're paid for. But now you come around and stop her performance. Get out! I'm through with you!"

"You want to break the contract?" Guy Dalby demanded with hauteur. "You'll hear from my lawyer about that."

"Contract! Why you've broken it twenty times. It's as full of holes as a porous plaster. When did you dance here last? It was weeks ago. Now beat it! Don't show up here again!"

"If I go, Margot goes!" Guy rose and beckoned furiously to the girl. "Come on, Margot, we'll leave this beastly hole. I can get you twice as much money, ten times as much! And you won't have to work for it." He seized his ward by the arm, disregarding her terror.

"What do you mean?" George's knuckles showed white under the skin.

Guy glanced significantly at Don Pedro. The Brazilian smiled and spread his hands with a lordly gesture.

"Si! I will provide for Mademoiselle Margot! If you are tired of the contract, it will be a pleasure to take her off your hands. I have told her guardian."

George's fists shot out right and left. Guy and the pursy Brazilian went down like ten-pins, and in a second the café was in an uproar.

Don Pedro, the big boss, had been struck down! It was an outrage! Sacrilege! There were cries of revenge and hatred.

"Catch the assassin! Don't let him go! He has killed Don Pedro!"

Margot was clinging to George's arm and together they were crowded back by the mob that was wild with excitement and howling for blood.

Don Pedro, supported by two waiters, was bellowing like a bull.

"Bring him to me, the wretch! The murderer! I will tear him to pieces!"

Only Guy Dalby said nothing. He had been sent to dreamland. Nobody paid any attention to him.

The mob of Brazilians were crowding George back toward the wall and only a feeble line of waiters was helping to keep back the would-be lynchers.

Tina knew then that her chance had come. She forced her way to the platform, seizing Lenoir by the wrist as she neared the piano.

"Off with your apron," she gasped, and to Pierre Vigney she commanded, "Play, play for God's sake! The apache dance!"

The music began with a crash and rose to a frenzy. The patrons of the café turned in astonishment. That anybody should make music at such a moment!

But when they caught sight of Tina struggling in the arms of Lenoir, apparently fighting in a death struggle, they were fascinated. Was it a dance or a duel?

The pair were flung apart and slowly circled around each other ready to pounce like jaguars. Even Pedro Valdez forgot his outraged feelings as he watched this duel of the underworld. "Ah Paris! Paris!" he murmured rapturously.

And Jim Harbison was shouting "Brava! Brava!" with the rest.

When Tina stopped at last, dishevelled, panting, her waist half torn away, she was thrilled by applause such as Margot had never received. Silver was flung at her feet.

The dance of the apache was a success. George and Margot had slipped outside!

CHAPTER XII.

CONFESSION.

WHEN Happy George faced the horde of Brazilians who denounced him as "the assassin, the murderer," of Pedro Valdez, he realized that that blow had been a mistake. It had been

a savage joy to land his fist in the leering face of the politician, but it was a mistake. He had imperilled not only his own life but that of Margot, whom he shielded with his body as best he could while he backed slowly away from the shrieking mob.

Pedro Valdez was a greater power and a more popular figure in Rio than he had ever imagined.

With a forward surge, the crowd scattered the ineffectual group of waiters who were trying to protect their "boss" and George was able to save himself only by snatching up a chair and swinging it wildly in their faces. His assailants wavered, then with greater fury than ever they leaped at him, and knives were drawn.

George instinctively felt in his hip pocket, remembering as he did so that he had not brought a gun, but the gesture had its effect on the gang, and as they hesitated the piano at the other end of the hall broke abruptly into crashing chords, followed by the shrill outcry of a terrified woman.

The fringe of the mob nearest the platform turned to see a girl struggling in the arms of a young ruffian, the rest craned their necks and some leaped on to chairs to see over their neighbors' heads.

For a moment George was forgotten. Tina and Jean Lenoir were dancing the *Danse des Apaches* with a realism that made it look like a deadly assault.

A second of time was all that George needed. He had dragged Margot to the door of the café, jostling aside the curiosity seekers who came running in, and was lost in the crowd on the sidewalk.

A taxi driver slowed down to see what the trouble was all about. George flung open the door, shoved the girl in ahead of him and directed the chauffeur. "Hurry! Drive like the devil! Beira Mar!"

Before the bellowing gang of pursuers had swarmed out of the Café La Scala, the car had turned a corner and did not slow up until it had joined the stream of pleasure cars rolling along the Beira Mar, that boulevard that runs beside the sea.

George slipped an arm about the trembling shoulders of the girl who pressed against him as if seeking protection in the physical contact of her weakness with his strength. Under his caressing fingers he could feel the fluttering of her heart, the breath came in gasps as if she had been running. He saw the terror in her eyes as the light from the street lamps fell upon her face.

"Don't worry, kid—Miss Margot, I mean. Don't be scared! I'm not going to let anything happen to you."

She did not reply, only stared at him with those wide frightened eyes. She was like a child in the dark.

"I'm going to get you out of this scrape," he said. "Don't worry, dear, I'll think of a way. And we're safe now. As long as we keep going, we're safe."

"Where are you taking me?" she asked faintly.

"I don't know yet. I've got to think of a place," he admitted. "I don't want to take you to my house, that's the first place the gang will look. And it's not alone the crowd from the café. Pedro Valdez has got the police force in his pocket. I was a fool to have a set-to with a politician like that."

"Is he really so dangerous?" she whispered.

"He got the chief of police his job. He's as thick as thieves with every judge and magistrate and office holder and crook in Rio."

"And you dared to use your fists on a man like that for my sake!"

"You bet I did. I'd hand a wallop to the general in chief of the army or the president himself if he bothered you. But the question is, 'How are we going to get away with it?' I don't think your hotel's a safe place for you now."

"No, no!" replied Margot in alarm. "I never did feel safe there. There's something wrong about it. All kinds of queer looking men are hanging about the women who live there. It's horrible!"

"The worst of it is that I can't count on your guardian to protect you. After what he did—after he tried to turn you over to Valdez, practically sell you to that big ruffian—"

Margot sobbed. "Oh George, I don't understand Guy any more. Since he came to Rio he's gone all to pieces. He used to drink. Even in England he would take too

much sometimes, but now I don't think he's ever quite sober."

"He's the lowest kind of a crook," replied George. "A stick-up man wouldn't associate with anything as low as Guy Dalby. Has he tried that game before?"

"What game?"

"You know what I mean! Has he tried to introduce his friends?"

The girl nodded, too ashamed to speak.

"When?"

"Just a day or two ago. He tried to make me drink champagne with some of his friends at the hotel. I had to lock my door against them."

George gritted his teeth in rage. For a moment he was speechless.

"By God, I did wrong to hit him with my fist. I should have killed him outright. The dirty dog!"

Margot sobbed silently.

The car rolled along the sweeping curve of the bay where the moonlight flashed on the waves and the gentle plash of the surf filled the night with music. Before them lay the most beautiful vista in South America, that continent of romance and beauty, the bold peaks of the Sugar Loaf and the Hunchback, and the other rocky summits that overhang the city, the dark masses of tropical foliage, the walls of houses, bright in the moonlight, and the lofty, graceful forms of the royal palms.

But to the boy and girl who rode through that loverland, clasped in each other's arms, like happy sweethearts, the bay and Rio and all South America seemed like a fatal trap in that hour. They were surrounded by hidden dangers. The boy had insulted and struck with his fist a powerful and unscrupulous local despot—and the girl was the object of that scoundrel's inflamed desire.

"The safest place I can take you is Gian' Bori's," George spoke presently. "He has a little house with a garden and a grape arbor, an out-of-the-way place where no one is likely to come."

"And can you stay there, too?" Margot's voice trembled. "I know I can trust you to protect me."

"I'm not sure whether I can stay with you, but you will be safe there. Bori's wife will look after you. She's a good-hearted old lady."

The car turned and retraced part of the way along that magical shore and the romance of the perfumed night made the boy and girl forget their anxiety for a while.

Margot's body, warm and fragrant, relaxed as she lay in his strong arms. She sighed like a tired child.

"How wonderful it is to be riding like this with you."

"It's like when I dream of you," replied George fervently. "It doesn't seem real, and yet it is. Any minute I expect to wake up and find that I'm all alone. That's the way my dreams of you end."

"Do you really dream of me, George?"

"What else is there to dream of?"

Her only answer was a shy pressure of his hand and the boy continued: "Oh girl, I'm wild about you! From the first minute I saw you, it was like that. I'm just crazy about you!"

"You were very kind to me that first night," she replied timidly. "You were splendid the way you found Guy for me! The way you fought off that gang of cutthroats! But I didn't know you were doing it because—because you cared for me that way."

"Of course, I cared for you, Margot! I tell you, I fell—fell hard for you the minute I saw you! It's the first time I ever felt that way about a girl!"

"Is that true, George? You're not just saying that?"

"Before God it is true. Do you know what I thought the minute I set eyes on you?"

Margot's head sank to his shoulder. "Tell me," she said.

"All right! If I was a rich swell—if I had a college education, and knew how to behave, and if I'd ever done anything to be proud of—if I was the sort of a fellow that was even half good enough for you, I'd try to get you to care for me—and some day, I'd ask you to marry me. You know what I mean, if I was ten times as good—ten times as rich as I am! Then perhaps you might—"

He stopped. Words would not come to him. George stared straight ahead, not

daring to look at the girl, realizing that he had blundered and stammered something ridiculous. She would hate him now! She would think he was a fool for imagining such things!

"Oh damn!" he groaned.

"Go on," she said shyly. "I never dreamed you could say such things."

He turned to her with sudden eagerness, hope in his eyes. "Do you mean that you care for me just a little? That way?"

"I—I don't know. It's all so strange. So wonderful! So unexpected! But I do like you. I think you are the kindest, bravest man I've ever known."

He was covering both her hands with kisses. Fire seemed to run through his veins. His eyes flashed and he cried: "My God, I could fight the whole world for you, now. I'd like to stand up against all South America! One at a time or all together! After what you said, girl, I'd knock 'em cold!"

Frightened by his burst of passion she pulled her hands away and he released her gently. "Don't worry, Margot, I'm not going to rush you. Take your time. But gee! It's grand to know that you like me —even a little."

"I do like you very much — but oh, George, I'm so terrified. I need your help!"

"I'll look after you, all right! Don't worry!"

The light from the street lamp illuminated his face, white and shining with the joy of that moment. At the same instant a prowling cat-like figure ran lightly from the curb, sped alongside the car for a moment and then sprang upon the running board.

George started up in his seat with a cry of rage but the intruder whispered:

"Hist! Don't make a racket. You know me. I've got something to tell you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAY OUT.

"IT'S you, Jean Lenoir! Get inside the car! Keep on to Gian' Bori's house!" he called to the chauffeur. Then to Jean, "What are you doing here?"

"Sure, it's me, boss," replied the waiter from Café La Scala. "I was lookin' for you. Your sister sent me. We held the crowd back with that apache dance but Valdez is wild. He swears he'll get you and the girl, too."

"That guy's lucky if he only knew it," growled George. "This time, if I was to hit him, I'd croak him sure."

"You'd better lay low for a while. Valdez is a big boss here in Rio. He was swearing he'd have you both in jail, you and Miss Dalby. Likely he's got the police after you by now."

"Me in jail? What can he have against me?" cried Margot in terror.

But George became serious. Jail in Rio was an ugly matter for an unprotected girl —and a dancer in a café could be locked up on any trumped-up charge. Such women were at the mercy of the police.

"You haven't done anything wrong," he explained to Margot. "But just the same that fellow could lock you up as a vagrant. Your guardian is no good. Guy Dalby would play right into the hands of Valdez. A girl in your profession needs some one to look after her."

"Oh, if I could only get away from this horrible, horrible place!" Margot was almost in tears.

"I think I see a way out. Listen, Margot. You would be a lot safer from the police as a married woman. Give me a legal right to protect you, and I'll see you through. After all, Gian' Bori is my partner. We are both business men in this town, and old Bori has friends among the politicians, too. Valdez wouldn't dare to throw you into jail without any charge, if you were the wife of Gian' Bori's partner."

"But, George, how can I say 'yes.' You know I told you that I don't care for you that way—not yet—"

"I'm not asking anything of you, girl. I swear all I want is just to protect you."

"Do you really mean that?"

"I do mean it! Things will be just as they are between us. I'll keep on hoping just the same, but you will be free—absolutely free—until you tell me that you are ready to be my wife."

"You know I care for you, George! Yes, I'll do it! I know you'll do as you say."

The car had slackened speed as it ascended a hill set with small villas and gardens. Before one of these it jerked to a standstill, and Jean Lenoir jumped out and rang the bell. George handed the waiter a bill.

"Pay the taxi driver and give him a fat tip. Tell him to say nothing if he's asked questions, and I'll make it worth his while. You beat it back to the café!"

A moment later Gian' Bori and his dried-up little wife were exclaiming in shrill Italian at the atrocious wickedness of Pedro Valdez.

"But it was a mistake to lay hands on that man," cried Bori. "I know how you feel. Many a time I've been tempted to treat him the same way, but he is too powerful."

"I'm not worried about what he can do to me," said George. "I'll take a chance for myself, but what about Margot? If he throws her into jail as a suspicious character, he can do anything he likes with her."

"That's true," said Bori. "These café entertainers are all classed alike. She would get no consideration. If she were only married—if she only had a protector."

"Would that help some? If she were married to me, for instance?"

"Sure, that would be different. If Valdez had insulted your wife, instead of a cabaret girl, and you struck him, public sympathy would be on your side. The newspapers, especially the opposition papers, might play it up, appealing to the chivalry of the Latin race. It could be made an affair of honor. Valdez would be forced by public opinion to send you a challenge instead of throwing you into a cell."

"Then the big boss does care for what people say?"

"Of course he does. Election time is not very far off. His reputation for honesty means nothing, but if anybody could say that he had avoided a duel by throwing his opponent into jail, the very street beggars would hiss at him. He wouldn't dare to crawl out of an affair of honor."

"Is there no other way out?" cried Margot.

"Why, don't you want to marry George?" asked Bori in surprise. "I should think that any girl would want to marry a fine man like him."

"I told her that the marriage could be a matter of form as long as she likes," explained George. "She doesn't have to live with me. She can even get a separation later on, if she wants to."

"You'd better do it, Miss Dalby," said Gian' Bori earnestly. "It's the only way out."

"But can we be married without notice like this? Late at night?"

"Don't worry about that," chuckled Bori. "The law is very flexible when you have political friends and plenty of money. I have a good friend, an official in the government, Martin Aguirre. He lives in the same street and I can have him here in five minutes."

"You should be the happiest girl in the whole world," cried Bori's shriveled wife as she embraced the girl and kissed her on both cheeks. "A husband like that! A fine, handsome young fellow, and some day he'll be rich!"

Old Bori was at the door putting on his hat when George asked: "How about the legal papers and all that? Will everything be all right?"

Bori grinned at him knowingly. "I tell you, my friend is a government official. He knows how to unwind red tape. He has the right to marry you, and as for the necessary papers, he can fix them up afterward. A few pieces of gold in the palm of a politician works miracles."

The door closed behind him.

Signora Bori, who was all aflutter at the romance that had come into her monotonous life, trotted about in agitation, and finally bustled out of the room to find wine and cakes for the wedding feast. Her regret was that she could not have known long before. Ah, if she could have only helped to make a trousseau of white satin and lace for this beautiful bride—this lily of the north! If she could have had a week to prepare a real feast with many courses and various wines!

But an impromptu wedding was better than none at all, and no finer couple had ever been seen in Rio!

Finally she was gone, and the couple were left alone. George was walking nervously back and forth while Margot stood by the open window that looked into the courtyard. It was drenched in moonlight and the scent of roses. It was languorous with the heavy air of the tropics.

George stole softly behind her and gently took the white hand that was hanging listlessly by her side. She did not draw it away. She only acknowledged his presence by a slight pressure.

"Are you sorry, Margot? Are you frightened of me?" he asked.

"No, I'm not frightened." And after a pause: "I trust you, George. I know you will do as you promised."

The boy covered her hand with kisses.

"Don't worry about that," he said. "I swear not to disturb you—not to take advantage. It will be for you to decide when I'm to be your real husband. That's a promise!"

They were interrupted by the return of Mme. Bori. She carried a decanter of white wine and red and a large plate of cakes.

"It is all that I have in the house now," she exclaimed; "but later—later you must promise to let me give you a real wedding feast, and we will have all our friends and a dance. Maybe you will have a second wedding in the church," she continued. "With just a civil wedding one never seems more than half married."

"What's that you say?" Bori had entered with his friend, who, in spite of the heat, wore striped trousers and heavy frock coat—the official uniform. "Don't tell me that a marriage made by my friend here is not so good as one celebrated in the cathedral! Aguirre has tied thousands of knots in his time, and the archbishop himself with fifty priests, acolytes and choir boys could not tie it any tighter."

The yellow skinned little man in the big frock coat showed his few remaining teeth in a grin at these words, shook hands with the prospective bride and groom, and accepted a glass of wine from Mme. Bori.

From his pocket he pulled out a mass of documents, including one or two blank forms, and began laboriously to fill in the names and dates.

"This is very irregular. Not everybody could arrange this little matter," he kept grumbling under his breath as he toiled with a rusty pen until Bori became impatient and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Listen, old friend," he cried. "Here is the remedy for all irregularities." He jingled some golden coins and slipped them into the withered hand. "Now fix up your long-winded documents at home at your leisure. Get the dates and seals and stamps all in order. Let's have the ceremony now and be done with it. Who knows at what moment we may be interrupted?"

The couple stood side by side before the ancient official in his formal frock coat. The cold hand of Margot was lying in the strong hand of George, and the words that bind man and woman as husband and wife were spoken. Signora Bori hastily drew the worn circlet from her own left hand, when at the critical moment it was found that nobody had thought of a ring.

It was over. Senhor Aguirre picked up his papers, drank another glass of wine, and bowed himself out. All would be arranged, he said, the documents would be sent to them to-morrow, and the records at the city hall would be properly entered to make everything legal.

Bori and his wife shook George's hand with gayety, almost dancing in their joy. Gian' Bori declared that it was like marrying off his own son, and they both kissed the bride.

"But I must say," exclaimed Bori, "that you are a strange wedded couple. You have not even kissed each other."

Margot threw her arms around George's neck and raised her fresh rosy lips to his. It was their first kiss.

At the pressure of those warm young lips upon his own the boy's blood took fire. He pressed her madly to him and for a second her body relaxed in his arms. Then with swift revulsion she forced him desperately away from her. Her body stiffened in resistance, and with one hand she pushed against his face and averted her

own. Her eyes were staring, her mouth drawn with anguish.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "No, I can't let you kiss me that way! I don't love you that way! I can't!"

Slowly George let his arms fall from her. It was as if he had been stunned with a blow. If she had not yielded for that one instant, then he could have borne it. But to have her surrender like that and then force him away as if he were a stranger! That was humiliating! It was more than he could stand!

Gian' Bori and his wife looked at this scene in open-mouthed astonishment. Such a bride they had never heard of! These English!

George looked about in a dazed fashion, saw his cap on a chair, and picked it up. "It's all right, Margot," he managed to say. "I'm going."

"Going! Oh, no! I'm sorry. I didn't mean that!"

"You meant it all right." His voice was husky, but not with anger. "You can't help it. You don't love me—and you did not pretend to. It's better for me to go."

"Where are you going?"

He turned at the door and replied: "Back to the café!" With a twisted smile he added: "Got to tend to business. The place can't run itself."

"No, don't go back to La Scala tonight!"

"Why not?"

"Valdez may be there!"

"I hope to God he is," said George quietly, but his eyes had a wicked gleam and his fists suddenly clenched hard as hammers.

The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

TINA'S IMPULSE.

PLUNGING through the dark street, smarting with Margot's rebuff, George had gone only a short distance when he heard some one running behind him and turned quickly.

It was Gian' Bori, who, as he overtook the young man, drew one hand through his arm, and panted: "Not so fast! If Valdez is still there, he can wait. If not, there is plenty of time!"

"I want to get back, Gian'. That gang may have wrecked the place while I was gone, or they may have acted rough with Tina."

At this Gian' Bori laughed. "It is far more likely that Tina acted rough with them. I'd trust that girl to protect herself against those thugs. She's a regular animal tamer!"

"You said something!" admitted George. He remembered how Tina had helped to pull him out of one tight place after another, and he added, half to himself: "There never was a pal like Tina!"

"You may need this, George," said Bori, and slipped a small automatic into his partner's hand. "Stick that into your pocket where you can get it quick."

"Lucky I didn't have a gat an hour ago. There would be one coffee-colored politician shot full of holes!"

"For God's sake, don't use it, my boy, unless you've got to!" cautioned the older man. "Sometimes it is better to think fast than to shoot fast."

They had reached the brightly lighted streets by now, and George kept a lookout for Valdez's friends, political or otherwise. As they passed sidewalk cafés, the drinkers looked up and many of them recognized the pair. A buzz of comment followed them down the street. Heads flew together, fingers were pointed. It was evident that the news of the fight had flashed from café to café, but if any one felt hostile he did not show it. One or two raised their glasses in friendly greeting.

"Keep cool, George! Here are two of Valdez's men right now!" Bori whispered as a couple of policemen approached them. Bori saw that they were observed, and pressed George's arm.

"Now, don't get excited," he said. "If they have a warrant and everything is regular, don't resist arrest. If they have no warrant, we'll try to talk them out of it some way or buy them off. But for God's sake, don't pull your gun on a policeman. That would be your finish."

"Don't worry," answered George in a

whisper. "I'm not going to do anything foolish. Come on."

With his chin up and his chest out, he walked boldly toward the half-caste guardians of the law, Bori keeping close to his side, and both looking quite unconcerned. As they came closer George recognized the two officers. Many a time he had given them a free drink or a tip at his place. Before they could speak he nodded to them with a mixture of patronage and good fellowship. "Hello, Paulo! Good evening, Joe!" and looked them straight in the eye.

The policemen muttered respectfully and touched their caps a little sheepishly and shuffled on.

For some reason they did not think this was the right moment to make an arrest. The two partners reached Café La Scala without being molested.

There was the usual crowd before the door and inside at the little tables. Tina sat at the cashier's desk, very cool and extremely pretty in her costume of red and black. The only thing unusual about the place was that the pianist was supplying all the entertainment.

There was no sign of Valdez. And as for Guy Dalby, he had simply faded out of the picture after George's blow. George stopped at the desk and leaned over to give Tina's hand a little pat.

"That was a fine job you did, Tina," he said. "That showed good headwork to give me a chance to make a get-away."

Tina smiled, and with a tilt of her chin retorted: "The headwork was all right! How did you like the footwork?"

"I didn't see enough to say. About the time you got going I was on my way. Did Valdez try to make any more trouble? Did he want to wreck the place or something?"

"He made a lot of noise, and said he would have you and that girl in jail tonight. His friends did want to smash the mirrors and dishes, but I said a few things that made them change their minds. Then the reporters and the police got Valdez telling his story, and he sure told 'em plenty. He says you're crazy and an anarchist and a murderer, and that a life sentence in an underground cell will just be about right for you."

"I don't think he can get away with it, not even in South America!"

"Maybe not. I'm glad you got Margot safely out of this. But don't you think you're foolish to be here, George? There's apt to be a lot of these saddle-colored cops coming in any moment to take you away."

"I'll chance it. But right now I want you to do something for me. Go around to the newspaper that is opposed to Valdez. You know—*O Jornal*—and see that they get my story. Will you do that?"

"Sure, I'll do it!" said Tina, and she jumped down from her stool and began to put on her hat. "What is your story, George? What can you tell them to help your case if you get hauled up before the judge?"

"Tell them that Valdez is a dirty dog, and I knocked him down because he insulted a lady."

"Everybody knows that." Tina paused and looked at him with a saucy smile. "Can't you think of anything more interesting to say?"

"Sure! It's a man-to-man fight, not a matter for the police. If he's not yellow clear through, Valdez will want to settle it man fashion—not run snivelling to a judge. The lady he insulted is my wife!"

"Oh!" Tina's hand flew to her heart. The smile was erased from her face and all the color went with it. Her big black eyes stared at George with an expression of tragic incredulity.

"It's not true," she whispered. "You're just telling that to the papers!"

"It is true! If Valdez has me arrested instead of fighting it out like a man, he's a sneak and a coward. See that the paper gets that! See that they play it up!"

With a sound that might have been a sob choked back in her throat, Tina darted from the café. She was wrestling with her grief. That George could tell her of his marriage to Margot in that cold and offhand way! That he could care so little for his friend, the pal who had stuck to him through hell and high water! That was what hurt! Not that she wanted George herself. It was her pride that was stung.

At least, that is what Tina told herself as she hastened through the streets, disregarding the stares of the sidewalk drinkers and the calls of the overdressed mashers.

By the time she had reached the newspaper office, the most important of the journals opposed to Valdez's crowd, she managed to get control of her feelings, dried her eyes, and asked for the editorial rooms in a matter-of-fact voice.

There was no trouble in finding a reporter to take her story. The sensational attack on the political boss would be front page stuff. Tina sat in a rickety chair by a littered desk, and while the presses pounded away downstairs and the smell of printer's ink filled her nostrils and the click of typewriters sounded in her ears, she told George's story to a yellow faced young man with a languid manner.

As a matter of fact, the reporter was impressed. It was a big story, but it was part of his training not to show any excitement over big stories.

"So Pedro Valdez tried to get gay with a married woman! And it was the lady's husband that punched him in the face! That's not the first time he's been in a scrape, but he most always bulls his way through!"

"He's a beast," exclaimed Tina. "I'd like to dig my nails in his face!"

"Many ladies think otherwise," grinned the reporter. "There will be plenty of them at his party to-night."

"His party?"

"Oh yes, in spite of his being punched in the face, I think the party will come off all right. He keeps open house at his big place in the hills. No end of pretty ladies will be there."

"What sort of party will it be?"

"Rather wild! I've been to some of his sprees."

"You? From an opposition paper?"

"Oh, sometimes I work on one paper and sometimes on another. We reporters have no politics! Most any one can get in, the young sports and newspaper men because they can help on election day. And of course any girl who is not ugly is more than welcome."

"Gee, I'd like to see that kind of a blow-out!" exclaimed Tina suddenly. "I feel like taking a chance to-night. You know what I mean? I've got that don't-care-what-happens feeling!"

The reporter eyed her with a sardonic smile. "I guess you've had a quarrel with your steady," he commented.

"Well, that's all bunk, I have no steady. I'm the sort of a girl that has no regular fellow!"

"They must be blind then, the men you know!" The reporter's languid eyes brightened with admiration as he stared at this strange girl.

"Why don't you come along?" smiled Tina coquettishly. "I've made up my mind that I'm going to that party if I have to go alone."

"Are you kidding? Would you take a chance like that?"

"Sure, I'd take a chance. Will you come along?"

"Yes! Give me a few minutes to fix up this story and I'll be right with you."

Fifteen minutes later the reporter was trying to squeeze Tina's hand as their taxi bumped and rattled up the road to the showy villa where Valdez gave his biggest parties.

CHAPTER XV.

A RECOGNITION—AND A SHOCK.

AS Tina left the café to carry George's story to the newspaper, Bori took her place at the cashier's desk.

Without even glancing after the girl, George turned away from the desk and was on his way to the platform. Still enraged at Valdez and still smarting from the repulse of Margot, he longed to assert himself. He wanted everybody to know that he was right there, ready to meet all comers if there was more trouble on the way.

He walked to the piano, touched Pierre Vigney on the shoulder and spoke to him. The latter nodded and switched deftly from the jazz to the melody of an Italian folk song. It had been quite some time since George had entertained his café patrons. As part owner he was not sure whether it was beneath his dignity, but to-

night he sang with a spirit of bravado and as his fine tenor voice soared into the ever popular "O Sole Mio," the glasses rattled with the applause. There were cries of "Bravo! Bravo!"

The patrons were delighted at the evening's entertainment. The Dancing Doll, a fist fight, the apache dance and now "O Sole Mio," but on the last note George was brought up with a start, and the old pianist's fingers ceased abruptly.

A voice in the café had shouted, "By God! It's Kid Caruso!"

There was no dodging the encounter. Happy George was recognized. He looked straight into the eyes of Jim Harbison, who had half risen from his chair and was pointing him out, while a large, overdressed woman with lemon-colored hair stared with smiling interest.

George walked over to the table and took the showman's outstretched hand. Harbison was overjoyed.

"Happy George! Can you beat that! What are you doing down in this corner of the world?" Without waiting for an answer he continued, "Want you to meet my wife! Lily, this is Mr. George Marcanda, otherwise known to fame as Kid Caruso, the Bleecker Street Nightingale!"

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," replied George blushing and extending a hand. "It's nice to meet folks from home!" To himself he added emphatically, "Like hell it is!"

"Well, well, well!" crowed Harbison, slapping George on the back as they settled down to drinks "on the house." "I never expected to find you here. It must be all of two years since I saw you last. Have you been working here all this time?"

"I got a part interest in this place," answered George with some pride. "I left New York because I thought I could do better for myself, and I guess I was right."

Harbison patted his hand. "Fine, my boy, fine! You'd make good anywhere! But say," he added in a low voice, "now I remember you had some run-in with the police. I forgot all about that. Maybe I pulled a boner when I spoke your name right out in meeting just now."

"No, there was nothing to it," said George with assumed indifference. "The bulls never had anything on me—you didn't hear that I was wanted for anything, did you?"

"Well, let me see," Jim Harbison knitted his brows. Things happened so fast on Broadway that the events of two years ago were old stuff! "There was something in the newspapers about your running with a gang that killed a policeman. I never took any stock in it myself. They sent a guy to the chair for that murder, Spaghetti House Louie, I think his name was. Some of the others got long terms in Sing Sing. One of them, Nick-in-the-Blade, made his getaway. He was the brains of the gang."

"Yes, I read about it in the newspapers —what brings you to South America?"

"Partly business and partly pleasure," replied Harbison. "Lily kept after me for years to take her on a trip to the tropics, and besides I thought I might pick up some novelty in the way of entertainers. Some of these South American capitals are said to be as gay as Paris."

"They're pretty wild in spots," admitted George.

"It's not exactly the wild stuff I'm looking for. If I wanted wild stuff I'd sign up those two apache dancers. That was a wow I'll say! It looked like a real murder when those two were strangling each other. But that act's too rough. The little lady I want to sign up is that Dancing Doll! There's a girl that can dance!"

"You think she's pretty good?" asked George.

"Think so? Why man I've got ten thousand dollars cash that says so, right out loud. Yes, sir, I've got ten thousand dollars cash to back my opinion, and a good fat contract for a year as well. If I can get her manager to sign up I'll have her name in lights in front of my Broadway theatre!"

"You haven't seen her manager?" asked George.

"No. I was looking for him. Somebody told me he was tanked most of the time. Have to send him to a Turkish bath before talking business! A sport named Dalby!"

"He used to be her manager but he isn't any more."

"No? Well it's a good thing for her. Who is her manager?"

"I am," said George. "She's my wife!"

"Your wife? Congratulations! You certainly have come up in the world. Owner of a swell café and married to the cleverest little dancer I've seen for years!"

Mrs. Harbison added her gushing congratulations, but her husband continued:

"Well, what about it? I wasn't bluffing about that contract—though I wouldn't have said so much if I'd known I was talking to her manager. Why don't you turn over your business to your partner and take your wife to New York? I can put her across big!"

"I don't think I can go. Not just yet. But perhaps Margot will take up your offer."

"She will if she cares for money. I'll give her a contract for seven hundred and fifty dollars a week to start with—and raise it to a thousand a week if she goes as good as I expect."

"When are you leaving?" asked George.

"To-morrow at noon."

"I'll talk to her about it to-night. We'll have to settle it pretty quick. Suppose you come out to the house with me right now."

"You'd better come along to New York with us, Mr. Marcanda," said Lily Harbison. "I don't see how you can be separated from such a wife! Why, she's the daintiest little creature I ever saw. She's wonderful! She must be or Jim wouldn't rave over her. He's usually hard boiled when it comes to artists."

"I know. But there are reasons why I would just as soon have her go to New York without me." George's smile was a little wry as he recalled those reasons to himself. This seemed like the best way out. Margot would be protected in New York, safe from the schemes and violence of Pedro Valdez. What is more, she would be removed from the husband she had married but did not love. George felt that he could not stand it to see this girl constantly, to know that she was legally his but that he could not possess her. Perhaps, after a separation she would begin to care for him! Might ask him to join her!

"Let's take a taxi right now. We can be there in ten minutes!" George nodded to Bori as they passed out of the café and a few minutes later the party had reached the villa set back in its garden.

George told the chauffeur to wait.

The house was dark. There was no response to their knock and when George finally tried the door he was astonished to find that it swung open easily It was not even latched.

With a sinking heart he switched on the lights and went from room to room calling, "Margot! Margot!" at the top of his voice.

But there was no answer!

At last he wrenched open a closet door and saw a limp heap of rags lying on the floor. He shook it wildly and disclosed the unconscious features of Signora Bori. She had been left there stunned.

But Margot was gone!

CHAPTER XVI.

AT VALDEZ' PARTY.

EVIDENTLY the old signora had been stunned, and thrown carelessly out of the way with a door slammed upon her.

When they brought her out and laid her on a couch, she was unable to speak, only gazed about helplessly with drooping eyes, and her head rolled as if she had lost all control of her muscles.

George found some brandy while Lily Harbison loosened the old lady's clothing, but even after a glass of spirits had been poured down her throat, Signora Bori could only mumble incoherently. Her phrases came from her withered throat like the ravings of a nightmare.

"Don't! Don't hit me! Oh my poor lamb! They are carrying her away! *Dio mio!*—No, no, no! Don't strike me!"

George realized that the worst had happened. A gang of Valdez' thugs had invaded the place. They must have knocked the old woman on the head as callously as if she were a troublesome watchdog.

As for Margot! George shuddered at the thought of what she had suffered. The ruffians must have tied her and thrown her

bodily into a car. Chairs were overset, table covers dragged to the floor: everywhere there were signs of a struggle.

But there was nothing to show where the gang had taken her. To some retreat where Valdez could compel her to submit, of course. But where? He might have a dozen haunts for just such purposes. He was rich and had a notorious fondness for women.

"Why didn't I choke the life out of that yellow brute when I had my hands on him!" groaned George.

Harbison and his wife were busy trying to help Signora Bori and George spoke with forced calm, though his hands were trembling with rage and agitation.

"You two look after the old lady. I'm going to comb this town till I find Margot. If I don't find my wife, I'll run down Valdez. This time I'll croak him, by God!"

Before his friends could answer he had dashed out of the room and jumped into the waiting taxi.

"To Pedro Valdez' house," he cried.

"Which one?"

"How many houses does he own?"

The chauffeur shrugged. "I don't know how many, but he has one in town and a fine big place up in the hills."

"Go to the town house first!"

"I think you are more likely to find him at the villa. There's a party going on there to-night."

"How do you know?"

The chauffeur had already started the car on the winding hill road. "I ought to know," he retorted. "I took some guests up there an hour ago. French ladies!" he added with a chuckle.

"Burn up the road!" commanded George and the car continued to climb and climb. Soon the scattering town houses were left behind and the road swung about hillsides dark with tropical foliage. Occasionally the white walls of a villa showed where some estate overlooked the sea, but none of them had a sign of life and until at a turn of the road a pretentious structure, like a small exposition building, appeared, blazing with lights from every window.

"That's the place," said the driver.

"Good! Drop me at the gate! Turn the car and have the engine going. When I come back we're apt to be in a hurry!"

George leaped from the car, ran across the roadway and dashed through the shrubbery toward the house. With one hand he touched the gun that Bori had given him to keep it from jolting out of his pocket.

From the open windows came the noise of shrill laughter and the blare of jazz. The party was in full swing!

The intruder who had come to break up Valdez' party moved cautiously about the grounds, dodging the shafts of light that poured from the windows, and took shelter in the bushes. The little summer house offered a hiding place where he could look in upon the ballroom from a higher level. As he hurriedly sprang into this vine-shadowed refuge, there was a faint feminine shriek, a man's growling curse, and two figures hastily scuttled out the other side. George was no less startled than the lovers, but he held his ground. By standing on a bench he could look squarely into the broad ballroom and took in at a glance the interior that had been copied from Monte Carlo.

The walls were profusely decorated with gilt; great chandeliers hung from the ceiling and cast their light on theatrical looking velvet curtains, and the gilt tables and chairs that were arranged about the wall.

At intervals stood buffets piled high with elaborate dishes of fruit and pastry and trays of glasses. Bottles of wine and coolers of champagne were abundantly supplied, and the waiters in red plush and white silk stockings perspired freely as they pulled corks and filled glasses for the thirsty guests.

But in contrast to this tawdry magnificence the revellers looked like a moonlight chowder party at some tough beach, or an outing of the Stick-up Men's Protective Association.

George wondered at this but when he saw a new arrival in evening clothes throw off his coat and vest and begin to pull on some old clothes rummaged from the servants' quarters, he understood. Pedro Valdez had taken a sudden fancy to have a roughneck party, and it was an easy matter to improvise suitable costumes.

The men had jammed old felt hats or

caps with huge visors, on their heads. Some had even added a black mask or a handkerchief with slitted eye holes to look like real gun men.

With a red sash improvised from a table cover, and a gay colored bandanna knotted about the throat the most fastidious young swell of Rio was easily transformed into a roughneck.

And in the way Pedro's friends swung their partners in the wild tango, it was easy to see that they felt at ease in their costumes.

Their lady companions, most of them originally from Paris or Brussels or the night clubs of Vienna, fell into the rôle as if they enjoyed it. It meant nothing to them to shorten their skirts by tearing off a foot around the hem and to slash the silk to ribbons so as to look like ragamuffins. Pedro was rich and paid well for his whims. They would all go home with gold enough for six new dresses.

Some selected narrow silken masks which the servants had found among old costumes and the women declared they were girl bandits.

So the party that George stared at from the summerhouse was as riotous as anything in the gutters of Paris, a dance of holdup men and wild *gamines*, with their host stalking about in their midst, trailed by six or eight women who shrieked ribald remarks as they swayed across the floor.

Valdez had his head bound with a red bandanna, a broad sash held up his trousers and in its folds he carried a huge kitchen knife, borrowed by way of a pleasantry from the cook.

George noticed with satisfaction that he himself had added to the piratical effect by a cut on the cheek where his fist had landed. It was patched with black sticking plaster over the purple bruise.

But in spite of that Valdez was in good spirits. The insult in the café was forgotten for a while, and as a lavish host he went about the hall, stopping now and then to open a champagne bottle with his own bejeweled hands and fill the glasses of his guests. Occasionally, to prove that he was a daredevil with flashes of wit, he would tilt a foaming bottle over the brassy head of one of his fair friends, and then the whole party would break into wild hand clapping and yells of admiration. Pedro Valdez was a grand boss! He certainly knew how to give a party!

While George was quivering with impatience to break in and take this millionaire thug by the throat, he restrained himself. Valdez could wait! He had come for Margot and he strained his eyes for any sign of the girl.

All at once his throat contracted. He had caught sight of Guy Dalby, wearing only a pink striped shirt above his checkered trousers. For headwear he sported the brim of his straw hat from which he had cut away the crown so that it stood out behind his ears like a halo.

As Guy came from an anteroom, he looked at Valdez with a rueful face and despairing gesture. Valdez answered with a scowl and sent him back with an imperative movement. As the door closed behind the song-and-dance man, George made swift preparations to join the party. He threw off his coat and collar, and opened his shirt. He made a mask out of his handkerchief and pulled his cap far down over his eyes. By the time he had rolled up the shirt sleeves on his muscular arms he felt that he would be an ornament to Valdez' little affair.

He only stopped long enough to transfer the automatic from the coat pocket to his trousers before he ran across the lawn and climbed the nearest balcony.

From the balcony he merely had to step through the open window. In a moment he was among a knot of young fellows gathered about a champagne cooler.

George kept edging toward the door where Guy Dalby had disappeared, but before he reached it the song-and-dance man had reappeared, staggering a little with the effects of Pedro's hospitality. He was scowling back into the anteroom and all at once with an impatient jerk he dragged in a girl by the arm.

It was Margot!

Her hair was disheveled and her dress torn, but in that crowd where everybody wore rags, that was not conspicuous. The difference was that while the women who

stared at her curiously were laughing shrilly from vermilion painted lips, Margot's face was drawn with terror and tears were running down her cheeks.

"Come on, Margot," urged Guy Dalby. "Pedro isn't going to hurt you. He's a prince!" Then as his ward still tried to shrink back into the anteroom he spun her onto the floor with a vicious snap.

"Come on," he growled. "No one is going to eat you! It's a nice party! All friends together! They want to see you dance."

At the sight of the trembling girl, Valdez advanced majestically across the ballroom, a string of women hanging to each arm, and his corpulent body swaying like old Silenus himself.

"There you are," he chuckled flatly. "Ah, here is my lily of the north, my dancing doll!"

Margot retreated before him, staring piteously at her guardian for protection from the drunkard.

"I knew you'd be here, you little beauty! I passed out the word to have you brought in—and here you are! Now dance for us!"

George was groaning with fury as he saw Valdez' fat hand reach out toward Margot and his own hand tightened about his automatic. It was out of his pocket, the finger on the trigger ready to shoot from the hip.

But at that moment a firm touch on his wrist checked him and he looked straight into a pair of black eyes under a red satin mask, a costume of scarlet and black with a red flower in the hair. The eyes were full of bold deviltry and could not be mistaken.

"How did you get here?" he whispered in astonishment.

"S—st!" cautioned Tina. "Don't talk and for God's sake don't start anything rough!"

It had happened in a split second. Before Valdez' outstretched hand had touched Margot, the lithe figure in black and scarlet was spinning like a whirling firebrand across the polished floor. Right under Valdez' astounded eyes she jerked to a stop and poised with a hip thrown out at a provoking angle, one arm akimbo, the other snapping above her head as if she were clicking castanets. Her eyes were a challenge. Every young line of her body was an invitation. To the rhythm of a native dance, she sinuously backed away, clicking the syncopated time with her little heels and the snapping of her fingers.

"Brava! Brava!" cried the tipsy revelers. And Valdez, dragging his satellites, waddled after her as if hypnotized.

"I know you!" he gurgled rapturously. "I know who you are, you fascinating little devil! You're the apache dancer!" He rolled his eyes langorously.

Homesickness for Paris had seized him! "You're Montmartre! You're the spirit of the *brasseries* of the Butte. You're the soul of Paris!"

With bloodshot eyes, and babbling "Paris! Ah Paris!" he lurched unsteadily in pursuit.

As the crowd surged past him George found Margot unexpectedly at his side. He whispered sharply. "Don't hurry! Don't make a noise! Keep your eye on me and follow!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW PLAN.

MARGOT stared doubtfully and shrank a little from this masked stranger, who looked like a holdup man with a handkerchief drawn across his face and the cap pulled low over his eyes.

The crowd was pressing them closer together as the spectators followed with laughing ribaldry in the wake of Pedro Valdez and the madcap dancer.

Guy Dalby, with his hand still holding Margot's wrist, was looking after the pair with mixed feelings. He was partly amused at Valdez' new infatuation and partly irritated that his ward was overlooked for this latest whim.

His hand relaxed on the girl's wrist and George seized the opportunity to whisper to Margot.

"It's me! It's George!" And then as Guy looked around he added in a loud voice: "May I have the pleasure of a dance with you, *mademoiselle?*"

In a second she was swung clear of Guy Dalby's grip and the couple were dancing

across the ballroom where a few half-tipsy couples were tangoing.

Guy Dalby lurched along after them. "I say there! Oh, I say!" Then he gave it up as he bumped first into one pair of dancers and then another.

Finally he retired to a buffet for liquid consolation, cursing Valdez for his fickleness in turning from Margot to the Spanish dancer so abruptly.

As they danced George kept whispering, "Act as if you enjoyed it, Margot! Put a little life into it! And be ready to follow me when I give the word. I've got a car waiting at the gate!"

Around the ballroom they circled, weaving in and out among the dancing couples and spectators.

But at every doorway there was a compact knot of guests and servants. That way out was blocked!

Then as they approached the window where George had entered he whispered, "Now's our chance! Dance on to the balcony. Dance as if you like it! *Now!*"

As they whirled through the window, George leaped over the balcony, agile as a cat, and stood on the lawn with arms upraised to receive her.

With the light step of a professional dancer she poised on the railing for a second, then sprang into his arms.

He caught her as if she had been a falling rosebud, and swept her in a tight embrace before he put her little feet on the ground.

Then hand in hand they ran swiftly and noiselessly down the slope to the entrance of the estate.

They could not be sure whether the shouts and calls that issued from the house were just part of the gayety or an alarm at their escape.

They did not stop to find out.

The driver saw them dash out of the gate and instantly threw in the clutch. The car was moving slowly when George thrust the girl inside and slammed the door after him as he followed.

Instantly they were taking the long down grades and the first sharp turn at breakneck speed.

In the darkness of the taxi, Margot clung to George's arm, gasping:

"Oh, get me out of here! Take me away from this horrid place! I never want to see Rio again!"

But George was straining his ears for sounds of pursuit. He did not expect to get clear so easily.

From the cliff above them, where the first pale light of dawn was touching the tree tops, came a sudden rattle of pistol shots and the faint echoes of yells and shrieks.

George wondered if the chase was on.

He knew that a steep trail cut across the road, a rugged footpath, a short cut, leading from the villa, and he made sure that his revolver was handy in case Valdez' friends tried to stop them there.

They had to slacken their speed, for there was a hairpin curve just beyond the trail, and as the chauffeur put on the brakes, the headlight suddenly showed a mad figure leaping out of the bushes at the roadside and directly ahead of the car.

The brakes screamed as they were jammed on hard and George's revolver was out of his pocket. The car swerved to avoid collision.

But at the same instant he let his gun fall, swung open the door and the breathless fugitive scrambled in beside him.

"Tina! How did you get away?" he cried. The figure in tatters of scarlet and black, that had been a jaunty costume but was now mere shreds of fabrics, was panting like a hunted deer.

But as the car took the curve and swung into a long drive toward the city, George heard with amazement that she was not sobbing but laughing crazily, as she was trying to catch her breath.

"Oh George!" she gasped. "That was *some* party! I wouldn't have missed that for the world! Did you ever see such a riot?"

With one hand she steadied herself against the jouncing of the car and with the other she held her chest, trying to recover her breath.

"Oh boy! What a get-away! It was a scream!"

"How did you make it? Through the window like we did?" asked George.

Margot was gazing with distended eyes

at this gypsy-like creature. To think that any one could laugh in such a situation!

"No, not through the window," exclaimed Tina. "Valdez was right on top of me. He had his arms almost around me when I grabbed that big knife from his sash and made a pass at him. Not trying to hurt him, you know. Just to make him watch his step! I was laughing all the time and he didn't know how to take it."

"You pulled a knife on him!"

"Sure! And when he saw that half a yard of steel coming his way he began to back off. Then he and I did a dagger dance right across the ballroom. Valdez made wonderful time for a fat man. You'd have died laughing!

"Nobody came between. Maybe they thought it was part of the show—or maybe they thought I'd gone crazy and would put the knife into him."

"I wish to God you had!"

"Honest George, I couldn't do it! He looked so funny! He's just a grown-up baby! Valdez didn't stop when he got to the doorway. He went right through it as if he were in a hurry. As soon as I got outside I didn't stick around to say good-by or to get my wraps or anything. I ducked for the trail and was half way down it before the shooting began."

Suddenly Tina's laughter went unnaturally shrill and almost immediately she began to sob.

George leaned over and patted her on the shoulder, slipping one arm around her and drawing her to him.

"What's the matter, dear? Are you hurt?" he asked tenderly.

"I don't know. I guess it's just a few scratches and bruises."

"There, there," said George. "Don't cry! You'll be all right. Don't cry!" And he held her closer. But at this, Tina shed real tears and stiffening in his arms she exclaimed indignantly:

"Why shouldn't I cry? Hasn't a girl got a right to cry if she wants to?" And having asserted her sex, Tina relaxed again on George's shoulder.

The driver turned his head to speak into the car. "Shall I stop at Bori's house or go straight into town?"

"Stop at Gian' Bori's," directed George and in a few minutes the car halted at his partner's house.

Gian' Bori came running out at the sound of the car and began to pour out a stream of maledictions upon the head of Pedro Valdez.

What sort of a man was this! To break into a man's house, butcher his wife and kidnap women! *Maladetta!* He would shoot that scoundrel on sight!

Though Signora Bori was able to sit up and talk coherently, she was still suffering from the shock. She would never be the same after this outrage, declared Bori.

"Is Harbison still here?" demanded George, but at that moment his question was answered by the appearance of Harbison and his wife at the door.

"Get in quick!" cried George. "We'll take you back to your hotel. You're just the man I want to see."

As the car drove them back through comparatively level streets to the hotel, George continued:

"Margot, here's a New York manager. I know him. He's white clean through! He wants to give you a contract for big time. Seven hundred and fifty a week and your name in lights on Broadway!"

"Do you mean it?" cried Margot. "You're not joking?"

"Would I be joking now?" retorted George.

And Harbison broke in: "This is straight goods, Miss Dalby. I saw your act and I know it would go big on Broadway."

"Big! It would be a knock-out, deary," burbled Mrs. Harbison.

"And you will give me a contract at seven hundred and fifty a week?"

"That's just a starter! It will be more than that in less than six months."

"Just a starter, honey," echoed Lily Harbison.

"You've got to decide at once, for Mr. Harbison sails to-day," urged George. "You won't even have a chance to get your things from the hotel. It wouldn't be safe to go back."

Margot smiled bitterly. "Precious little to get! Guy pawned everything he could lay his hands on."

"Do you want to go, Margot? Do you want to go to New York?"

The girl hesitated for only the fraction of a second.

"Yes," she said. "I couldn't very well refuse such an offer. Of course I'll go!"

"Good! We'll take you right along to Harbison's hotel and he'll get you aboard the boat as early as possible. There may be some trouble getting by the officials—"

But Mrs. Harbison interrupted, laying her hand on the girl's arm. "Oh, I'm just sure we can fix that, honey! I came with a maid, and the papers are made out to include her. We can leave Marie over for the next boat. She's perfectly crazy to have a little time in Rio. Not very nice, but I know how she feels. I was young once myself. We'll smuggle Miss Dalby aboard as our maid. I don't suppose you'd mind going as a servant, deary?"

"I'd go as a stowaway or as kitchen help to get away from this terrible country," exclaimed Margot passionately.

Tina listened with amazement.

"And that's the girl that George married!" she thought, indignantly. "She hasn't even asked whether George is going or staying here. She doesn't even care! George is smart, all right, but when it comes to picking a wife, a baby could do better. She's a hell of a bride!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

ʊ ʊ ʊ

WOMEN BRAVE

I SING of women brave who through
The ages stayed at home
While husbands went adventuring,
Nor cared not where they'd roam.

The women of the Cave Age with
Their mates a-straying far,
In search of brontosaurus and
Of horny dinosaur.

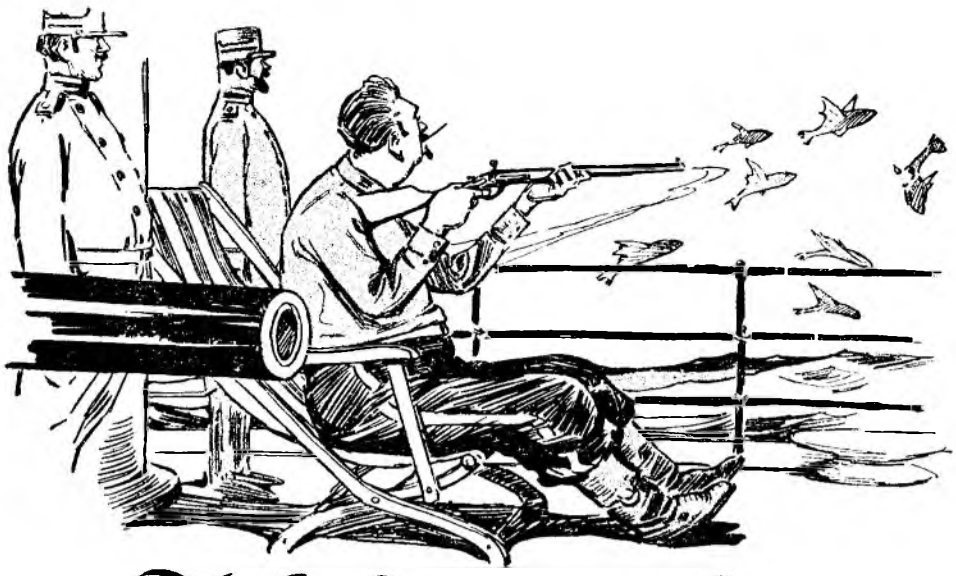
The women of the Ice Age who,
Howe'er their hearts might yearn,
Would pack their men off hunting while
They watched the home fires burn.

And women of Crusading times
Who waved their men to war;
With shouts and smiles they'd send them off,
And silent heart breaks bore.

Then sailors' wives of olden days,
Their husbands on the Horn:
Great guns! They'd wait for twenty years
Before they'd start to mourn.

And so I sing of women brave,
Although I sing in vain.
The wife won't let me golf to-day;
She thinks it's going to rain!

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.



Kakaua the Unconquered

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

WHEN the word reached Paris that the fearless La Besse had drawn his sword for the last time and had fired his last rifle and was, in fact, dead, there was consternation. Until that moment it had not been fully realized how completely the government—all the governments for the last thirty years—had depended on the fearless La Besse.

Dumont, of the pointed mustaches, looked at Tallien, of the close clipped beard, aghast. At that moment they realized that La Besse had been France, the strong arm and the power of France, in Moturoa.

"The women and children!" gasped Dumont.

"The factors! The warehouses! The inhabitants!" moaned Tallien.

"But you, my old one," said Dumont, "could not know the valiant La Besse was to die so suddenly, without warning the office. Do not take the awful catastrophe so heavily. If we are investigated—"

"Quiet, my friend!" rejoined Tallien sternly. "I shall not shirk my responsibility. If the massacre is consummated there is still my pearl-handled automatic!"

"Your automatic?"

"Or poison. Or the Seine. A Tallien must not survive his dishonor."

"You are a noble soul," said Dumont with feeling. "You are a giant among men, old cabbage! As for me, I echo you. A Dumont must not survive his dishonor. If Kakaua comes down from the mountain I, too, will efface myself."

"A bullet in the brain, yes?" said Tallien.

"I shall change my name and emigrate to the Republic of Argentine," replied Dumont with simple dignity. The two men clasped hands.

"In that case," said Tallien, "I shall accompany you. Will you look up the sailings and the cost of passage?"

"I have already done so," said Dumont.

"But, perhaps—"

"I understand you," said Dumont. "But is it possible that the monster Kakaua will let this unhappy occasion pass? Not in ten thousand million years, my dear old codfish! With the fearless La Besse dead he will come down from the mountain with his bloodthirsty hordes—"

"His man-eating cannibals—"

"His hideous painted savages," added Dumont. "My chief, do you realize how fully we have depended on the fearless La Besse? How this department has allowed the weight of the task of keeping the unconquered Kakaua in check for the past thirty years to rest on the shoulders of that brave warrior?"

"Alas, I do, old chicken!" groaned Tallien. "But what? Was it not so when we entered the Department? Did we not inherit it from those who were here before us? 'La Besse remains at Moturoa—all is well!' Has that not been an axiom of the office since the days when you and I lay in our little cradles sucking our pink little toes?"

"But when all the whites on Moturoa are massacred will our pink little toes be an excuse for our lack of foresight? How old was La Besse?"

Tallien consulted the dossier.

"Ninety-five years, six months, seven days," he groaned.

"Old top," said Dumont solemnly, "we are culpable."

"I was unware he was becoming so ancient," said Tallien helplessly.

"It was our business to be aware," insisted Dumont, refusing to soften the facts. "The dossier was in our bureau. The tables of the Bureau of Accountancies and Actuarialities were at our disposal. We could have discovered that a man of ninety-five years, six months and seven days was capable of becoming deceased without satisfactory preliminary notice. And we have done nothing, old lemon pie, to meet such a situation."

"We counted on La Besse," said Tallien. "We always did count on him. For years the office counted on him. We counted on him, and we supported him."

"Always!" exclaimed Dumont. "We were aware of his situation."

"He had but to ask," went on Tallien. "Arms, gunpowder, projectiles, cartridges, swords with and without gold embossed hilts, funds for the payment of the native troops, funds for pensions for the wounded —we did support him, Dumont."

"We appeared in the Senate to uphold his just demands," said Dumont.

"And now—this!" groaned Tallien.

For several minutes Dumont twisted his mustaches and Tallien pulled at his beard.

"Even if the death of the fearless La Besse has been concealed from the unconquered monster of a Kakaua for the moment, as is to be hoped," said Dumont, "who would dare succeed La Besse?"

"Foch?"

"I grant you his fearlessness," said Dumont, "but a Marshal of France would never accept the post of governor general to a minute island in the far remoteness of Oceania. There is no one! What is the pay there?"

"One thousand francs per annum and supplies, with a dwelling."

"At the present rate of exchange about fifty dollars a year," computed Dumont. "And with it the pleasure of constant warfare with the unconquered Kakaua. I would not care for it myself."

"My dear old cauliflower," said Tallien earnestly, "I would not give the verdigris off the outer edge of a copper sou for the job!"

"There are no brave men left in this decomposed world," added Dumont.

"There is, at least, no one who would be willing to go to Moturoa for the pleasure of fighting that tattooed man-eating murderer at fifty dollars a year," agreed Tallien.

"Unless," said Dumont thoughtfully, "it might be Paradou."

For a full minute Tallien stared at Dumont open-mouthed.

" Paradou!" he cried then, and the name was an exclamation of joy.

A moment later he was pushing buttons, scrawling notes, urging sub-clerks to get telephone numbers. Messengers were rushing from doors. Columns of figures were being added. Documents fresh and documents stale were being read and epitomized. Lunch was being ordered in. At two o'clock precisely Paradou entered the office and threw his wide-brimmed felt hat on the floor.

" Well, what?" he asked roughly. " This is a devil of an occasion! I'm drinking a bock in front of the Seven Cows, and I am disturbed. The meaning?"

" You want war?" asked Tallien, leaning forward in his chair.

He knew that Paradou wanted war, for Paradou insistently said he wanted war. He was bloodthirsty, this Paradou. He spoke from park benches and he wrote to newspapers, and always he wanted war—more war—bloodier war. He was the War Party. He was a brave man and he said so. He wore a brave beard, red-brown.

" You know it! I want war!" he declared

" We have a war for you," said Tallien simply.

" Gentlemen, if you have a war for me I will eat it alive," responded Paradou. " I think you know me. I do not talk. I act. Hand me your war"

" And with it," said Tallien, " there goes a government appointment. The title is Governor General. A gubernatorial mansion is provided and, I see, a retinue of eighteen servants, including females of assorted ages. There are also furnished supplies. Funds for the payment and upkeep of an army are supplied. Pension money for wounded and disabled patriots is supplied. The monetary compensation—"

" Never mind the monetary compensation," said Paradou. " Is there fighting?"

Tallien glanced at Dumont, and Dumont nodded.

" There is constant fighting," said Tallien. " It is possible that at certain seasons a day may pass without a battle, but the dossier does not so indicate."

" Is the foeman worthy of the steel of a Paradou?" asked the immortal Paradou.

" The foeman," said Tallien, pausing a fraction of a second, " is Kakaua!"

Paradou did not quail. He did not turn pale. He folded his arms.

" And who in seven continents is this Kakaua?" he asked.

Again Tallien and Dumont exchanged glances.

" He is the scourge of Moturoa," said Dumont.

" He is the devil incarnate in a man-eating savage," said Tallien.

" For thirty years he has been held in his mountain strongholds only by the ceaseless valor of the fearless La Besse, now deceased," explained Dumont.

" And where is this infernal Moturoa?" demanded Paradou.

" It is in the southeast of the South Seas," said Tallien. " It is, so to speak, an island, being a body of land surrounded on all sides by water."

" Pearl diving and copra gathering are the principal occupations of the inhabitants," added Dumont.

" And the principal duty of the governor general is to combat the unconquered and unconquerable King Kakaua—"

" Who is a holy terror—"

" And no mistake!" concluded Tallien.

" I will swallow your Kakaua at one gulp," said Paradou with an upward throw of his hand, the hand he so often wore inserted between the first and second buttons of his black frock coat. " What you need is a man out there. What species of decayed lemon was this La Besse of yours?"

" Then you will accept?" asked Tallien and Dumont in unison.

" But certainly!" said Paradou haughtily. " As a war it will be a mere trifle—but I accept! On one condition!"

" Ah! A condition!" exclaimed Dumont and Tallien in a sadder unison.

" That when I have annihilated this petty flea of a Kakaua I may be permitted to resign this governorship."

" That," said Tallien and Dumont together, " is your privilege."

" How soon may I depart?"

" It can undoubtedly be arranged that

your commission arrives in no time at all, and you can depart on the first vessel."

"Done!" said Paradou in his grandest manner, and he kissed Dumont and Tallien on both cheeks—four cheeks in all—and went away.

As soon as Paradou was outside Dumont and Tallien arose and, wrapped each in the other's arms, did one wildly joyous jazz dance.

II.

"BUT this La Besse of yours," declared Paradou, as he seated himself at Tallien's desk when his commission as Governor General of the Island of Moturoa had been approved by the government and signed by the President, "must have been a pink-eyed rabbit! Thirty years, and this nuisance of a Kakaua still lives!"

"On the contrary," said Tallien. "Our La Besse was a brave man."

"He was a specimen of the glorious," insisted Dumont.

"In fact," said Tallien, "you are speaking without having your eyes open. You have not read the documents in the case."

"I will read them," said Paradou, and Tallien placed in his hands the reports of La Besse, the notations of the bureau, the orders of the Department thereon.

As Paradou read he became grave. He frowned. "Thousand devils!" he exclaimed now and then, and turned a page. "Thousand thunders!" he exclaimed, and turned another page. "Name of a boiled turnip!" he exclaimed and turned another page.

The story told by the documents was an amazing tale of savage wickedness and cannibal bravery. It was the tale of a stanch white man trying to protect a little settlement against the wicked wiles of the most frightful monster of all times. Although, as he read on, Paradou's blood turned cold in his veins he could not but admire this La Besse. His life on Moturoa had been one long battle against the most heartless and wily native king ever met with in even those far distant parts. At midnight La Besse would leap from his bed and grasp his sword and pistols, the cries of the demons deafening his ears.

He was no milksop, this La Besse! Here he hunted the unconquerable Kakaua for three months during the rainy season—"Requisition: 104 oilskin coats; 100 pounds of quinine; seventeen cases brandy; 200 rifles; 4,000 rounds of ammunition." And a month later it was the same, only not so wet: "Requisition: 104 tropical hats with veils; 104 sun umbrellas, natural silk lined with green; 24 rifles; 10 kegs gunpowder; 2,000 rounds of ammunition."

"I have the honor to report that Lieut. Mokomola, in charge of the Sixth Division, Native Troops, reports that he believes one of his sharpshooters, Tatakomo, wounded Kakaua in the engagement of the 17th, when the savages were driven back beyond the Umbara foothills. Our loss was slight in the engagement, merely three killed and seventeen wounded. On the 18th the raid of the savages on the capital was met in force and they were driven out with loss. Our loss was one killed, nine wounded. On the 19th our expeditionary force, proceeding to the east in canoes, landed near the Kaoao River and proceeded west and north, myself leading. We met the savages and fought a battle, the savages being able to retreat toward the mountain in good order. Had my last requisition for six small brass cannon arrived their loss would have been serious. Our loss was two killed and ten wounded. On the 20th—"

"Ten thousand thunders!" exclaimed Paradou, looking up at Tallien. "This Kakaua is then no infants' food!"

"We attempted to explain," said Tallien. "He is, my little baby boy, a ring-tailed snorter!"

"He is a hot dog!" said Dumont. "He is a red hot canine!"

"When I said I wanted war—" began Paradou, placing the dossier on the edge of Tallien's desk.

"In these days, when government appointments are so few and far between," interrupted Tallien hastily, "and one is lucky enough to fall into one—"

"Yes, but when I said I wanted war," continued Paradou, "I was, in a way of speaking, thinking of—"

"And that is the reason," Dumont interrupted hastily, "that we have persuaded

the government to have you conveyed thither on an armored cruiser, which will be accompanied by two gun-boats, thus assuring all that the landing will be free from annoyance."

"Which is something, after all," admitted Paradou.

"To say nothing of the immediate assistance from the native troops, who should be drawn up on the docks when you arrive. The young females of the island, whose beauty, I understand, is beyond compare, although perhaps their morals are not always of the best when they are confronted by a handsome white man of a handsome cast of countenance—"

"And practically imperial physique," added Tallien.

"Because they are so attracted by the uniforms of the military—"

"Especially those with gold lace—"

"Say no more! Say no more!" cried Paradou. "I will go! France looks to me in this most serious crisis. After all—"

"After all," said Tallien, "La Besse lived to be ninety-five years, six months and seven days old. There is a good chance. And the palm trees and coral sands are not to be forgotten. The moonlight on the lagoon. Beautiful maidens—well, let that go; that is not official business."

"And after all," thought Paradou, "I owe too much here in Paris; a man might as well die in battle as be hounded to death by his creditors."

"And there is no law against a man doing a little transaction in pearls now and then," suggested Dumont.

"And may I not, perhaps, be a fighter, after all?" Paradou asked himself. "This La Besse, what was he when he went out there but a clerk in the Bureau? At least I have been a tram driver. I may not be as scared as I imagine I may be. And—a man can die but once."

"Then—?" asked Tallien anxiously.

"I go!" said Paradou firmly. "Here I have made a little draft of the uniform I would like made for me. The trousers, as you see, are red; the coat is sky-blue."

"I think I have heard somewhere," said Dumont thoughtfully, "that the native ladies prefer indigo blue as a color."

"The coat, on second thought," said Paradou, "should be indigo blue, to harmonize with the scarlet of the trousers."

III.

As Tallien and Dumont left the steamer's dock at Marseilles to take the train back to Paris after seeing Paradou aboard they said little. They had maintained their air of careless levity until the last, but now they felt an honest shame that they were sending this man to his doom. That it had been done to save their official berths only made them the more silent.

"And, in the meanwhile—" said Dumont.

"Exactly what I was thinking!" said Tallien.

"At the moment I know of no one to succeed him," went on Dumont, "but we may be able, before Paradou—I mean to say, old one, we must find another and gradually work him up to a longing for a South Sea life."

"Some youngish one would be best," said Tallien. "If the sad news of Paradou's demise comes soon—"

"Even if Kakaua should, in the first battle—"

"It will be some months before the news arrives," Tallien reminded him hopefully.

"And in the meanwhile we will be looking up—"

They did not say "another victim for the unconquerable Kakaua," but that was what they thought, for Paradou was no hardened fellow, as La Besse had become. Neither was Paradou going, as La Besse had gone, to an island where peace reigned.

La Besse had, as the earlier reports showed, found the King Kakaua harmless enough thirty years ago. It was only gradually that King Kakaua had come to feel that he must exterminate the whites. And by that time La Besse knew his way about. He knew the savages and their ways. An expert, La Besse, if ever there was one, and fit to cope with this monster that Kakaua had become. But Paradou! A Parisian spouter of words! Poor Paradou!

Almost, when they reached the Bureau in Paris, Tallien and Dumont expected to see the façade draped in black for Paradou!

They framed the full-page portrait of La Besse and hung it in the bureau with the words " Illustrious—Valiant — Deceased " below it, and as they waited to hear from Paradou the face of La Besse looked upon them.

Upon his arrival at Moturoa the brave Paradou had fully recovered from his seasickness and he was glad. He had been beautifully sick. The cruiser's doctor declared that in all his experience he had never known a human being to be so enormously ill as Paradou was, and he wrote a brochure on Paradou, beginning " The most amazing case of *mal-de-mer* in my extended experience was that of Monsieur X.—"

The interest in Paradou hardly abated with his seasickness. When he emerged from his berth to sit in a cane chair on the deck he was flabby, so flabby that he hung in folds. And then a new interest in Paradou arose as he began to eat. He ate enormously. He ate continuously. He ate twenty meals a day and lunched between meals. As he ate he grew. At first he could not button his indigo-blue coat; then the coat would not meet in front by a decimeter; then it would not meet by a meter.

" He is a wonderful being," declared the captain. " Life in the navy would not be so bad after all, my friends, if we could always carry a Paradou."

Sitting in his cane chair on the forward gun deck Paradou practiced shooting with a rifle. He shot at porpoises; he shot at flying fish. Two marines loaded his rifles and handed them to him, and Paradou, quite unassisted, pulled the trigger.

" *A bas*, Kakaua, take that!" he would cry as he pulled the trigger, or " Zut! Ha! Dog of a Kakaua, this is a Paradou, not one of your La Besses!"

When the two gunboats joined the cruiser at Nukahiva the brave Paradou became braver than ever. He fired the rapid-fire gun on the bow of the cruiser without flinching. He walked up and down the deck like an upright hippopotamus with his right hand in the bosom of his shirt and frowned as he planned campaigns for the destruction of the unconquered Kakaua. When he was joined by the captain he questioned him concerning Moturoa and Kakaua. There in the South Seas, as the little flotilla neared the distant Moturoa, the name " Ka-ka-oo-a " fell from Paradou's tongue as often as " *la guerre* " and " *un bock, garçon!*" had fallen from it in dear Paris. And the brave Paradou told the captain about Moturoa and Kakaua, because, as a matter of fact, the captain knew little or nothing of them. He had never seen Moturoa.

Outside the atoll that guards Moturoa the cruiser dropped anchor and fired a blank to call the isle to attention, for the chart showed that neither the cruiser nor the gunboats could risk the narrow entrance to the lagoon.

" It seems to be less inhabited than I had supposed," said Paradou anxiously. " The metropolis of my island, if that is it, is not extensive."

After a time the flag of France on the flagpole ashore dipped and rose again.

" We are observed," announced the captain. " You are ready to go ashore? Everything is prepared for transport? Sixteen trunks, thirty-seven boxes, twelve cases of rifles, eighteen cases of wine, one hundred cartons of ammunition?"

" I have checked them personally," said Paradou.

" The boats are being lowered. I, my brave governor general, shall go ashore with you with an escort. One can never tell!"

" It will be best," agreed Paradou. " As a matter of fact, my captain, I do not precisely like the looks of things as seen through these binoculars. Why do I not see the native troops drawn up to receive their new governor general as they should receive him? Why is the populace so lacking in number?"

" Let us admit that it looks serious," remarked the captain.

" To my way of thinking," said Paradou, " it looks *tout a'tout* serious! It looks condemnably serious!"

" I grasp your thought—Kakaua—"

" Has raided!" said Paradou. " With no La Besse and no Paradou he has worked his savage will."

" The thought is hideous! If this has

happened, Governor General Paradou, the revenge of an outraged France will be horrible. We will bring the remains—if any—of the settlers to the cruiser, and we will shell the island fore and aft. We will blow it out of the sea!"

"Spoken! We will blow it to thunderation!" declared Paradou.

Luckily a native proa was seen to approach, crossing the lagoon and daring the exit from it. It neared the cruiser, and the flag of France was seen to be flying from the proa. It drew alongside, and a white man clambered aboard. He embraced Paradou, his keen intelligence seeming to recognize by Paradou's uniform that he was probably the new governor general. He saluted the captain.

"Me, I am Duperron," he said, "factor and inhabitant, acting governor general. You are—"

"Paradou, governor general, in fact," said Paradou.

"As I supposed," said Duperron. "And for your coming I thank the blessed stars of fate. This task has been almost too much for me, my governor general. You see how I look?"

He looked like a beach-comber who had been dragged through a garbage pile.

"You should see me when I look otherwise," went on Duperron. "No sleep for three months, for instance. My garments, if you will believe me, not off my limbs for three months! Worry! Distress! For I am not, for instance, a warrior. I am not a strategist. Kakaua—"

"Is it arms?"

"What to expect, with the brave La Besse in his grave under a palm tree? You can imagine him, that Kakaua? That demon? That murderer? That unyielding harrier of this island? You can picture him, that battle chief who has been in arms day and night for thirty years, with La Besse deceased, and you, my Paradou, not yet arrived? Would he miss the opportunity? Swell chance!"

"I shall attend to that," said Paradou. "Has the rascal been, then, bothersome?"

"Conceive!" answered Duperron. "You are aware of the relentless fury of that savage? Multiply his rages by ten thousand and you have his present rage. Conceive that he had sworn personally to annihilate this dear La Besse, and this La Besse expires without his assistance! Imagine me, a civilian, obliged to conduct the combat with that terrible Kakaua!"

"I arrive to a pretty pickle," observed Paradou.

"Ah, but perhaps his rage may now abate somewhat," said Duperron. "He will now have you to annihilate, my dear governor general."

"Permit me to suggest," interrupted the captain, "that I proceed to shell the entire island, including all sides of the mountain, and teach this Kakaua something."

Duperron threw up his hands in horror.

"And with our faithful native troops scattered over that same mountain?" he cried.

"That's where they are, is it?" asked Paradou with relief.

"But certainly!" said Duperron. "We must hold this Kakaua in check. My heart is rent, my governor, that your island has not been able to receive you in a fitting manner, but—you understand!"

"And the inhabitants?"

"In hiding, as it were," explained Duperron. "But when you, my brave governor, set foot on your island—"

"They haven't gone away? They haven't gone to some other island?"

"Comparatively, so to speak, few," said Duperron. "The old men and the women—"

"And the girls?"

Duperron glanced at Paradou's face.

"I can assure you," he said, "that the number of young females has not been seriously depleted, my governor."

"Perhaps, then," said Paradou, "we had better have just a suspicion of brandy, and then go ashore."

IV.

THE boats of the cruiser and the gunboats, with the proa at their head, made a very respectable parade as they crossed the lagoon, but as they neared the sandy beach, Paradou, in the foremost boat with Duperron and the captain, was less and less favorably impressed by the appearance of

his island. The Quai Marshal Rochambeau, of which La Besse had written frequently in his reports, appeared to have suffered considerably from the rapid ravage of the tropical climate. At one end it had slumped down into the water, and this disclosed that practically all the planking was missing except a string of boards laid loosely as a sort of footpath. The beach behind and around the quai was unkempt and untidy, and on the quai itself, just where they must land, was a filthy looking bundle of rags.

As they neared the quai the governor general's mansion seemed also considerably shot to pieces, as if Kakaua had, perhaps, trained a field gun now and then with not imperfect aim. It appeared to be in a badly decayed condition, the roof of the veranda leaning to one side, and remaining where it was only because it rested against a palm tree.

At the other end of what might have been a plaza, had it not been overgrown with rank vegetation, was the group of warehouses, walled and roofed with corrugated iron which was now gnawed into rusty edged holes. Between the warehouses and the mansion of the governor general, and among the trees at the far side of the plaza, were native huts, mere poles covered with palm leaves, and in and near them the most indolent South Sea Islanders to be imagined were sitting or standing lazily, watching the approach of the flotilla. As the boats neared the quai, some of these men and women yawned, stretched and strolled lazily toward the waterside.

The proa ran itself on the beach, and the foremost of the ship's boats drew up along the decayed steps of the Quai Marshal Rochambeau and Duperron clambered out and offered Paradou a helping hand.

"It may be desirable to exercise a portion of care in ascending the steps," he suggested, and preceded Paradou, testing each step carefully before he put his weight on it. At the top he stopped and scowled at the bundle of soiled rags.

"Name of ten thousand cats!" he cried angrily. "What do you mean, you heap of flesh of a pig, getting in my way like this? Out of my way!"

The bundle of rags raised a fat puffy head and held out a fat lemon-colored hand.

"Cigarette!" a whining voice pleaded. "Cigarette!"

"Nonsense of the devil!" shouted Duperron. "I should think you do not get a cigarette! You had your cigarette today, you sun-stewed bunch of worthlessness. Move!"

He put his foot against the massy human pile and pushed it.

"Cigarette! One cigarette!" whined the fat voice.

"Ah, you worthless accumulation of dog meat!" cried Duperron. "You have been at the brandy again! Have you not been told a thousand times not to drink the brandy? Up! Move! Quick, now!"

"Cigarette!" pleaded the husky voice.

"I'll give you a cigarette, you! I'll give you a cigarette with the end of my foot!" exclaimed Duperron, and he pushed the suppliant again, using his heel.

The unwieldy mass swayed, attempted to rise, toppled and fell through the flooring of the Quai Marshal Rochambeau into the water below. As Paradou gained the planking and followed Duperron, the water-soaked native splashed after them, whining "Cigarette! Cigarette!" as he reached upward toward their feet.

"Thousand thunders!" cried Duperron, wiping his brow. "I do get so angry at that worthless hound! If he was not the only cook on the island whose concoctions are fit to eat I would have drowned him long ago!"

"Whose cook is he?" asked Paradou.

"He is your cook," answered Duperron.

"But he is repulsive," said Paradou. "To a degree he is repulsive. And he becomes intoxicated."

"Nevertheless, he is a good cook," insisted Duperron. "And a good cook is a difficult article to obtain."

The end of the quai was now reached, and Duperron removed his hat and made an oration to the assembled populace. Of this Paradou could not understand one word, but the words seemed to give general satisfaction. The natives grinned and uttered gentle grunts.

"They say," said Duperron, "that they welcome your honor to the island, and wish you a long and prosperous governorship. They say that while they will look to you to protect them against Kakaua, they will uphold your prowess in every way possible. They say that France has endeared herself to them, and that they consider you their father and mother, and wish to welcome you with a feast. They say, however, that as the raids of Kakaua have deprived them of live stock, they will be endlessly obliged if you will purchase, say, two or three pigs for the feast. I, by the way, can sell you the pigs."

"Tell them I will furnish the pigs," said Paradou.

"And they say," went on Duperron, "that it would cement the affection of this colony and the French people eternally if you would assist by contributing a few cases of canned goods, some preserves, a supply of cigarettes, and a quantity of brandy."

"But certainly!" agreed Paradou.

"And as a final favor," continued Duperron, "they ask that you lend them your cook to prepare the feast, knowing that only your cook can prepare the food to please your most august palate."

"That is granted," said Paradou; "but there is one thing, Duperron. Is there not danger that Kakaua may choose the time of the feast for a raid?"

"Your troops, my master, have that annoying Kakaua well engaged at the moment," Duperron assured him. "I do not believe it will be possible for that murderous villain to make his appearance. Tomorrow, perhaps, you will put yourself at the head of the troops and make an end of him, once and for all."

"Good!" exclaimed Paradou. "And—and how about a dance? A dance of the girls, hey? How about that, Duperron?"

"That certainly," agreed Duperron. "It was the first thing I thought of."

When they reached the governor's mansion, Paradou found it was not so bad, after all. The furnishings were rather ancient, it was true, but everything had been planned for comfort. The chairs, for the most part, required a man to lie flat on his back; the couches were soft and sleep-inducing. There were small tables just exactly right to hold a pitcher or bottle and a few glasses. The books were easily read novels. This La Besse had known how to live! A warrior deserves luxury after his battles.

"Cigarette!" whined a voice at the door.

"Permit me," said Paradou, seeing the fat old fellow of the quai and questioning Duperron. "In honor of my arrival—may I give him a small package of cigarettes, for example?"

"And spoil the lazy loafer?" cried Duperron. "A nice way to begin! Let me get rid of him for you. Out of this, you!"

He took the cook by the nape of his neck and ran him around the house, bumping him with his knee every two steps.

"One must not permit oneself to be bothered by such trash," he said when he returned, and he unlocked La Besse's cabinet and brought out bottles and glasses. "To your success, my governor!" he exclaimed as he poured the liquids.

V.

THE feast, as even Duperron admitted, was a success, and as Paradou tasted the succulent young pig, roasted in the coals with herbs and condiments, he agreed with Duperron that a good cook was not to be despised even if a nuisance in other ways. Nor was the dance in any way less than what he had hoped. It was, he was pleased to note, all that had been reported, if not more, and Duperron, who admitted he was a connoisseur, said that even he was fully satisfied with it and with the feast.

About midday the next day, when Paradou awoke, he lay considering the future. A man could be very happy on this island. Imagine! Already he was engaged to wed the most enticing young woman he had ever seen! And what a cook! What a magnificent blue the water out yonder! What a soothing breeze on his face! There must be fighting, of course, but there was always a fly in the ointment.

"If I do not intrude?"

Paradou sat up to see Duperron in the doorway, and he bade him enter.

"The captain did not like to disturb you," explained Duperron when he was seated and had reached for the bottle. "It is that he has received a wireless recalling him to Nukahiva if he is not needed here. As a fact, if I were you, my governor, I would let him go. The honor to you would be all the greater were you to overcome this murderous Kakaua unaided. And, between you and me, your native troops are superb!"

"Ah, if I could be sure of that!"

"Have you not my word?" asked Duperron. "Listen, excellency, we don't want that captain hanging around here. Reports to Paris of feasts and dances every week? Every other day? They don't understand such things, those office worms in Paris. If this captain remains but long enough to take back your first report—your report of your first battle with this Kakaua—your first victory, hey? If he sails this evening, yes?"

"But a battle? A victory? By this evening? My dear old fellow, I am still asleep. I am still, shall I say, half stewed!"

Duperron shrugged his shoulders.

"Battles? Victories? You will have my assistance, you see."

Paradou, staring at Duperron, was sure he saw a wink.

"La Besse, perhaps, exaggerated a mere suspicion, hey?" he asked.

"You are a man after my own heart, yes?" queried Duperron, moving closer.

"I am a second La Besse, old lad," declared Paradou.

"We understand each other?" urged Duperron.

"I am a red camel if we do not!" swore Paradou.

"I am a factor," said Duperron. "I have a market, with schooners that stop here for trifles like rifles, oilskin coats, ammunition, powder for guns, sun umbrellas. You understand me, Paradou? Fifty-fifty. And the pay roll of that native army is no mean thing."

"The pay roll?"

Duperron leaned back and laughed loud and long.

"But, my dear old boy, you don't suppose there is any native army, do you? What would you do with an army on this sketch of an island?"

Paradou leaned forward and drained his glass. He looked at Duperron with wide eyes in which understanding now showed.

"But this unconquered Kakaua?" he hesitated.

Paradou turned toward the kitchen.

"Kakaua!" he shouted. "Without delay! Clean glasses for two!"

The fat cook waddled into the room bearing two clean glasses.

"Cigarette!" he pleaded.

"Be still! You don't get a cigarette."

Paradou leaned back and grinned.

"There's your Kakaua the Unconquered," said Duperron.

Paradou stretched and moved to the small desk in the corner by the open window. He found a fountain pen there and shook it, finding that it still contained ink. He drew from a pigeonhole a sheet of paper headed "Mansion of the Governor General, Moturoa, French Oceania."

"Do you remember the date, old fellow?" he asked.

"September fourteenth," said Duperron.

"September 14," wrote Paradou. "Upon taking possession of the island your new governor general found the native troops engaged with the forces of King Kakaua in the mountains, and immediately assumed command, replacing the factor Duperron who had maintained a valiant resistance since the decease of the lamented La Besse. But a few hours were needed in which to study the situation, and with the governor general at their head, the troops charged the enemy with the utmost valor. The brave but treacherous Kakaua met the charge with all his savages, but by a flank movement your governor general was able to enfilade the position and the savages were obliged to retreat into the mountain fastnesses. While they left but thirty-two dead on the field, it is believed they carried many more with them. Our loss was but one dead and six wounded. It is believed this signal defeat will quiet Kakaua for some weeks."

"Excellent!" declared Duperron. "It is better than any battle La Besse ever fought."

"You must remember," said Paradou, proudly tapping his chest, "that that poor La Besse was but a clerk; I am a warrior."

"Cigarette!" whined a voice at the door leading to the kitchen.

"Thousand cats!" cried Duperron, scowling at the bulk of Kakaua, "What do you want now, infernal nuisance?"

Kakaua whined for several minutes.

"What does he say?" asked Paradou.

"A nice slice of meat!" Duperron exclaimed. "He is going to quit, this king of yours!"

"But he cannot quit!" cried Paradou. "I like this blessed island. I desire to do battle with this specimen of king for many years. What variety of maggot has got into him that he quits now, after he has been an unconquered monster these many years?"

"He is going on strike," said Duperron. "He says he is sick of being kicked all over the place for one cigarette a day. Unless he is paid a full package of cigarettes a day he will tell this accursed captain he is Kakaua, and sail away with him."

"And he is such a handy unconquered king!" moaned Paradou.

"Always where you can find him," groaned Duperron.

"And such a prince of cooks," moaned Paradou.

"And you have not tasted his sauces yet, remember!" groaned Duperron.

"But why," asked Paradou, brightening, "not give him a pack of cigarettes daily, if that is what he wants?"

"Sacrebleu!" cried Duperron. "You have a brain, Paradou! You think of things! You are magnificent, Paradou!"

"Perhaps I should have been a diplomat," said Paradou modestly. "Thousand thunders, Duperron, I have the idea! This La Besse was but half a man. He was a child in arms. He could think of nothing but war—war—war. We will have a new era. We will combine war with diplomacy."

"As?" queried Duperron, but Paradou had picked up his pen and was writing.

"'While the indefatigable Kakaua is nursing his wounds,'" Paradou read as he wrote, "'I propose to undermine him. By the utmost cleverness my secret service men have learned that it may be possible to bribe some of this monster's most important allies away from him. My investigations lead me to believe tobacco will appeal to their cupidity most strongly, their appetite for cigarettes being insatiable.'"

"Paradou," said Duperron, "you are a genius!"

Paradou smiled. He reached for a requisition blank, and on it wrote but one line:

"Cigarettes—100,000."

Paradou read over what he had written. He frowned.

"You are worried, old one?" Duperron asked solicitously.

"This report. This battle," said Paradou doubtfully. "Do you think I have made it ferocious enough? They will be expecting something of Paradou back there in that Paris. This thirty-two dead, for example. Is that enough for a man of my prowess to have killed, Duperron? If I made it sixty-four—only double as many?"

"We don't want to murder the entire enemy in one combat, just the same," said Duperron. "We want to keep this thing going a while, yes?"

"But only sixty-four," pleaded Paradou. "That Tallien and that Dumont would appreciate sixty-four, Duperron. They expect big things from me. My first battle with the unconquered Kakaua, Duperron."

"Have it your own way, then, little pigeon," said Duperron. "Double your slaughter this time if you wish, but—"

"But what?" asked Paradou.

"What is fair for one is fair for another," said Duperron. "If you give those clerks sixty-four killed, ask them for two hundred thousand cigarettes. Thousand devils! Do they expect you to wear your life away fighting this monster of a Kakaua for nothing?"

"Doubtless," said Paradou, as he blotted the new requisition and reached for the sealing wax. "Doubtless, Duperron, for republics—as has been truly said—are ungrateful."

"Absolutely!" said Duperron, as he leaned back in his chair and raised his glass to his lips.

THE END

Buccaneer Blood

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Queen of the Night," "Sundown Café," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

HEARD IN THE MANGROVE THICKET.

CAMERON and the boy poled the little sloop farther into the tules till she found ooze. The bowline was made fast to a cypress stump. Then bidding his cabin-boy to follow and to keep constantly under cover, Cameron led the way.

They waded at first knee deep in the tules and oozy water; reaching a mud shoal, and finally sand, they made their way on hands and knees along the spit. When within a furlong of the point off which the lugger was anchored, they kept under the cover of the reef grass until coming to a mangrove thicket. Here they crawled on their stomachs, moving as deliberately, as silently toward the water again, as two sluggish alligators.

It was pitch dark in the thickets. The prop roots formed an impenetrable mass down to the shore line. Through this Cameron and the boy could see merely the glittering flecks of light made by the moonpath on the black water. The lugger was invisible, but it seemed so close—because of those voices—that Cameron imagined that when the wind veered he could almost smell the oil of the engine and the sweat of the men. Certainly the voices, in that death-like stillness, were as distinct as if uttered just beyond that mangrove screen.

"I tell yer, capting, I carn't—not if you shoots me daid! Not me! If yer wants to have me on yer hands with a fit of 'ysterics, orl right! This here swamp's got me—that's orl—wot with its quiet and its stink, and these mists! Leave Parson stay wiv me, capting, I beg yer on me knees!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 11.

The whining cockney voice was cut short by a husky growl—evidently the " capting " himself:

" On your knees is it? Yah! That's where you belong, Dorset, snivelin' little coward that ye are. If we hauled up any closer to the house with *you* in tow you'd be screamin' bloody murder just when we was about to pull off somethin' good. You stay here: First, because I never leaves my ship—no matter what its size, without an anchor watch; second, because you're too scairt to do any fightin'."

" Why do we need an anchor watch—or any watch, capting?" another voice put in—a voice that was tremulous and wheezy, as if belonging to a man who was not only very excited, but very old.

" Do you ask me that, Wing?" the voice of the captain shot back angrily.

" Ain't no one ever cruisin' about in these waters, captain!" the wheezy voice replied apologetically.

" They's supposed to be a ole negro up there, ain't they? What if he's snoopin' about in a skiff? What if he seen us sailin' up this last reach, and is waitin' his chanst to come aboard as soon as we go ashore? Might you can turn *that* over in your toothless ole gums. Wing—blitherin' sea-cook that y'are!"

There was no comment from the wheezy voice—nor from any one for a moment or two. The leader of the crew seemed to be ruminating before giving his last instructions for making the attack upon the château. Then came that whining sobbing voice of the cockney. It drifted through the mandrakes like the voice of a man in mortal anguish; it was as if the man were in the throes of a nightmare, attempting to give his utterance all the power of his lungs, but succeeding only in a gibber:

" I tell you, capting, I'm in a funk. I'm goin' crazy—slop me gob if that ain't the truth! My brain's like as if somethin' was touchin' it—churnin' it—somethin' soft. I'm sick—'c ? in me belly. The stink of these swamps. Yer carn't leave me, capting. Yuss, you said it—howl bloody murder—that's wot! You'll hear me howl, orl righto! Look at me—a-holdin' of me mouth so's I won't howl, s'help me God!"

This speech was terminated abruptly by a resounding thud—something like the dull thwack of a sledge on the head of a steer. It was followed—at an interval of it seemed several seconds—by the sound of a body crashing to a deck.

" A-holdin' yer mouth is it?" It was the husky growl of the captain. " Good! *That 'll* hold your mouth for you—and might it 'll take your mind off'n the swamp and set it on a good healthy toothache."

" You've come aboard of the blowsy little swob, captain," said the wheezy, tremulous voice. " He's a bit small for a blow like that!"

" You crossin' me again, Wing? You ain't too old but that I'll stretch you on the deck—if you tell me to measure *my* blows."

" I ain't crossin' ye, skipper—not me. Leave me douse a bucket of water on him—There—that'll give him his bearin's again."

" While he's comin' to, you git that dinghy alongside, Wing. Parson you muffle them oar-locks with whatever ye can lay your hands on, and grease 'em, too. See that your guns is loaded and then we'll invite ourselves into the ole castle—by the front door. Just like we was guests. That's allus *my* way. Ain't no use proclaimin' yourselves robbers when ye're on the outside. Wait till ye're aboard, says I, then tell 'em your names."

A succession of desperate and whimpering moans—like a dog expecting momentarily a lash on his back—answered the captain's instructions.

A swishing sound—as of a bucketful of water washing down the decks was followed by the tremulous voice of the old man—the one they called Wing: " I reckon that'll bring him to, captain."

The captain's husky voice broke into a soft growling laugh.

" All righto, my little scruffer!" he said. " Stay on yer back where I put you. Don't try to haul yerself up. We're goin' ashore to do a bit of fightin' while you snooze off yer headache. And mind this: If I find ye drunk when I come aboard agin, I'll flenze your thin hide for you till you do some real honest-to-God howlin'. None of this whimperin'. I said howlin'."

"He's fumblin' for his tobaccy," another voice put in.

The captain burst out in a suppressed bellow—all the more terrifying because he could not give it the usual volume. "So *that's* the way the crawlin', shiverin' cockroach is goin' to gum us, is it? Here we stand up the whole bayou without a light—all but gettin' horsed into hell itself—and now he wants to light his stinkin' pipe!"

"Don't bash me again, capting! I begs yer! My jaw's broke. Don't kick me! No—not that Don't kick me! I've learned me lesson, s'help me! If you'll only forgive me. I'll stay aboard. I'll keep watch—anything you arsks of me. I'll do it wivvout a whimper!"

Cameron could hear the muttering oaths of the captain, enraged but satisfied; he could hear the chuckles of the other two men. Then came the inevitable but guarded sounds of their putting off: the dinghy bumping easily alongside of the lugger; the men shoving off; the sound of the oars dipping in water; the lapping at the prow; the dull rhythmic turn of the muffled oarlocks.

The dense mangrove thicket screened all further sound as if a curtain had come down upon the first act of a drama. The last thing Cameron remembered hearing was the muttering voice of the captain as he cast back a string of foul epithets to the man on the lugger. The oarlocks were silent—even though Cameron could still feel their rhythm in the air.

Whispering to Tim Holloway to follow him, Cameron left the mangrove thicket, crawling again through the reef grass and then back along the sand spit toward their sloop.

CHAPTER XV.

DORSET RECEIVES A VISITOR.

BEFORE reaching the sloop Cameron led the way through the reef grass to the water's edge. They found themselves on a little mud beach out of earshot of the man on the lugger. But from that point they could see the lugger at its anchorage, lying silent and black like a huge bird asleep on the water.

"From here to that lugger is a short, easy swim," Cameron said.

"Swim, sir? Did you say swim? They's 'gators about, sir!" the boy exclaimed.

"I myself am going to swim to that lugger."

"It would be safer to sail up there, sir. We could make it in two tacks, and then swarm aboard—like they did in the old days."

"We're unarmed. The fellow they've left there could pot us at will. To swim is the safest way—"

"But the 'gators, sir—"

"Do you realize what I'm doing this for, *mon petit?*"

"I do, sir. That lady—the one in white—the one which you kissed her hand."

"Yes, for her. And there are two old people—her grandmother and the doddering old servant. What sort of a fight do you think they could put up against these ruffians? If I had arms I wouldn't have let them off their lugger without tacking up there in our sloop and engaging them as you doubtless would like best—in a sea fight. As it is I'm going aboard, have a go with that man with the cockney voice, get his firearms and what ammunition we can find; then for the château."

"I'm with you, sir."

"Not yet. Are you ready for my orders?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Go aboard the sloop and wait."

"Me—go back, sir?" the boy asked dolefully.

"You said something about the alligators."

"But think what we're fightin' for, skipper!" the boy rejoined fervently. "Am I afraid of 'gators? I'll say, Hell no!"

"Nevertheless, the sloop must be manned," Cameron returned. "One man's enough for this job. Two would rock it. You go aboard. Wait until you hear my whistle. If in ten minutes you do not hear my whistle there is one course for you to take, which I will lay down for you now, and which you will obey."

"I'm your cabin-boy, skipper. Can't disobey no orders from you—not if you bids me keelhaul meself under me own sloop!"

"If you do not hear my whistle, you will make sail, stand out for the bay and return to Deux-Sevres—where you first shipped with me."

"That I will not do, sir!"

"You *do* refuse to obey then?" Cameron asked, quickly, sharply. "There's no time to lose in this argument."

"I refuse, sir, to sail home and leave you on that lugger. If I don't hear you, it'll mean you're dead. Ain't no call to obey the orders of a dead skipper. When I sail out'n this bayou I sails with you aboard—or with your body. One or the other!" He added, thrusting out his hand: "You may lay to that, sir—here's me hand, s'help me God!"

Cameron gripped the hand. Doubt was dispelled. He could not lose. The cockney was already paralyzed with fear. If he saw a man coming out of the black bayou water, dressed as an ancient pirate, there could be no combat.

"You'll hear my whistle, *mon petit!*" Cameron concluded with a final grip at the wiry little fist.

The boy stood by, while his master divested himself of his top boots and jacket. Accoutered then in nothing more than a blouse, a pair of dungaree jumpers, and the red bandanna about his wounded forehead, Cameron was ready for his attack.

Tim Holloway watched him. Cameron could not dive in—that spectacular beginning was denied him. He had to crawl into the water from the mud beach precisely like an alligator, dragging himself along until he had water enough to float. One or two strokes churning up phosphorescence, sent him out in the open stretch. Here he kept both arms under, swimming an easy side stroke. The boy could see his head moving off towards the lugger, dwindling to a dull black spot, leaving a wake on the smooth ebony surface, in which there was an almost imperceptible touch of light.

From where the boy stood, half hidden in the reef grass, the anchored lugger was clearly visible. The boy's dilated eyes could easily discern the diminutive figure of the cockney Dorset, huddled up against the bulkhead of the cabin. The black silhouette was visible now against the background of the bulkhead, then as the craft swung out at its mooring, against the background of the moonpath. Huddled though it was—as if the wretched man were clinging for warmth against bulkhead and deck, it was restive—restive enough so that its movements could be seen across that misty moonlit expanse. Tim Holloway could see a head, thrusting out at the end of a long neck, like a turtle's from the bundle of dark rags—peering athwart the taffrail now toward the château, now down the reach; now aft, now forward towards the mast, beyond which the cry of a marsh bird had broken weirdly into the silence.

Cameron — as the boy estimated — had halved the distance of his swim.

The turtle-like silhouette shook itself, stood up in the cockpit taking on the partial semblance of a man—grotesque, long-necked. A drink would have calmed that perturbed spirit. But that was forbidden—and the smell of rum clings to the breath. His master and persecutor who had laid down that law, would be jealous of its observance. A smoke would do—that at least could be indulged in secretly. The other three renegades were well out of sight. Indeed, they had probably already reached the end of the inlet and were disembarked, picking their way through the swamp oaks and mangroves.

Cameron was now out of sight. The water was a jet-black plane as devoid of variation in tone as the top of a teakwood table. The boy could only judge his position by time. He must be within a few yards of the boat. His stroke was probably gentler now, so that he could glide along without a sound. That last part of the swim might take time—not because of fatigue, but because of the danger. Tim strained his eyes. The silhouette on deck had again fallen—like a formless shadow cast by something hovering overhead—against the bulkhead. It was facing aft—the little knob on the end of the long neck bobbing this way and that.

Tim Holloway's eyes sharpened. The lugger was broadside to him—the moon on its quarter. The light coming from beyond. Tim could see the outline of the craft—a squat ugly thing with a snub nose, a mast

like a derrick, a huddle of canvas on the deck, and a huge rudder, something like these rudders you see on a catboat.

A peculiar rudder for a lugger—so thought Tim. It extended as high above water as the sternpost itself. Very unusual. Furthermore Tim could see the moonlit water in an aperture just above the waterline between the rudder and the hull.

Then the truth of the matter dawned on him. It was not a rudder at all, but a man clinging to the rail, waist deep in water!

Tim looked at the heap of black rags on deck. Whether that restive and tortured being had discovered Cameron's arrival or not, Tim could not tell. One thing was clear: he was more restive than ever, his little head darting out and in, looking up and down, forward and aft, as if expecting a wraith to leap upon him from any direction and at any moment. The suspense was too great for him. His accomplices might keep him waiting there for hours, tortured by every new shape the mists assumed, every new sound of marsh bird or wind in the mangroves. He had to smoke. Every nerve in his body yearned, commanded.

There was the light of a match—a mere red pin point off across that water, with another pin point reflected in the black plane below.

"Now is the time!" Tim cried—almost giving his thought a voice. The flare of that match would blind the man who lit it. There would be a brief moment before his pupils again opened to the dark.

If his soul had depended on it, Dorset could not have kept himself from lighting that pipe of his. Inasmuch as treachery is one very satisfactory outlet to cowardice, Dorset found this bit of treachery toward his master doubly effective. He would light as many matches as he desired. He would suffocate himself with tobacco. As he puffed up that flame, in fact, he immediately felt an enormous relief. It had been forced upon him; to do something with those trembling fingers; to intertwine them, to crack them, to button and unbutton his jacket—all this was futile. But the simple act of defying his master was sufficient.

The light went out; his eyes dilated again.

What had happened? What supernatural power had stepped in to punish him?

Whatever the cause, he saw in that fraction of a second of remorse, all the dread fears that obsessed him, taking shape, assuming the form of a devil in pirate garb, arisen from the swamp, and looming above him.

A gun was on Dorset's thigh, loosened in its holster. But he had no power to draw it. Nor for that matter would he have had time.

The swamp-devil leaped upon him.

That was what happened in the next flash of consciousness. Dorset, already seated, rolled over on the deck like a sack of bran. A heavy weight was upon him. Knees pressed on his hips, fingers were gripped about his throat. He thrust out his hand, clutching at two arms. They were taut, powerful arms, sinews and bones. They were not arms of a supernatural thing. The being was not a devil—but a man!

Dorset clung to him, as if the man were saving him from quicksand. He clutched at his dripping blouse; he reached for his huge chest; he wanted to hug him! His voice—all but choked by those fingers at his throat gurgled to a laugh. He tried to utter some sort of an oath—or else he was actually thanking God for what had happened!

The fingers relaxed.

"You're a man, ain't yer? Yuss, s'help me—a man! You've saved me from madness, b'God! Yuss, I was goin' stark, ravin' mad—till you come for me! No, don't choke me. Don't press on me. Your knees—they're killin' me! There! I'm through. I'm yourn. There's me gun. Tyke it. Welcome to it! Sure, bind up me 'ands. I'm thankin' ye from the bottom of me 'eart!"

His hands made fast with coil upon coil, he was thrown against the bulkhead in a heap, as helpless and inconsequential as ever. One thing, however, could be said for him. His mind was restored after this contact with reality. He was virtually saved from hysteria by the arrival of this physical—instead of supernatural—enemy. He looked up.

His captor was standing abaft the wheel, one bare foot on the taffrail. The looming figure, peering into the fathoms of moonlit mist down the bayou, put a finger into his mouth and gave vent to a low whistle which sounded like the call of a snipe.

While waiting for the result of that signal he frisked his prisoner's matches, lighted them one after the other, as he went below and rummaged about the cabin and its lockers.

He came out on deck again just as a distant creak of blocks drifted across the face of the water from the mooring place on his sloop.

Cameron—and perhaps his prisoner—could interpret those sounds: the peak being hoisted; the boom swinging across once with a rattle of blocks; the jib spanking as it was trimmed in; then a long interval of silence which meant that the sails had filled and the sloop was under way.

In another moment she appeared, dilated in the fog, sailing without the slightest list in that faint breeze, as stately and ghostlike as the Flying Dutchman!

They could see the boy now, with the tiller in one hand, the jibsheet and mainsheet in the other, as if he were holding the reins of a horse. He came about on the one tack—which, as he had told Cameron, was all that was necessary to reach the lugger. The boom swung over, the jib was hauled flat, the mainsail filled, the windward jibsheet eased off, the leeward trimmed in—and the boy headed his shadowy ghost-craft directly for the lugger.

A moment later, without missing a foot in his calculations, he spilled the wind, came up softly into the breeze and alongside of the larger craft without so much as an audible bump.

Cameron leaped aboard and shoved off. "I've got two guns—and all the ammunition you'd want to fight a navy!" he whispered to his cabin boy. "Stuff these boxes of cartridges into your pockets, and hang on to this pistol. It's loaded."

Tim Holloway obeyed. "Are we haulin' up for the house now, sir?" he asked.

"We are. Pay off till you get enough headway to cut through those waterplants."

"Aye, aye, sir." Then a moment later: "Hard alee now, sir. We'll make the islet on this lay, sir."

Dorset, lying bound on the deck of the lugger, watched them disappear up the reach. To him the appearance of the pirate, the coming of the ghost-ship, the sailing away into the mist—the whole episode seemed to have taken place in a single morbid flare of his imagination.

CHAPTER XVI.

WAS THAT ALL?

WITHIN the stone walls of the Raiglon château stillness reigned, except for the occasional squawk of a bat zigzagging in the shadows of the vaulted ceilings; and darkness reigned, except for dim moonbeams slanting through narrow casements and the glow of seven candles in the dining hall.

The ancient Madame Raiglon was observing a ceremony which had been her unbroken habit for over threescore years. She sat alone at the head of the long refectory table. The seven-branched candlestick was at the opposite side, casting a glow upon the chatelaine's inscrutable parchment mask. A little gold cup of Venetian carving stood on the cracked dry wood of the table, and this cup, containing sherry, she twisted about by revolving the stem in her thumb and forefinger. Occasionally she sipped, and then mused, resigning herself again to a world devoid of objective event, but thickly peopled with remembered — yes, with unforgettable—characters.

Her granddaughter, who had not been initiated into this habit of a nightcap, had retired. The old chatelaine went through the ritual alone, except for her servant, who stood behind with platter and napkin. She always experienced a mental relaxation at this time of night such as other women of her age will experience in saying prayers before retiring. Thus old women, in whose lives there is a magnificent past but no future, will commune with the spirit and lose themselves in a fog of contemplation; and thus the Chatelaine of the Raiglons com-

muned with her gods—the bloodthirsty pantheon of deities which gazed down upon her from the six great canvases on the walls.

There broke in upon this somber and silent communion a certain sound. It was a sound which the chatelaine was convinced had not been heard in that house for over seventy years: three dull, reverberating knocks upon the heavy batten door.

Quintilian gripped his platter tightly with both hands, as if to hold his body from sinking to the floor. A shudder passed through his bent spine. He rolled his eyes slowly, deliberately to his mistress; but she did not turn about.

The only immediate effect upon her—so far as Quintilian could see—was a cessation of revolving that little cup. The cup itself—some sort of a mariner's novelty—was carved to represent a globe. To the savage mind whose thoughts were the clearest when visible symbols were within grasp, the world had stopped revolving.

Quintilian waited for the command of his mistress. She might bid him open the door: she might send him for firearms; she might order the great door fortified further with the cross-bar which had long been in disuse. She might even order absolute silence, dictating that they flee immediately for a hiding place and there remain.

Then after but a moment of imperturbed waiting she spoke. Her first thought betrayed no fear for herself, nor for the servant, much less for the priceless furnishings of the house.

"*Where is Jacqueline?*"

"She went upstairs, madame."

"Yes, of course—she is in her room. Is her door locked?"

"I do not know, madame."

"Go upstairs. See that her door is locked. If she is asleep, do not wake her. If she is not asleep, tell her nothing of this."

He shuffled off, hobbling up the stairs as quickly as his rickety legs would take him. He returned immediately, puffing, gasping almost inaudibly: "Her door is locked."

Again the sound came, this time more vociferous—a loud banging of fists.

Quintilian beat upon his chest—a feeble echo to that other knock. A bat zigzagged down from the dark, tacking off into the hall, fleeing with a succession of squeaks into the realms above the staircase. The negro watched it open-mouthed. He was reminded of rats forsaking a ship.

Voices grumbled outside, the guttural vibration rolling like thunder infinitely distant.

Quintilian riveted his eyes on the chatelaine. He saw her scrawny hand pointing.

"Go to the door."

The negro obeyed, his piebald forehead moistening. As he shuffled uncertainly his head kept turning like an owl's so as to constantly face the chatelaine. When he reached the door his forehead wrinkled in mute questioning.

"Ask who is there," the chatelaine commanded.

The nego turned, lifting his hands to the door as if to lean his weight against it. He kept his palms an inch or two from it, as if fearing to touch the wood. The inanimate oak—to his savage imagination—had become consciously malignant.

"Who's there?" he asked chokingly.

"Who's here?" a voice roared. "*We're* here, that's who! Three gents as wants to drink yer health!"

"You cannot enter!" Quintilian said weakly.

"We can't, eh? Well, watch the door, then. Fetch me a rock, Parson. We'll show 'em how we go through doors."

"I'll fire!" the old negro cried desperately.

"We'll fire back! All righto, Parson—give it to me. Here goes!"

The batten door splintered under a terrific and unseen impact. A large piece of oak humped out, cracking in the middle. A filigreed hinge of rusty iron was wrenched from the door sashing.

The negro stepped back, astounded at this revelation. Something more would be needed than rotten wood and rusty iron. He turned to the chatelaine.

This last evidence of the utter hopelessness of their defense had brought her to her feet. But still outwardly serene, she

stood there at the end of the table, a grim, proud figure. She looked like a duchess who by the clap of her hand might summon retainers from every corner of that dim hall. She looked like an aged queen, but she had no army to answer her summons. She was confronted by a power which physically was greater than hers. Her only force was represented in the body of an aged and fear-ridden negro. But she had certain other powers.

"Let us be quiet," she said. "Jacqueline must not be frightened. She must hear nothing of this despicable affair. Let us manage this the right way—not by force, for we have none; but by strategy. Let them enter."

The men on the other side could be heard with alarming clarity, now that a part of the door had given way.

"The wood's rotten!" one of them was laughing. "Shall we give you another taste of it, or are you leavin' us come in like gentlemen? I can bust it in with me fist alone!"

A chain rattled, an old bolt squeaked, a tremendous iron key was turned, removing the final barrier.

Quintilian fled through the vestibule to the adjacent dining hall, where his mistress stood. From behind the table they could look down a dark, arched vista to the entrance door.

The three visitors had already shoved the door open and were standing with their backs to the flood of moonlight. A hulking man with high, massive shoulders, and no perceptible neck, led the way. He was followed on the left by a tall, shambling, yellow-skinned brute with kinky hair; on the right by a crafty looking old seaman with white hair and a palsied way of swinging his head.

Stealthily and hurriedly they left that patch of moonlight, making for the only bit of light they could see in the house—that seven-branched candlestick on the dining table. They were like men scurrying from one bit of cover to the next. Apparently they disliked that little intervening space of darkness.

Once standing in the glow of candles and facing the old chatelaine, they felt somewhat relieved. The leader slipped his pistol back again to his hip. A weapon of that sort seemed very much out of place in the present situation. He was facing no resistance, no obvious danger, no tangible force. He was confronted merely by a woman—a very old and proud looking grandam in whose presence ordinarily seamen would feel constrained to remove their caps.

There was, furthermore, a composure about the old lady, a coolness, which was extremely discomfiting because it was so unnatural.

The hulking mass of bone and muscle which was the leader of this delegation of brute force seemed tongue-tied. He tucked his chin farther into his huge pigeon chest and peered up through bushy eyebrows at the stately presence whose house he had entered. He saw that she showed no trace of fear—at least, not through that mask of wrinkled parchment.

"You have come here in the dead of night," she was saying in precise, modulated tones. "You have come forcing your way in, as thieves and robbers. You cannot have come on any mission of peace. Who are you?"

The leader took off the leather-visored cap which fitted closely upon his low cranium. He bowed. Somehow it seemed quite harmless, quite necessary to bow in that august presence.

"Who are you?"

"Three Creole gentlemen," he announced, putting one hairy paw to his chest and with the other indicating his two companions.

The dowager winced. What a sacrilege to use this term which she herself could justifiably claim! There was no excellence of race in those rapscallions; no purity of descent; neither French nor Spanish blood. One of them, in fact, was evidently an octoroon!

"Then what is your mission?" she asked coldly.

"To drink to Raiglon and his loot!" the leader of the trio replied. His own voice had calmed him. He felt more at home. "And we're good enough to drink to him, too, I'll tell yer. Think we're water front scum don't yer? Think we're thievin',

sousin' rats from N'Orleans, don't yer now? Well, we may be. But so was Raiglon—and Lafitte and the rest of your kind. We're the same as *him*—that's what! That makes you and me chummy now, don't it, me lady? Ashamed of ourselfs? Hell, no! Proud—that's us—same's you're proud. McCorkle's my name—Captain McCorkle, the same as the Mexican government is after for lootin' the seaport Tzucox. Me and three seamen done it, yes, ma'am. And here two of 'em be right now—Parson's his name, and Wing's hisn!"

The octoroon grinned. Feeling himself at home, he put away his gun, took a pipe and knocked out the ashes. As for Wing, that wrinkled and avaricious old seaman considered his introduction to the hostess as of little importance. He was interested in the tapestries, the suits of armor, the paintings.

"Now, then, me lady, let's have a drink and be friends!" McCorkle went on. "I hear you've got some rare old stuff stowed away here. Give us somethin' hot—hot enough to burn our guts out. None o' yer white wine—nor red, neither. Somethin' the color of a ole amber pipestem that bites like a pipe a hundred year old. That's what we're thirsty for! Here *you*—what the hell are you standin' there for gibberin' at us?"

"He's my steward," the chatelaine said.

"Stoo'rd—is it? So ye got a stoo'rd's department ashore here, have ye? See what the stoo'rd's got to plug us with, mates—afore we go on drinkin' the lady's health."

Parson—the nearest to the old negro—examined him.

"Nothin'," he reported, almost with disgust. "Not so much as a sheath knife."

"Well and good, stoo'rd. Now shag your piebald old carcass and git us our liquor."

Quintilian looked to his mistress. She bowed her head. He hobbled to the sideboard for more glasses.

McCorkle's eye fell upon the decanter. He stepped to it and threw himself into the Gothic chair at the head of the table where the chatelaine had been sitting.

"Here's a jug for you, Wing!" he exclaimed, examining the network of gold vine-leaves and jewels which ornamented the decanter. "What do you reckon that's worth, missus?"

The chatelaine stood away from the table, facing the three contemptible guests, her face gray with rage. She spoke with an obvious attempt to control her passion.

"No price can be set upon it," she said.

"It can't, eh?" McCorkle jeered. "Well, I reckon some collector of antiques in N'Orleans can set a price on it. A thousand dollars—five thousand—that's more like it, eh, missus?" He held it up to the candle light which came through the amber liquid and the filigreed gold like the beams through a stained glass rosace. "And the contents is worth a damned sight more, eh, missus! Here, you blackhead—pour us all a swig!"

Quintilian filled the glasses. McCorkle was about to take one, when the octoroon blurted out: "Look here, chief, you don't figure they might be poisoning us?"

McCorkle opened his red-veined eyes.

The negro stood waiting, with the platter of filled glasses.

"Look here, Mr. Blackhead, suppose you toss off that there glass yourself—the one which I was about to take?"

Quintilian was confused. He had never heard of such a procedure—the servant taking the first glass! He was in the habit of sneaking off a little bracer after his mistress retired, but this drinking a glassful in front of them was ridiculous. Furthermore, he was obliged to hold the heavy platter with both hands—a fact which made his discomfiture all the greater.

"This ancient liquor is not for servingmen," the chatelaine said, coming to the rescue, "but for the Raiglons—and their guests. Gentlemen, permit me to drink the first glass."

The negro hobbled to her with his platter. She took one of the wineglasses and held it up.

It shone in the candle light like a Mexican fire opal—its amber depths burning with flames.

She realized that she had their attention, their silence.

"To the blood!" she said, draining the glass without taking it once from her lips.

The three guests reached to the platter

for their glasses with one unceremonious and concerted movement, like impatient dogs for their meal.

McCorkle drained his glass in one gulp, belched comfortably, and settled back in his cathedral chair.

"What was we drinkin' to?" he asked, holding his glass out for another serving.

"To the blood," Wing said.

"What the hell's that?"

"She was liftin' her glass to these here paintin's," Wing explained doubtfully.

"To the blood of the Raiglons," the chatelaine said. "To the blood which in all tests demanding either wisdom or valor will tell."

"You was drinkin' to them *paintin's?*" McCorkle chuckled incredulously.

"Yes. The portraits of my ancestors—the pirate Raiglons."

"Well, damned if I get that. I thought we was to drink to our good ole hostess—which it is yourself!"

She looked up to the six figures.

"It is *they* who are your host!" she said.

McCorkle's big-jowled face reddened, breaking to a leer. He was trying to scoff at the old woman, but for some reason he failed.

Wing put down the decanter, which he had been minutely examining. He turned his wet blue eyes toward the chatelaine, his white head nodding from side to side—a different movement than usual—as if refusing to believe what he had heard. The octoroon stared, showing his blood clearly by the muddiness of his eyes.

"Look here, lady," McCorkle said seriously, "you're the only Raiglon still livin', ain't ye—you and your little gal? They ain't no one else in this house—we know that damned well—no one aside from that there piebald old lummox servin' us?"

"That is all," she said quietly—"except for those—up there."

The three guests followed her pointing clawlike finger. They stared at the pirate ancestors.

"Them?" McCorkle jeered. "Hell! They're dead." He turned to their scion—the old crone. "I said they're dead—ain't they?"

"Yes. For a hundred years. Some for two centuries. Nevertheless, when you came to this house, you came as their guests. It is with them that you will have to reckon."

The octoroon's lips were trembling. Old Wing darted rapid glances around the room as if he considered the wisest plan to follow would be to gather just such treasures as were within sight, and then escape.

McCorkle, the leader, burst out into a derisive guffaw.

That laugh was not, however, concocted entirely of derision. You could tell by a certain forced throatiness to it that it was covering up something else—a doubt, perhaps. He had come to fight an old woman, a decrepit negro, a girl. Was that all?

Perhaps she was right. He would have to combat six figures peering down upon him from the dark walls.

He redoubled the strength of his guffaw. And it sounded hollower.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LIGHT THAT WAS NO VISION.

"MIGHT it would be best—afore we go horsin' into any of these here other rooms upstairs, to find out where that gal's at!"

This, according to McCorkle, was the next step to take in their business of ransacking the house. There was no telling what the girl might do—hiding where she willed. Like as not she would bang away with some old blunderbuss at the first man who wandered too close to her.

"Parson, you go up above and find her. I want to get all three of 'em together afore we go luffin' up into any of these closets. Otherwise we'll be gettin' a bellyful of lead amidships first thing we know. Parson, you go above. What're you waitin' for?"

"Me go—alone, chief?"

"Afraid? You afraid? You big lubberin' halfbreed! I know'd it. Ain't no better'n little Dorset—you ain't."

"Two of us could do the job, chief," Parson begged. "If you send us up separate we're liable to be come aboard of one at a time."

" Which you're speakin' the truth," McCorkle admitted. " Wing you go alongside of him—and hold his hand."

Wing, whose desire for loot seemed to reinforce his courage at all times, made no objection—beyond the usual palsied shaking of his white head.

They started for the door at the other end of the dining hall, through which they could see the grand staircase, leading to a realm of pitch darkness. When they were about to pass the old chatelaine, however, the latter made a step forward as if to intercept them.

" Sirs," she broke in, " you have not yet emptied the decanter."

" Leave them go," McCorkle shouted. " They don't have to empty nothin'. I'll do the emptyin'."

" If you will permit me, and do me that much honor," the chatelaine said with a suppressed desperation, " I will order my servant to bring a roast fowl, some Burgundy—or perhaps you would fancy some of the old Peruvian wine—a relic of the sacking of Panama?"

Wing and Parson were glad enough to listen to her. The shadows of that staircase did not invite them. But their master again interrupted her:

" The old dame's worryin' about the gal, men—you can see that. That means the gal's up above—and most like without the means to defend herself. Which you better do your business in a hurry, the wind and weather now bein' favorable."

Reluctantly Parson and Wing went to the door, stopping shoulder to shoulder when they reached it, and peering upward.

" I beg you, sirs—" the chatelaine was about to begin. Her concern for the safety of her granddaughter was at least temporarily, without cause. For McCorkle had come to an abrupt change of mind.

The fact of the matter was, the leader of the three ruffians had succumbed to a very natural qualm. When he saw his two henchmen leaving him—for the uncertain realms above—he evoked a vivid and startling picture of himself waiting down there in the dining hall with that parchment faced witch standing above him, and those ghostly presences on the walls hovering over him. Yes, as the old crone had said, *they* had to be reckoned with!

" Avast there, you tremblin' white-livered rats!" he shouted in a sudden burst of temper—which in reality was a mask for his own funk. " We can't go about this business without we have Dorset. What the hell use is he to us now—shiverin' and howlin' back there aboard the lugger? Bein' we know exactly where all hands is at, the lugger's safe enough without no watch. The old dame and the black will stay here—with me watchin' 'em. The gal's upstairs—ain't no doubt about that, because the old lady proved it by the way she quartered up athwart that door to head you off."

" Sure enough, captain, we know just what we're standin' on. Might as well get Dorset," old Wing counseled.

" You can pipe Dorset up here yerself, Wing," McCorkle commanded. " Me and Parson will stay together. Then you and Dorset can join us. That makes us allus two and two. Then there ain't no chanst of gettin' a bowie knife stuck into our livers from behind."

Wing hurried out on his mission, his head lolling eagerly from side to side with each step of his widely separated shambling feet.

" Did I hear something about another drink?" McCorkle asked turning to the chatelaine. His drink was poured. He quaffed it, smacking his lips, settling back again in the bishop's throne chair. He seemed to feel something of the dignity of his position. He peered across his huge paunch which was thrust up because of his reclining position, and surveyed the court of which he was the newly crowned monarch.

By his side was the octoroon, Parson—a powerful, long-limbed man with sledge-hammer fists. There was no need of any greater power—if physical power was all that would be demanded in that situation. Before him, not four paces away, was the proud old dowager, still standing, livid, gray with smoldering rage. But a short while before she had sat in the seat of judgment. Now she was the judged. She had been a queen with power over the lives of her subjects. Now, dethroned, she was standing

before the gibes and insults of a commoner, elected to her place. And even yet she showed no trace of fear. There was a higher court, to which she could appeal: those six supreme judges looking down at her from the walls.

McCorkle, in fact, was studying the faces of that higher court now. With his peppered chin tucked down tightly on his chest he seemed to be studying the floor—whereas, in reality, his eyes were turned upward, peering through the bushy black brows at those portraits. The chatelaine noted that he had not taken his gaze from those figures for some time. Finishing his drink, he wiped his pudgy lips, and gave another one of his comfortable and incontinent belches.

"Who's the swob up there with the ruff?" he asked.

"That, sir, is the first of my pirate ancestors," Mme. Raiglon replied. "With the cutlass he is wearing he slew seven men in one brawl."

"Seven men? Cutlass! Phtht!" McCorkle grunted disgustedly. "Do you see this fist, lady?" He held up a chunk of bone, hair and tattooed sinews. "Do I need a cutlass to come aboard a man—or seven men? Killed a docker, that fist did. Sent his jawbone back into his skull. A docker—weighed two hundred and fifty—that's why his head wouldn't give. It just stayed there—he was so heavy, and his own jaw split it." He chuckled at his recital, lit a tiny pipe, and then pointed to another portrait. "Who's that Puss-in-boots with the lady's hat?"

"One of d'Etrées lieutenants, *monsieur,* who single-handed fought a rabble in Maracaibo and won through the sheer power of his terrifying aspect."

"Terrifyin', all righto! Ain't no two ways about that." Both McCorkle and the octoroon joined in raucous jeers. "Makes us tremble just to set here and look at him—don't it, Parson? Did he roll up them lace ruffs of his when he fought?"

The chatelaine remained silent and implacable in her fury.

"And that gent over there with the scar on his face—and the feathers in his cap? Who's that? He never killed anybody? Oh, no, don't tell me that. Not him!"

"He set fire to a Spanish galleon, *monsieur,*" the chatelaine said quietly. "A three decker."

"Oh ho! So that's his kind of crime, is it? A measly trick! I'd have went aboard with Parson here—and with Wing. The three of us—we'd have done the trick our own way! Gone aboard like gentlemen—that's us. Axed for a swig for to drink the skipper's health—then make 'em all walk the plank. Further and more we'd 'a' kept the galleon for ourselves. Ay, mate? Ain't that our way?"

"We, who are Creoles—" the octoroon said, "we fight like Creole gentlemen. Courtesy. That's us. Chivalry to womenkind, ma'am. Drink to the health of our victims. Smile. Then—zip! We slice their throats."

"If them lubbers up there was alive today, we'd show 'em a thing or two about fightin'!" McCorkle laughed. "Ay, mate?"

"*But they are dead,*" the chatelaine said calmly.

"What the hell do you mean by that?" McCorkle cried. "We know they're dead."

"Can you engage with the dead?" she asked inexorably.

"God!" McCorkle spat. "The old bat's tryin' to throw a scare into us. Of course we can, damn you! We can stand up agin' the whole six of 'em! I'll show you what quarter I'd give 'em. There—that hell-bender there staring at me—" he pointed to one of the Raiglon portraits—a man with fierce black eyes, hawk nose and two black strands of mustache reaching down below his jaw. "Thinks he can stare me out'n countenance, does he! I'll show you how to deal with him!"

With an incredibly rapid twist of his thick wrist, McCorkle flipped a large sheath knife, so that it whizzed through the air. It buried its point with a snick in the highest light of the portrait, which was the cheek bone.

The face stood out from the dark background in a striking semblance of relief, pallid, fierce, lifelike. The knife stuck there casting a shadow across the grim mouth and chin. It was perfect in verisimilitude, that knife buried in the face—except that it drew no blood.

" You perceive, *monsieur,*" the chatelaine said, " this man, even with a knife in his cheek bone, still looks down upon you and grins!"

When Wing boarded the dinghy which he had beached not far from the chateau, he shoved off and stood up to his sculling with all the vim of his hardy old body. He sculled down the black inlet toward his lugger, picking his way with ease through the open channels of the lily pads. It was a quicker and surer way than tacking through them under sail. Within the space of a few minutes, he swung his boat up alongside of the lugger.

The Cockney engineer had already succeeded in freeing himself from the ropes with which his enemy had bound him. Eagerly he leaped to the rail, fell to his knees and reached down, clutching the gunwale of the dinghy.

" So you're alone, Wing — are yer? Alone! I know'd it! No, don't tell me wot's happened to the other two. They've been done in—that's wot! Don't tell me abaht it! The whole thing's too 'orrible. I seen a dead hare on shore yesterday—which means we're all goin'. You and me gits ours now. Come aboard for 'ell's sake, my man. Think I'm goin' to hold you alongside orl night! I guess bloody well not! We make sail—you and me. And I've got as much steam as the ole boiler will carry."

Wing silenced the frantic little donkeyman with a burst of oaths. " Still got the D. T.'s, ain't yer, Dorset! Little shiverin' whelp! Good mind to give you a clout like the way the chief done. They're up there —them two; the chief and the half-breed. Dead? No one's dead! Not yet! We breezed in with all sails set—no objections from nobody. Nobody armed—just a ole negro and a flat-footed bat of a woman. That's all. Gave us a slug of somethin' I can still feel scaldin' me guts. And what am I here for? To take you back with me —for a banquet. That's what. And in a hurry, too. Jump in, lay to an oar and row like hell."

" You say you seen a negro and a ole woman?" Dorset asked in a changed voice.

" I did."

" Did you see the—the others?"

" Ain't no others—yes, they's a gal. But she didn't come below. Stowed away up in her room—somewheres. We'll attend to her when we go back. Come aboard I said—and shove off."

" You didn't see the others—" little Dorset insisted in his nasal and frightened tones.

" Ain't no others. Damn you!"

" There is! So 'elp me God there is! Two of 'em! Two of 'em in dungarees—shirts with lace—bandannas abaht their bloody 'eads!"

" The fit's still on you, is it?" old Wing said seriously. He grasped the rail of the lugger moving his dinghy forward so that he could look directly up into the Cockney's face. " Still ravin', be you, Dorset! You little puppy!"

" Ravin' abaht nothin', s'help me! It's the honest-to-God truth! Two pirates—like them as used to 'aunt this bloody 'ole in the old days. One of 'em comes aboard, flips me under the lug. I drops. He binds me. Look at me wrists. Feel of 'em. Blood on 'em, ain't they? That's from my gettin' free. Tore my skin freein' meself. And there's the line he used—see it wiv yer own eyes—a granny knot which I wriggled out of. So! A-shakin' of yer bally ole head, are yer? Orl right. Come aboard, see for yourself. Go below there and take a look at the capting's locker—which one of them pirates rummaged in! Filched a good bit of his cartridges, too, s'help me!"

" Look here, Dorset! What the hell is this nightmare you been havin'. Pirates, you say? Bad dreams of a little yaller whelp—that's the truth of the matter. No more hedgin'. Get into this boat, and I'll scull you up, bein' you're too weak in the spine to lend a hand at the oars."

" And then wot 'appens?" Dorset went on, practically as if he had not been interrupted. " A ship comes bowlin' out'n the mist, piling up a wave of light, all sails set and bellying out—"

" Bellyin', is it?" Wing snickered. " I told you you was dreamin'. There warn't a streak of air. How could her sails fill—"

" That's just it!" Dorset cried. " Slop me gob if that ain't the truth. She was

pilin' up a bow-wave and sailin' twenty knots, like the wind was roarin' like the Bull o' Barney! And yet *there warn't a streak of air!*"

"You seen the Flyin' Dutchman—that's what you seen! Are you comin' aboard, or shall I shove off and tell McCorkle you're refusin' to obey his orders?"

"You bloody well know I'll come aboard. You scull. My 'ands is 'elpless. Wrists as good as broke—every bone in 'em!" He jumped into the dinghy, his clumsiness tipping her gunwale, too, despite his light weight. He was the incarnation of indecision, despair, fear. Physically as well as mentally he was helpless. His own recital, in fact, had served to throw him again into his former funk. "Look here, Wing, I ain't so sure but that you've clicked. It was the Flyin' Dutchman orl right! That explains everything! The pirate, who rose up outn the mire. The other pirate's face I seen—a little one wiv rat's eyes. You've clicked! Think I'd stay aboard the lugger after that? I guess bloody well not. We got to stick together—the four of us. It was the Flyin' Dutchman, orl righto!"

Wing set to his work earnestly. The twisting movement of his hand as he sculled was balanced by a similar movement of his head.

Dorset, sitting shivering on a thwart, his chin in his hands, was trying to recall that terrifying picture.

"It seems to me she only had one mast," he was saying half to himself, half to the old seaman standing above him. "A mast as high as that there 'ouse, b'God!" In his hysterical fright, the little sloop had seemed gigantic as it came out of the mist. "And there warn't no list to the mast neither. Stuck up like a maypole, s'help me! She had a mainsail and one jib. Might have had a topsail—I don't know. She was so big, and the mist hung down so low, that she seemed to touch the sky with her masthead. Leastwise her sails was bellyin' out. Fore-and-aft—that was the rig— Wot the hell are you laffin' at?"

Wing continued sculling, puffing at his work and chuckling heartily.

"A Flyin' Dutchman fore-and-aft rigged!" he laughed. "Sure—that explains everythin'! I seen ships sailin' without no wind; I seen pirates comin' up out of swamps; I seen purple crocodiles, too, and red girafts. But I never had the D. T.'s so bad that I seen a Flyin' Dutchman with a sloop rig—so help me God!"

Dorset set his chattering teeth in a sulky fit of silence. Wing was a very old and very cynical man. He would believe nothing. All unfamiliar aspects of nature he attributed to his own peculiar and common affliction—the D. T.'s. And even the revelations of that disease—when described by somebody else—he took with a grain of salt.

"Tell it to McCorkle," Wing was chuckling as he sculled his boat up on the mud beach of the islet. "And don't forget to mention that there little p'int about the fore-and-aft riggin'!"

They landed. The bewildered little donkeyman followed old Wing up toward the chateau. Dorset had no conception, so to speak, of his bearings. He might have been dreaming. It might have been a visitation from hell—that ship and those pirates. He felt his wrists. They were raw and still bleeding. That at least was an effect of reality.

But the devil—who was said to visit the Raiglon Chateau—could have inflicted those wounds!

They walked up over the sand dunes, and Dorset stumbled over the carcass of the steer. He fell into Wing's arms with a shriek. The old seaman had to literally pack him off—a dead weight—toward the chateau.

He had not struggled very far along that sand trail, however, before he experienced a very violent shock—violent even to a grim and worn-out old seadog such as Wing. He saw the mast and stays of some sort of sailboat the hull of which was hidden away in the tules. It might have been there when he sculled his boat down the inlet to get Dorset. And yet he could not be sure. He had sculled his little craft straight down through the lily-pads, whereas this sailboat would unquestionably have found it necessary to tack far out toward the other side of the inlet to get sufficient water.

Because of the low mist—and likewise the fact that he was not on the lookout for such a thing—Wing had failed to see the craft sailing past him. Furthermore his own dinghy being so low in the water—a matter of six inches of freeboard—it was more than likely that they had failed to sight him.

He dropped his burden—the hysterical man who had flung himself into his arms. Dorset found himself sprawled on the sand while his companion ducked off into the protection of the cane-brake.

"Belay there, you gibberin' idiot!" Wing was whispering frantically. "Them pirates you seen is runnin' up there athwart the chateau. There they go into the courtyard around aft of the first tower. You ain't seen visions, you ain't seen devils. Crawl alongside of me on yer belly. They's real men!"

It was thus, under cover of the cane-brake and the thick marsh tussocks, that Wing reached the door of the château. In his eyes, the terrified and crab-like thing crawling along behind him could no longer be considered as *non compos mentis*. Dorset, in other words, had justified himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN JACQUELINE AWOKE.

JACQUELINE awoke from a violent but romantic dream — of magnificently dressed buccaneer captains stepping down from massive gold frames, of a golden haired brave swinging a flashing cutlass in the air so that it sang as it cleaved through the skulls of his victims; of a diminutive gargoyle with piquant face and mouse eyes; of a banquet at which the six Raiglon pirates sang, "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest! Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum!" She dreamed of a whole crew of filibusters dancing on the decks of a Spanish galleon after an orgy of murder. One with a scar like the scar on one of the Raiglon portraits, was hopping about and pounding the deck with his peg leg. The very viciferousness of his jig, and the sound of that peg knocking, banging, awoke her.

She started up, clutching wildly at the mosquito netting which draped her huge four-poster.

Had she actually heard that knock? It seemed as if the room still vibrated with the sound. It filled her ears. She felt it in her very bones. She trembled to it, as a taut wire responds to a chord.

For a long time she waited, terrified, listening, clutching the netting, afraid to part the velvet curtains. And yet, surely, she pursuaded herself—it must have been a dream. There was a grumble of voices, like thunder rolling at an infinite distance across the salt marshes.

No wind, no whining of mosquitoes, no hoot of owl: all customary sounds were held in abeyance. It was like the unnatural silence which she knew came before those Gulf hurricanes. Only now the hurricane—so she imagined—was going to break, not out in the bayous, but within the house. The Raiglons were awakening. They were unsheathing their cutlasses, which for centuries had remained in web-covered scabbards. She could not get the dreadful thrill of her dream out of her soul: her ancestors, whom she had been taught to worship as her gods, were to reënact their murderous brawls in that house before dawn!

Even now there was the low mutter of voices in the great dining hall downstairs. It could not be the cracked piping voice of old Quintilian—nor of her grandam. They never bickered; they never so much as raised their voices above a quiet modulation proper in the talk of servant and dowager. When the grandam was angry, she vented her wrath in a voiceless whisper.

A guttural laugh floated upward; the laugh of men drinking. Never in her seventeen years on this earth had Jacqueline heard such a hideous sound crashing into the air.

She parted the velvet draperies, leaped from her bed and, barefooted, tiptoed to the door. She put her trembling hand to the key to ascertain that it was turned, and the door locked. Then she thought of her grandam. It was the custom of the aged chatelaine, as Jacqueline knew, to remain down there—in that very hall—taking her "nightcap" before retiring.

Back again to light a candle, throw something over her shoulders, and Jacqueline returned to the door. Without stopping this time to listen further, she turned the squeaking lock. Her heart thumped as if to beat itself out of her breast. Above that merciless tumult of her own emotions she heard the voices. Now they were distinct: a husky brutal jargon hurling itself against the subdued but adamantine sentences of her grandam.

She tiptoed to the stair. A bat fluttered past her. The beams from the shaking candlestick she held cast widely wagging shadows everywhere, so that the whole house, the walls, the grand staircase awoke to a shuddering life.

She ventured half way down. And from there she could look through the tall arched doorway that led to the dining hall.

Quintilian stood there, his mottled forehead beaded with sweat, his eyes bulging, his hand holding a golden tray, while with the other he groped for support as if about to faint. Her grandmother stood with face turned the other way. Even though the girl could see nothing but the old woman's back, she seemed regal, imperturbed. Before her a hideous beast with bushy black brows, unshaven jaws and a fat paunch, sat shapelessly in the cathedral chair. Behind him stood another bestial thing, who because of the candles throwing his features into relief, seemed to be a negro—even though apparently he was white. Both these visitors were of a sodden, murderous appearance without the glamour of pirates; as desperate and dangerous as any picture of buccaneers Jacqueline had ever seen—but without the splendid touch of crimson sash, of jackboots or glittering steel.

With this one glimpse of the plight her loved grandam and the helpless Quintilian were in, Jacqueline fled back to her room.

Terror for her own safety was replaced by the far more exhilarating fear—the fear for those whom she loved. Her hand steadied, and in consequence there was a cessation of that bewildering play of criss-crossing lights and shadows. She ran to her window, under the sill of which there was an oaken chest, carved with arches and saints. She lifted the top with a creak of massive hinges. A dagger was hidden somewhere in the mass of shawls, compasses, charts; and she must find it. Her grandam was standing in the presence of murderers. The girl—the last of that great race of fighters—must go down to help.

Her slender white hands rummaged about the mass of brass and steel, of silver and iron. She placed the candle on the window sill, and combed through the contents again. She threw out the shawls, quadrants, charts, flags. For some damnable reason—a trick of destiny—the dagger was not there!

It gave her the feeling as she stood up dazed, staring helplessly into the moonlit mist, that the last remnant of power of the Raiglons was gone. It was symbolized by the loss of that dagger. She looked to the swamps: those hyacinths lying there in dark patches on the bayou—those were the allies of the Raiglons in the latter days when the sword was laid away! The hyacinths—as her grandam had always said—had kept the Raiglon house safe from the world! The hyacinths ultimately brought all enemies of the Raiglons to account!

It was of course for only the space of a brief moment that Jacqueline cast her distracted glance down into that bayou. But it was at that moment that she saw a sloop with a man and a boy on board luffed up to the end of the inlet, and nosed into the tules just below the château.

CHAPTER XIX.

TIM THROWS ORDERS OVERBOARD.

CAMERON and his mate Tim Holloway were on the threshold of a splendid adventure. Both were aware of it. They looked up at the old château like two knights gazing at a spell-bound castle; eager, afire, yearning for dreadful combat. They saw a turret against the waning moon. A curtain of mist hung across the grim façade—silvery above, black and lowering underneath. They saw a narrow window casement, and leaning from it a girl frantically waving a scarf.

What knight had ever received summons more soul-stirring than this? What scene

in story or song could Cameron and Tim have evoked more glorious than the scene in which they were to act the leading parts? There was an old forgotten château, hidden away in a desolate coast of swamps; there it was besieged by four cutthroats whose expedition was kept secret from all the outside world; there was Cameron, burning with the love of combat; and there was the indispensable element of all heroic adventure—the maiden in distress!

Abandoning his first attempt, which had been to enter the front door and engage in an immediate duel with the renegades, Cameron ran into the patio upon which the girl's window looked down. Tim followed and the two swarmed up the vines of the wall with the ease of two seamen running up the shrouds. Swinging themselves over a railing of elaborately filigreed iron, they found themselves on the gallery just outside the girl's window.

"*Mon brave!*" the girl exclaimed. "Again Destiny has sent you to us!" She wrung her hands. Her face was in the dark as it was bent forward and tilted up to Cameron in tragic earnestness. The candle behind her made a somber halo of the black hair. "What has happened, *monsieur*, I cannot tell. It is some terrible thing. The enemies from the past have come back to haunt this house!"

"I know what has happened," Cameron said. "I can only thank God that you are safe. But we must be quick—"

"Yes, *monsieur*—my poor old *grand-mère*—you will save her, *monsieur*! These demons have come up as if from the morass outside. They have come, sucked from the swamps by the moon herself! From out of hell perhaps—I know not!"

"Four cutthroats—that's all. Not devils but the riffraff of some waterfront."

"But no, *monsieur*, they are demons! You have come *monsieur*—as the champion. To fight our fight! And a terrible fight it will be, *monsieur*, for they cannot be kin to to this earth!"

"If you think they're demons, I have a charm against them." Cameron reassured her. "It is this gun."

"And this gun, too, skipper!" his cabin-boy chimed in. "I'll bring the lubbers down howling to the decks!"

"*Mon brave!* And *mon petit!*" the girl cried fervently. "Come in, Come in, Brethren of the Coast! Destiny is good to poor Jacqueline, for her *brave* is come! Climb over the sill. Enter my chamber! God is with you, *messieurs* both! as he was always on the side of the Raiglons in their ancient combats!"

Cameron and the boy climbed in and found themselves in a vast gloom of shadows and beams which were concentrated in an open chest, a pallid candle and the slender wraith-like form of the girl.

"They are down there, *monsieur*."

"And your grandmother?"

"She is before them—as a prisoner before judges, wincing under their gibes and insults!"

"*Mademoiselle*, they will pay for every insult a thousand times!" Cameron assured her.

"'Sblood!" Tim added. "I'll fill 'em so full of lead they'll sag like tops'ls in a dead calm!"

"Show us the way to the stairs," Cameron said.

The girl lifted her hand. "No! No! It must not be! This petit—he is too frail, even though he so brave! We must not send him to fight grown men!"

Tim Holloway muttered to himself: "Oh, hell!"

"Nor is it right that you yourself go down there alone, *mon brave*," the girl said to Cameron. "Shall I be guilty of sending you—one man who is so courageous—into a den of wild beasts? No, I myself shall go. Then when the time is propitious I will call you."

This obviously was ridiculous. Having a fairly good idea of the general character of the intruders, Cameron had no intention whatsoever of letting this girl fall into their hands. Diplomacy under ordinary conditions might be better than the use of force. But there was no time for diplomacy now.

"*Mademoiselle* will remain here!" he said definitely.

"I am resolved!" she announced. "You will be killed if you go down. Assuredly they will not raise their hands against me—

a woman! Is this not the unwritten law of all fighting men?"

"Not of their brand," Cameron said. "I would be safer in their midst than you. There is no further time to argue."

"It is the truth you speak. And I have said what I have said!" She started for the door.

He intercepted her.

"What a lunacy! What a sacrifice!" he cried. "Have you no conception of what will happen if they see you—if they discover that this sort of treasure is to be found in this house? All else in this house—gold, silver, precious relics, will mean nothing to them—if only they catch sight of you!"

"Can it be that I have such power over them! It is to thank God! I am a Medusa then—that everything will turn to stone, because of my looks—"

"Your beauty—yes! There will be a tragedy in this house—greater than the rifling of all its hoard of wealth. Must I force you to stay here?"

"Force—me?" she asked incredulously.

A shock passed through Cameron as if she had hurled a challenge at him—or rather as if she had held a knife up to warn him not to touch her. The dim candle light reflected in her eyes was transformed into a livid, a savage fire. For the first time Cameron caught a glimpse—which was but a momentary flash—of another personality in this scion of a bloodthirsty race.

A qualm thrilled him—an instinctive desire to step back from her—an impulse that might overcome a soldier in the face of a terrific onslaught.

She stepped towards the door before which he stood. She was apparently confident that he would not dare to touch her. It was unthinkable! By all the laws of heaven and earth he would have to step aside and let her pass. She even saw the confounded look—the bewilderment, the parting of those masculine lips.

He raised his arms as she stepped to him. It seemed a gesture of defense—as if he feared she would bury a knife in his chest which was revealed by that torn wet blouse.

He did not step aside. She realized that too late. For she had literally walked into his arms. That savage fire that flamed up was snuffed out and in its place there burned a light softer than the candle beams. He held her in his arms with a feeling of wonder: could this frail and perfect vessel contain the fierce hot blood of those buccaneers?

"*Mademoiselle* will stay in this room," he said.

She did not struggle. Cameron had the impression that she was totally without physical strength. Her power was intangible—a thing of the spirit. But curiously enough even the strange force that she had, could not be pitted against the brute strength of those masculine arms.

Cameron released her for there was nothing to combat.

Tim Holloway looked up from a very important bit of work at which he had for the last few moments been engaged.

"Shiver my timbers, skipper, if our whole game ain't hashed!"

Cameron turned towards the bed where Tim had spilled out his cartridge boxes, arranging the cartridges in rows.

"They don't fit! My gun's no use!" the boy exclaimed.

"What calibre's your gun, mate?"

"Thirty-eight—and these here cartridges is forty-four!"

"Mine's a thirty-eight, too!" Cameron said in consternation.

"Hashed!"

"Our guns are loaded," Cameron said. "That gives us twelve shots. And we've only got four men to fight. Pretty good odds, mate. So forget about that ammunition. There isn't going to be any siege or any gun-battle. I'm going down there now to hold 'em up. You stay here and protect *mademoiselle.*"

"Aye, aye, skipper. They'll have to cross me dead body, afore they luff up into this here room."

Cameron opened the door softly, and groped his way out into the dark.

The girl stood in the room somewhat dazed at that first bewildering and vital experience. The strange young pirate had actually used force to curb her will. She

reeled back as she awoke to what had happened. He had not only stopped her but had held her in his arms! She felt her cheek which was wet. Cameron's clothes were still dripping from his swim. She held up her palms and looked at them dumfounded—as if her delicate white hands had been stained. Her angry lips were parted, curled upward in the slight shadow of a smile. Then she came to herself.

He had been arbitrary—ordering her to stay in her room while he went downstairs. Downstairs to what purpose? To sacrifice himself before those hideous man-beasts down there!

She turned to the door again, where that little human gargoyle—the *brave's* servant—was standing, gun in hand, listening breathlessly at the partly opened door.

She herself looked out across the boy's tousled hair into the depths of the dark hall. She evoked a terrible picture of that paragon of strength and manhood whose sinewy arms had but a moment before held her. In her vision she saw him cut down mercilessly by that pack of beasts.

She clutched the boy impulsively; she put her slender fingers through the spiky hair; she encircled him with her trembling arm. Unknown to her—needless to say—she was carressing an effigy of his master.

"*Mon petit!*"

"Now what?" He turned to her impatiently. Her whisper had cut in, strangely alien, to that rumble of men's voice down below.

"We cannot let him go to his death alone, *mon petit!*"

"To his death!" the boy scoffed. "He'll have the whole crew kissin' the decks, so help me!"

"We must go to him!" She brushed him aside.

He did not attempt to repulse her. Her motive, he could scarcely help seeing, was a noble one.

"Damme, lady!" he cried, "the skipper's orders was to stay above while he went aboard of them cutthroats. But I can't do it, lady. This is no time to stay above with womenfolk when the fight's below!"

They tiptoed out into the hall.

In the darkness there was the nebulous glow that came up the grand staircase from the candles of the banquet hall.

"Follow me lady—a pace or two aft, and belay hangin' onto my hand. Don't want nothin' foulin' me when I start firin'!"

When they looked down over the balustrade into the main hall and through the great arched doorway that gave in to the dining hall they saw a picture that satisfied the souls of the boy and of Jacqueline—ultimately, and perfectly. They say what all the world worships—the hero who can never lose; they saw the idol with superhuman power; they saw a champion winning his fight: the girl saw her *brave*—the boy saw his hero-skipper—standing on the lower landing of the staircase and holding his six-gun so that it covered the gang.

Jacqueline, surprised but no longer terrified, saw three strangers down there instead of two. There was the fat, chunky man still seated in the cathedral chair, his hairy paws upraised, his swollen flabby lips parted, his red-veined eyes bulging.

At his elbow was the kinky-haired octoroon holding up his arms which seemed strangely elongated, grotesque, ape-like. Far back, towards the entrance hall was an old man holding up palsied hands. Looking down from the top of the stairs, Jacqueline could see little of this figure, except the leather-visored cap and the white uncut hair of the head, nodding in an excited but meaningless rhythm.

Quintilian, the old servant, was on his knees, his dry black hands clasped, his wrinkled lips gibbering prayers.

The only other visible presence in that scene was the grandmother—the most commanding, the most dramatic—standing by the table with the full glow of the candles upon her grim, yellowish face; serene and implacable in this moment of victory.

But there was one guest who had just arrived at the château, whom Jacqueline did not see And for that matter, his presence was unknown to the provisional master of the situation—Cameron.

The cockney engineer—a shivering and terror-stricken wisp of humanity—had just arrived from the lugger, in response to his chief's summons. His funk had been so

overpowering, upon finding himself dragged by Wing into this ghost-haunted, musty tomb of a house, that he had staggered, shuddering and spineless, groping frantically for support. His shaking hands found the comforting folds of a great hanging arras.

When the pirate figure appeared on the staircase beyond the banquet hall, Dorset, terrified at again meeting that swamp-devil who had disarmed him, drew the folds of the arras about him. He remained there, innocuous and hysterical.

But, for all that, he was a force with which Cameron had soon to reckon.

CHAPTER XX.

A FATAL MISCHANCE.

McCORKLE was troubled. He was aghast. He was helpless. In many past brawls he had always found that the situation of one man holding up a gang was an almost impossible feat. It was rarely successful, and then only when most of those held up were unarmed. In this case Wing and Parson and McCorkle himself were armed. Under ordinary circumstances McCorkle would probably have laughed at his assailant and thrown a bottle at his head.

But these were not ordinary circumstances in any sense of the word.

McCorkle himself was nonplused—thoroughly paralyzed. His vision had been slightly affected by the strong potion with which he had been drinking the chatelaine's health.

His wits had been numbed. He had been brooding upon the weird influence exercised upon the imagination of all in the household by those inanimate but strangely realistic personages on the walls. They had been emerging out of the depths of their black canvas more and more lifelike with each quaff from his goblet.

One, in fact, had irritated him to such an extent with that uncannily natural grimace, that he had flung his bowie knife into its cheekbone! And now behold, while this illusion momentarily increased its grip upon him, he looked up to the staircase—the shadows of which were as black as the background of those portraits. There, framed in the ant-eaten mahogany of the doorway, he saw a pirate figure—clothed in the garb of those ancient times, apparently ready to walk out of his frame—moving—speaking! And he heard the abrupt command to lift his hands.

Taken by surprise and in this state of mind, McCorkle was resigned for the first time in his career, to the ignominious situation of one man holding up his gang.

The others—Wing and Parson—cast a glance immediately towards their master, expecting as usual some gesture or command from their chief which would solve the problem. Ordinarily their chief was resourceful in the extreme, even when intoxicated. Their raids in the past had invariably culminated in an orgy of drunkenness and bloodshed, but the one man who could always be relied upon—so Wing and Parson recalled—was their leader, McCorkle. Now, for the first time, they observed at a glance, he was thoroughly frightened. Naturally enough they followed his lead and went to pieces. The slight dash of negro blood in Parson responded to the dreadful suggestiveness of shadows, of strange figures, of a house famed as an abode of the devil, of a tall woman with a ghastly yellow face, of a seventeenth century buccaneer incarnated, and of an aged black man who was a voodoo doctor.

These were Cameron's adversaries—and a pitiable spectacle they made as he looked down upon them from the landing of that staircase.

He would have found it hard to fire upon them in any event; they were so utterly broken down in body and spirit. You can't in cold blood shoot down a man who is whimpering before you—any more than it is possible to strike a man who is drunk. The task before Cameron was absurdly easy. But yet there was that ticklish little matter of getting their guns.

His eye fell upon Quintilian, kneeling, swaying back and forth, rolling his head, mumbling prayers.

Cameron whistled to him. "Get up on your feet and disarm these men."

Tim Holloway gazed down over the balustrade upon this glorious drama. His eyes were dilated, his breath came in gasps, he sniffed, he fidgeted, he bit his thumb, he wiped his nose with his lace sleeve, he knicked himself. The moment came when he could no longer remain, so to speak, in the wings while that drama was going on. He had to be on the stage doing his part.

It was, in short, high time now for the *deux ex machina* to come down out of heaven.

He leaped down the stairs, three at a time, and passed his master at a leap—a movement which very nearly knocked Cameron completely off his guard.

Old Quintilian had lumbered up from his knees with a crackling of joints. He was shuffling wearily across the floor toward the nearest of the villains when he was confronted by that detestable little upstart, blinking up at him out of mouse eyes, and muttering threats at him through small uneven teeth.

" Belay there, you woolen-headed swob! This is a white man's work!"

With a feeling of immeasurable relief old Quintilian backed away and again took his position behind his mistress. The honor of disarming the enemy fell without dissent, upon Tim Holloway.

With a full consciousness of the dramatic values of the ceremony Tim stepped to the octoroon--a figure that seemed twice his own height—and extracted his revolver from the holster. Old Wing submitted to the same humiliation, cursing to himself, mumbling nodding his white head threateningly.

With these two guns in his hands and his own gun tucked in his belt, Tim swaggered down to the other end of the room towards McCorkle.

But before he reached that cathedral chair to disarm the third member of the party, something happened to Tim.

He could not have guessed what had happened to him—not if his life depended upon it. It was another one of those uncanny manifestations—wholly to be expected in that haunted corner of the world. It was a surprise—even though Tim expected, even hoped for, surprises. But this intervention of a malignant fate was enough to strike terror into the most courageous heart. To McCorkle, slumped back in his chair waiting resignedly for this little spike-haired gargoyle to come to him, the event was most baffling. To him it seemed as if the knights and sailors on that tapestry before which Tim was passing had come to life, writhed in a tumult of action and confusion; and then with a concerted rush, a unanimous and well-directed movement—all the figures in the tapestry had pounced upon Tim Holloway!

Old Wing, with palsied neck, wagging his head knowingly and excitedly, was the only one who understood this dreadful event. He recalled that Dorset had disappeared somewhere in the vicinity of that tapestry but a moment before.

The whole thing happened in the blink of an eye. Dorset snatched one of the guns. Tim Holloway—too flabbergasted to utter a sound, fought frantically in the folds of the tapestry—like a fly in a web. He freed himself; leaped away, dropped his guns.

A shot rang out from the folds—giving a clear white line of light. The victim for whom it was intended was Cameron, on the landing of the staircase. A fraction of an inch off aim, due to the trembling wrist of the donkeyman, Dorset, the bullet sang past Cameron's head, ripping the bandanna he wore, then crashing into the steps behind.

Cameron felt a burn, following what had seemed a dull heavy thwack upon the side of his skull. He staggered.

McCorkle sprang from his chair. He was like a maddened hog, rushing to the attack of a man who has stumbled.

McCorkle was no longer surprised. The inevitable had happened. He had always maintained that no man can hold up an armed gang. This ferocious looking being in pirate garb had attempted something impossible; impossible, that is to say, unless he was possessed of superhuman powers. He had failed.

Hence, McCorkle concluded with considerable relief, the fellow was only a mortal!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Fortune Favors the Knave

By JOHN HOLDEN

NEVER in his ten years of knocking around from one construction camp to another was Finnerty more surprised. He wanted to pull his freight, and Alice Maloney did not want to let him go.

"But why?" asked the puzzled navvy. "You don't need me any more than a mule needs wings. You got lots of good men. Your contract is comin' along fine."

"'T isn't because of your work that I want you to stay." Blarney was in the lady's tone and enticement was in her eye. She was a plump and pretty creature, amazingly competent, too, and the fact that since the demise of her husband she was the owner of a fine outfit in no way detracted from the charm of her personality. There were many men—contractors, foremen, and such important persons—who would have given much for a bit of her blarney.

"Why, then?" persisted the amazed pick-and-shovel manipulator.

"I can't tell you to-day, Finnerty, but later on I will."

The undersized and by no means handsome Irishman scratched his red thatch with a toil-stiffened finger and wrinkled his brick-colored forehead in unwonted thought. No good woman had ever wanted him to stay anywhere. He knew little about the creatures and hitherto had cared less. A change of jobs, an occasional spree, a soul-satisfying fight; these had been the spice of his commonplace existence.

"Well—" he wavered.

"Fine," said the widow. "Back to the

bunk house with you, now, like a good man, and if it's another blanket or any such little thing that you're wanting, I'll see that Tommy Dove, the timekeeper, takes it to you."

So Finnerty remained on the job.

But not with the same degree of contentment as formerly. Not only did the mystery of the thing give him no peace of mind, but news of his conversation with the widow circulated in the camp and inspired comments.

"Is it one of these here sheiks you are, Fin?"

"How did you come to make a hit with her, and you so homely?"

His mates argued the matter in his hearing.

"'T ain't always the handsome face that cops the prize."

"Wish she'd give me a tumble like that."

Finnerty didn't object to such compliments at first. Rather enjoyed them, in fact. But they became a bit wearing after a while.

Could the widow be struck on him, as the boys hinted? Ridiculous. Alice Maloney was as far above him as the moon. And yet if she wasn't, why did she want him hanging around? When the suspense became unbearable, Finnerty entered her office again.

She greeted him cordially.

"'T is glad to see you I am. Is everything satisfactory now?"

"No," said Finnerty. "I hear there's a chance to get on as straw boss up the line. I'd kinda like to give the job a whirl."

"You a straw boss?" She seemed pleased.

"I can lick any man who won't do what I tell him." With becoming modesty.

"And you not a big man." Admiration colored the lady's tone.

"Bigness ain't everything, ma'am."

"Indeed it isn't." She appraised him thoughtfully. "I can give you a job as straw boss."

Finnerty gasped. Instead of clearing up the mystery he merely had deepened it.

Also her action revived the kidding.

"I want a raise when you start to run the camp, Fin."

"Remember 't was me that got you your stand-in."

"Can I be your best man?"

His tormentors desisted when Finnerty offered to lick them all, one at a time; but that didn't solve the mystery of Alice Maloney's interest in him.

Gradually the little Irishman came to half believe that the widow's interest might indeed be personal, as the kidders claimed. What if he was rough and unhandsome? Mike Maloney had been the same.

At any rate he found himself becoming interested in the widow. The more he thought about her, the better he liked her. She certainly would make a fine wife for any man. He'd marry her in a minute if that was what she had in her mind. Yes, sirree!

It was, therefore, in an ecstasy of mingled joy and apprehension that Finnerty obeyed the widow's next summons to her office. He entered and stood in front of her counter, nervously twisting his cap in his hands.

"You want to see me, ma'am?"

"Yes, Finnerty." She rose in a businesslike manner. "At last I can tell you why I wished you to remain here."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"I'm sorry to say, Finnerty, that I made a slight mistake."

Finnerty held his breath.

"Ye-es," he muttered apprehensively.

"You see, I got a man-wanted circular. The picture of the escaped murderer looked just like you, so naturally I wanted to keep you on the job till I could write to the police. But they tell me you're not the man, so if you want to leave the camp, go ahead."

The silence that followed this hideous revelation was broken by a hoarse guffaw outside the open window.

"Ye-es, ma'am," mumbled Finnerty.

He stumbled toward the door, but the widow was not through with him.

"Are you going to stay?"

Finnerty's mind was too chaotic to realize what he was saying.

"Yes, ma'am."

Outside his companions were lying in wait.

"Haw, haw, Fin."

"She thought you were a murderer."

"Oh, you Irish sheik!"

Finnerty glared from one to another. He whipped off his coat and flung it down.

"Will somebody say something now?"

No one would, so Fin replaced his coat and betook himself to the grade. He trudged the long mound of earth for half a mile or so, then sat down to ponder his problem.

Should he leave the camp?

No; the story would follow him and grow by repetition, until finally he would be the outstanding joke of the line. Better stick and live it down.

But the story was kept alive, nevertheless, as Finnerty could tell by the secret conversations between old and new men, and the smiles and furtive glances at him. The subject was not mentioned in his presence, however. It was well understood that the mentioner would risk a wallop on the jaw.

Finnerty was considerably surprised, therefore, when a newcomer to the camp, a city fop gone to seed who wasn't a real railroader any more than Fin was a diplomat, approached him boldly and stated:

"I can fix up your affair with the widow if you want me to."

"You!" Finnerty glared at the fellow. "Who the hell are you?"

The fixer shrugged a thin shoulder.

"Bertram McCandless, at your service."

Finnerty was impressed. Apparently McCandless was a gentleman in hard luck. His clothes were ragged but once had been stylish; he was tall and slim and handsome; he possessed poise and distinction.

"How can you help me?" Fin demanded.

"By boosting your stock with the lady."

Finnerty sneered. "A lot of boosting you can do in that rig-out, even though you have got the gift of gab."

McCandless smiled. "That, my dear Mr. Finnerty, is where my compensation for helping you comes in. Buy me some decent clothes and introduce me to Mrs. Maloney, and inside of a week I'll have told her so many good things about you that you can probably have the last laugh on the camp—on the whole construction line, I should say—by leading the lady to the altar."

Finnerty didn't know whether to thank the fellow or swat him.

"You—you really think you can do a thing like that?"

"Assuredly."

"If I buy you a suit of clothes?"

"With shoes and shirts and so on."

Finnerty scratched his head.

"I think, man, that you're crazy."

McCandless did not resent the aspersion. Instead, he took Finnerty's arm and piloted him far from the other laborers.

"Finnerty," he said, "you've got everything in your favor. The widow naturally will be looking around for another man, if she hasn't already, and whom should she like better than a rough and ready fellow like her late husband? She is interested in you because for a while she thought you were a criminal. She feels under no obligation to you because you stayed here when she asked you to. If you'd only spruce up and make a try you'd probably win her anyhow. But you're unskilled at that sort of thing, Finnerty, and that's why you need me."

"You're skilled, are you?"

"I think I may say that I am. At least, in other cases, I have steered the frail bark of love through the rocky channel of inexperience."

Finnerty was impressed by the language. "By golly," he said. "Maybe you can, at that."

"Is it a go, then?"

"It is."

Thus it transpired that handsome Mr. McCandless labored as a dump-wagon driver by day, but sauntered about in giddy garments by evening.

"Introduce me to the lady and then fade out," he instructed Finnerty. "Leave me alone with her for a while. Tell her I'm a college man."

"I don't want to tell her no lies."

"Nonsense. The end justifies the means. Tell her I came here to learn railroading from the ground up."

So Finnerty made McCandless acquainted with Alice Maloney.

" Indeed and I'm glad to meet you," the comely widow greeted the newcomer. " Gentlemen are scarce on the grade."

As per instructions, Finnerty made himself scarce then. His footsteps were slow and his demeanor was sad. If only he was handsome and a talker, like McCandless, he could do his own love making. His conscience smote him for lying to the widow; for introducing a bum as a gentleman. He wondered if any good could come from such a procedure.

" Well, did you fix things for me?" he asked McCandless when the latter returned from the office, an hour later.

" Almost but not quite," replied the fixer. " I'll have another talk with Alice to-morrow night, then, as I figure it, all three of us will go out together the following night."

" Alice?" said Finnerty, surprised. "Are you calling the lady by her first name already?"

Mr. Elegance laughed lightly.

" I should say so. Always call 'em by their first name, Fin. They like it. Trouble with you is you're too darned respectful."

On the following evening McCandless and the widow took a long walk together, but when the ambassador reported progress he was sadly regretful.

" I tried my level best to talk her into a little trip for all three of us, but I couldn't put it across," he stated. " She insisted that just she and I should go. But I'll fix things for you and then drop out. You bet I will."

But somehow, despite his cultured air and easy manner, Finnerty's fixer seemed unable to accomplish this task. Personal progress he could make, but no progress for Finnerty.

" You seem to be losing sight of what I bought you them elegant clothes for," the latter complained.

" Positively I'm not," McCandless insisted. " I'm doing the best I can for you —boosting you first, last and all the time— but I just can't get her interested in you. That is, not yet."

" You still think you can?"

" I'll say so."

Finnerty endured the unsatisfactory situation for a whole week. Then he put his foot down.

" McCandless," he said, " the way you're carrying on with Mrs. Maloney has got to stop. I bought you clothes so you could make a hit for me, not for yourself."

The elegant one elevated his eyebrows. " But, my dear man—"

" Dear hell! You're more of a handicap than a help. I could talk to her myself if you weren't always hangin' around. It's plain enough now that you can do nothing for me. But at least you can get out. So do it."

" This very evening," promised the fixer.

But he didn't. He took another long walk with Alice Maloney, and when he returned he was very sad indeed.

" Finnerty," he said, " I'm afraid I've got bad news for you."

" What?"

" Alice and I are engaged to be married."

Finnerty jumped to his feet.

" You dare tell me that?"

McCandless shrugged a slim shoulder. " We have discovered that we love each other, old chap. Sorry—but you see how it is."

Finnerty shook a fist that looked big as a coal bucket.

" For two pins I'd knock your block off."

The fixer held up a languid hand. " I shouldn't blame you, Fin. It seems perfectly beastly of me. But I assure you I couldn't help it. Love laughs at fellows who do their courting through others, as you'd know if you ever read 'The Courtship of Miles Standish.' If it's any consolation, you may be my best man."

Finnerty wanted to rend the fellow limb from limb. But what good would that do? Alice Maloney would nurse him and love him all the more.

" You can't get away with that game," he cried. " I'll tell her what a fake you are; how you're no college man, but a bum; how I staked you to your clothes."

McCandless merely shrugged a shoulder.

" You dirty loafer," cried Finnerty, his anger rising. " 'T ain't for love you want to marry her, but because she owns property. You had it in your mind from the

first. You double-crossed me, you fortune-huntin' liar!"

McCandless gently said: "May I ask who it was that introduced me as a college man?"

"I did, God forgive me. But I'll wash that sin off me soul." Finnerty started for the door.

"Do you propose to call on my fiancée?"

"All of that, me bucko, and more besides."

"I'll go along, if I may."

So Finnerty and McCandless hurried to the camp office, where a lighted lamp indicated that the widow had not as yet retired to her sleeping quarters.

"Mrs. Maloney," said Finnerty, "it's to warn you against this fellow that I've come. He's not a college man, but a bum."

The widow sighed. "I know that he isn't a college man. Bertram told me. His nobility of character would not permit him to live a lie. He lost his position as salesman because of the hard times in St. Paul."

Finnerty winced.

"Did the laddy buck's nobility of character compel him to tell you that he came to me and wanted to hire himself out as a woman killer, so he could persuade you to marry me?"

"Marry you?"

Finnerty blushed.

"Well—er—yes."

"The very idea!"

McCandless laughed.

"I'm sorry, Alice," he said, "but it was only to spare your feelings that I refrained from stating that this fellow wanted to hire me to win you for him. Naturally, I refused to listen to the base proposition."

Finnerty gasped.

"Them clothes that you're wearin' this minute?" he demanded. "Did I buy them for you or did I not?"

"You did not. I bought and paid for them myself and I have a receipt to prove it."

Too late, Finnerty realized that he should have paid for the clothes and taken the receipt himself, instead of handing the money over to McCandless.

"You believe me, don't you, Alice?" the city man asked.

"Of course I do."

To Finnerty she said:

"I ought to order you out of my camp, but I won't. I did you an injustice and caused the whole camp to laugh at you. But, please leave us now."

Finnerty stumbled back to the bunk house and lay in wait for his betrayer. Soon the latter appeared. The other occupants were all asleep.

"Hand me back the money for them clothes or I'll wallop you," said Finnerty.

"Surely," replied McCandless, and gave him a roll of bills. "Sorry I had to lie about the loan you were good enough to let me have," he whispered with a cautious glance to make sure he was not overheard. "But you know how it is. You lied yourself when you thought it would get you something."

Wide awake in his bunk, Finnerty took stock of the situation. Truly, it was desperate. The widow might marry the hound at any time. Doubtless the fellow would try to hurry the ceremony. Something must be done to prevent it.

But what? In vain did Finnerty rack his none too agile brains. He gave it up for the time being and went to sleep.

Next morning a notice on the cook shack door informed the men that Mr. McCandless was the new timekeeper. That gave Finnerty an idea. Tommy Dove, who had lost his easy job to the newcomer, might be able to think of some feasible plan of revenge. Finnerty went to Tommy and told him the whole story of his dealings with the traitor.

Tommy sat in silent contemplation for a long time, then:

"Those man-wanted notices seem to make considerable impression on the boss, don't they?"

"She's always hoping to earn a reward by turning a wanted man over to the police."

"She gets quite a lot of them, doesn't she?"

"Heaps."

"I wonder—let's see, now—supposing she received one that described a fellow something like this bird McCandless—" Tommy suddenly slapped his hand down on

his knee. "I've got it, Fin! I know how we can queer that faker."

"H-how?"

"Get a fake notice printed and send it to the widow. It 'll state that McCandless is wanted back in St. Paul for—oh, for anything—embezzlement, say."

Finnerty stood gaping while the idea slowly penetrated his mind.

"Golly!" he exclaimed. "But that's dishonest, isn't it?"

"Naw—and who cares if it is? Ain't McCandless dishonest? Didn't he do you dirt?"

"Y-yes."

"Well, then."

"Who'll print the fake notice for us?" Finnerty wanted to know.

"Any printer in Great Falls."

"Who'll get it printed?"

"You. Take a day off and go to the city and get it set up. I can't afford to; have to hunt another job. But I'll write the copy. It 'll say that Bernard McCandless is wanted for embezzlement."

"Won't the widow find out that he isn't?"

"Sure. But not before two or three weeks. And by that time maybe she'll have got out of the notion of marrying the dirty crook."

"Who will you say wants him?"

"A detective agency—say the Neversleep Detective Agency, New York. It 'll take her a long time to find out there isn't any such concern."

Finnerty reached his decision. "All right, Tommy. Gimme the copy and I'll get it printed in Great Falls to-morrow. What printer should I go to first?"

"One that doesn't look too prosperous. When you get the printed bills destroy them all but one. Put that one in a plain envelope and have some public stenographer address it to the boss, just as the real circulars are addressed."

Finnerty took a day off and had the fake notice printed without any difficulty, after he explained that he was playing a practical joke. He had one addressed to Alice Maloney as per Tommy Dove's instructions and he stamped it and dropped it in a mail box.

"I did it, Tommy," he whispered when he returned to the camp. "It 'll come with the other mail this very evening."

"Splendid!"

Tommy had been given a clerical job in the office, under McCandless, and he went to work at it now. Finnerty hung around the office door, ostensibly watching some men pitch horseshoes, but really keyed up like a radio set to see what would happen when the widow read the fake man-wanted circular.

There was a rustle of paper as the boss went through her mail. Finnerty heard the ejaculation, "Good Heavens!" and knew that his big hour had come. A tense moment passed in silence.

Then footsteps sounded and the widow appeared in the doorway. She spied Finnerty and beckoned him inside. He followed her with a feeling of uneasiness. Her eyes looked cold and hard. Tommy was not in the place to come to his assistance. The widow went behind her counter, while Finnerty remained outside. She scrutinized him searchingly.

"Fin," she said, "you are a fool. All the more a fool when you try to be clever."

The plotter blinked. Clearly something had gone wrong.

"Huh? What's the matter?"

"Do you see that?" She placed on the counter before him the fake circular he had mailed in Great Falls.

"Yes; it's McCandless." Finnerty tried to simulate surprise, but did not succeed very well.

"It's a low trick that you played on Bertram to try and break up our wedding," the lady proclaimed. "That's not a real reward circular. It's a fake. You got it printed and mailed yourself—with the assistance of that wretched Tommy Dove, maybe."

Finnerty gulped so that his Adam's apple worked up and down like a bobbin. He realized that his rôle in this little drama called for a denial of her allegation with gusto, but somehow he couldn't manage it. The silence became painful.

"Finnerty," the pretty but capable widow went on, "I could have you arrested

for doing this, but I won't. I know why you insist on coming between Bertram and me, and in a way I sympathize with you. It was unfair of me to let you believe I had a personal interest in you when I hadn't.

" But your efforts to blacken the character of the man I propose to marry, first by lying about him and now by sending this fake notice, is too much. Last time I overlooked your offense, but this time I can't, and I won't. Mr. McCandless will give you your time and then you can make tracks out of here."

Finnerty's face resembled sealing wax held over a candle.

" All—all right," he stammered. " But how—how did you know?"

" By the postmark, you simpleton. The envelope is supposed to have come from New York, but it's postmarked Great Falls. You were in Great Falls yesterday. So what could be more simple?"

The lady stepped to the door and called to her fiancé, who was out in the yard.

" Bertram will give you your time check and then you can drift," she told Finnerty. " That is if he doesn't beat you up first."

The defeated plotter reflected that, for all he cared, anybody might beat him up. Even McCandless. He felt as small and useless as a glowworm in daylight. He waited in dumb misery for McCandless to enter and figure up his time. That was what a man got for trying to save a woman from her folly. McCandless *was* a worthless hound.

His mind wandered as the minds of condemned men are said to wander when the electric chair straps are being adjusted. He recollected a motto he had once read: " Fortune Favors the Brave." Hah! Fortune Favors the Knave would be more like it.

McCandless entered.

" Take a look at that," said the widow, and laid the fake man-wanted circular on the counter in front of her fiancé.

McCandless picked it up.

Then a strange thing happened. His handsome face went white as milk. He sagged against the counter. His breath came in gasps. Into his cowlike eyes came the hunted look of a coyote.

Finnerty noted this. For once his mind worked with marvelous quickness. Like a wildcat he sprang. He and McCandless went to the floor together and rolled over and over.

" Rope—quick!"

Automatically Alice Maloney obeyed that authoritative voice, so like her departed husband's.

In ten seconds Finnerty had McCandless trussed up like a fowl. He phoned the sheriff and then surveyed his captive with a grim smile.

" So-ho, me bucko! You *are* a wanted man, after all. That notice was only a fake, but it got you just the same."

The sheriff arrived and took his prisoner away. He would quickly learn where and by whom the fellow was wanted, he said.

Alice Maloney cried a little, then dried her tears and tried to smile.

" Finnerty," she said, " you don't have to leave me now. I'm terribly sorry I didn't treat you right about that first reward notice. Drop in to-morrow night, when I'm feeling better and we'll have a little chat."

THE END

THE 185TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

THE LOCKED BOOK

By FRANK L. PACKARD

Author of "The Miracle Man," "The Four Stragglers," etc.

(ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, May 24 to July 5, 1924.)

Published in book form by The George H. Doran Company, New York. Price $2.00.

Clovelly

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Night Horseman," "Dan Barry's Daughter," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

AMBUSH.

THEY found Cecily sitting erect in the carriage, perfectly still, with only the tightness with which her fingers were interlaced to tell of the terror that she was in; for perhaps to her that sound of shooting had meant murder. The patterning of the shadows of the branches fell softly over her, and Clovelly eyed her beauty with a sort of sad disinterest.

If she were his, unstained, what a prize she would be to keep against all the world, to serve like a queen, until she made for him a heaven upon earth. But since she was as she was, she was no more than the dirt upon which tall White Harry strode.

The carriage started on again. It was drawn by two grays, and they scampered along at a round rate with the carriage swaying and rocking and groaning. Then Clovelly rode past the coach and took the lead as they swung down a hill and pointed for a road in a hollow which was heavily covered with a row of trees on either side.

"There may be as many men in that gulley," called Clovelly to the driver, "as there are teeth in a wolf's mouth; but look where the road forks. I am going to ride straight ahead; if a fire breaks out at me, I shall try to ride the gantlet, but do you swing aside to the other road and I shall try to join you, if I escape, by riding across country."

Dunbar waved his hand. He made a queer, squatty figure of a man on the driver's seat, his booted feet braced far apart, his narrow head sunk deep between his shoulders, and his great hands fixed upon

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 27.

the reins. On either side of him, fastened with loops of leather to the seat, were the huge horse pistols, and slung in a leather case over the side of the seat there was a huge-muzzled, short-barreled blunderbuss, which cast a handful of lead and broken iron at a discharge and might sweep a whole width of a road clean of enemies. So prepared, he waved his hand to his captain and then sent the grays gingerly down the hill, using his brakes to keep the carriage from running down too heavily upon them.

Clovelly, in the meantime, roved on ahead, gathering White Harry beneath him for an emergency. What a horse it was! It seemed to read the mind of its master, signaled down the taut reins and to the iron bit between its teeth, and now White Harry became a bundle of half coiled watch springs waiting for a word or a touch of the heel to loosen them all togther.

He danced into the heart of the hollow and Clovelly, glancing back, had barely time to note that the carriage had not yet come to the forking of the roads when there was a considerable rustling on either side of the road and two tall men rode out from shelter with pistol leveled not at him, but at White Harry. All that they wished to do was to dismount him, counting upon other means to handle the rider.

Those other means were not hard to guess, for there was still a whispering among the shrubs on each side of the road, and the keen eye of Clovelly caught the glinting of sharp bits of light upon gun barrels here and there. They had come out in force, indeed, to stop him.

He dropped the reins into the crook of his left elbow and so was able to put up both his hands. At the same time he checked White Harry to a slow trot, but all the while the stallion could be controlled by the pressure of knees and heels rather than of the reins.

"You have me, gentlemen," said Clovelly, his hands high above his head. And then, as he came closer, he saw that it was the least dangerous of all his enemies who had been able to set such a trap for him. It was young Theale, Lord Pennistone, who had brought these men together and blocked his way.

There might be thirty men in the ambush. It had been cunningly planned, too, keeping them all in the background, saving two leaders, who, when they blocked the road, gave the signal which caused the others to close in from the sides.

At the same time, he saw Pennistone and his companion elevate the aims of their pistols to his own breast. He was completely helpless, but with the reins dangling from one elbow and with the supple little whip hanging from his other wrist, he came on toward them, his hands hopelessly high.

For that position was his only way of disarming them and their attention for even an instant. Lord Pennistone began to give orders like a soldier, and indeed, he had served abroad and under the ablest captains.

"Herbert and Matthew!" he called, "bring out half a dozen and close the road behind him, Joe, block the road ahead. The rest of you lie fast and take your aim at him. We must make sure that he doesn't break through the bag now that we have him in it—"

"Hello!" called some one, "the carriage has taken the other road."

And indeed, faithful Dunbar had swung the coach to the left-hand fork of the road and now the wheels were making a distant thundering behind the trees.

"Let that fool driver go!" cried Pennistone. "We want the fox, and here we have him. Never mind the rest. They'll be bagged in due time. Clovelly, halt your horse."

"Very good, sir," said Clovelly, checking White Harry to a slower trot and then to a fast walk, as if he intended to stop the stallion just before them. "I find myself hopelessly outnumbered, and there is no shame, I believe, in surrendering to a greatly superior enemy?"

"In France it is so considered," Pennistone agreed, bowing. "I regret that I must ask you for your pistols and your sword, sir."

"You are entirely welcome," Clovelly declared, but instead of reaching for his sword, to bring it out for surrender, being now full upon them, he twisted his hand suddenly so that his fingers caught the han-

dle of the whip and slashed it across the faces of both of his antagonists, for they were sitting their horses side by side.

It was a cutting blow, and as accurately aimed as any sword slash, for it bit them over the eyes and half blinded them. They fired off their pistols with a roar of oaths and of pain, but they had fired blindly.

As for Clovelly, he dug his heels into the tender flanks of White Harry and the big gray shot away like a thunderbolt. He crashed between the two mounts which stood before them. His powerful shoulder cast one to the ground, horse and man.

Lord Pennistone's horse was flung far to the side, and White Harry was instantly among the honest fellows who, at his lordship's command, had just filed across the road to block his advance. But not one of them had his weapon in a position to fire. An instant before yonder was their man calmly surrendering to their master, and now he was crashing through them on a horse which looked as huge and as winged as a thunder cloud.

The three or four immediately in front of him fled for their lives from the giant animal; the others turned about, pitched their guns up, and fired a scattering volley. They found an elusive target, however, which was already a vital distance away, for Clovelly had swung his mount under the shadows of the line of trees on his right.

That dappling of shadows which fell upon him and White Harry made them a more difficult target to strike. He was flattened in the saddle, and even so one slug slashed his coat at the shoulder and another caught his hat and knocked it clean from his head.

He twitched White Harry through a gap in the trees, and at the same instant the whole body of men down the road belched a volley after them. The bullets rattled among the branches and brought down a shower of leaves around him, but that was all.

He rode ahead, unhurt, and turning in his exultation he shook his fist behind him, then went on, bringing White Harry down to a moderate gallop at once, so perfect was his surety that he would escape.

He now swung the stallion back into the road. Those behind him had fired their volley; but by the time they reloaded he would be safely beyond them and the only danger in which he lay was from their pistols; yet how could pistols strike at two hundred yards? Yonder came half a dozen riders, however, spurring their horses, with sword in one hand and pistol in the other.

He only laughed at these, and called gaily to White Harry. The big stallion took wings over the hill; he jumped him over a tall hedge on the farther side; leaped a broad creek in the middle of the field; cleared a wall on the farther side, and finally found himself upon the other fork of the road, with the pursuit fallen to a dull and drowsy sound of shouting in his rear.

One thing he knew—they would not jump those fences but would wait until they found the gates in them; and comforted by this thought, he brought White Harry back to a conservative pace once more and went on again, blessing the giant strength and heart of that good mount.

He came upon the carriage almost at once. Dunbar drew up his horses to a slow trot and as he drew alongside, the girl stood up in the carriage and stared at him like one reclaimed from the dead.

"Thank God!" he heard her cry more to herself than to him. "There is no murder done."

He pondered that voice and those words for a moment, but he had no time to waste upon her and her emotions. Instead, he communed with Dunbar at once upon the goal for which they should strike that night. He could get nothing but exclamations from the coachman at first.

"When they poured around you, sir," he said, "and when they held their pistols to your head, and when I saw that your two hands were over your head, I'd a mind that you'd never look me in the face again, nor your wife neither. And then I heard the guns roaring. 'He's tried to get away,' says I to myself, 'and they're blowing him to bits with their blunderbusses!' But I went on down the road. 'His ghost 'll haunt me,' says I, 'if I pull up and wait to see what's happened!'"

Having expressed all of this astonishment, which Clovelly allowed to go unanswered, the master now inquired about the

inns toward which they could aim, and he found that Dunbar was a treasure indeed, for he knew the country, every inch of it, as if he had once made a map of it. He could rattle off places and distances as fast as he could talk, never pausing to guess.

What Clovelly decided on was a rash thing, indeed. He had the coach turn to the side, again, at the first lane they encountered and so they came back to the main road to London and Clovelly straightened the coach out upon that highway once more. He announced to Dunbar that they would drive straight down that highway and stop only at dark for the tavern.

The pursuit, he explained, probably would comb the side roads; they would never suspect that a man like himself might dare to use the main highway. And at the tavern there was only one chance in four that some one would recognize Cecily Medhurst, or the carriage in which they were traveling.

Dunbar gaped at him at first, then nodded curtly, as if he now understood why that ruby had been given him; he was to fight for it and his master and the lady, and from the manner in which Dunbar thrust out his chin it was plain that he did not intend to be slack in his duty.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MASQUERADE.

"HARKEN to me, madame," said Clovelly to his wife as they drew near to the tavern that night. "Hearken to me—you are no longer Mrs. Clovelly—you are Lady Dunstall, being on your way to London with your husband's secretary for your service. You may call me Michael. I shall expect you to carry your part, madame."

She nodded and bowed to him and then sat back as she had done all the afternoon, with a pale face and with troubled eyes looking to the far horizon. He bit his lips at that, foreseeing only lame acting on her part, but when they reached the inn she carried it off with a manner that astonished him.

Clovelly went in to engage the rooms, but when "Lady Dunstall" entered and inspected her chamber, she found that it would not do at all, and made a great complaint and insisted upon seeing half the other chambers in the building before she would be content. As for Clovelly and Dunbar, they were forced to sleep in the attic along with the other servants.

Dunbar accepted the company of his master with a quiet pleasure, and during the course of the evening he attempted twice to draw out Clovelly in talk, but it was like talking to a stone. Just before the falling of the utter dark, Clovelly went down to the room of Cecily and tapped at the door.

She opened it to him at once and he found her with her bright hair sweeping in a glorious curve over her shoulder. She gathered her dressing robe closer about her bosom and shrank back from him in a fear as terrible as it was silent, but Clovelly hardly looked at her.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that you will sleep in your clothes and be ready to leave at any time in the middle of the night."

She swallowed; she was still too paralyzed with the fear of him to speak.

"Can you get to the ground through that window?" he asked her.

She motioned him to come in and see for himself; so he went in and closed the door behind him, and stepped to the window. It would be simple indeed to leave in that fashion. An infant could have climbed down the slanting surface, using the crevices in the stonework as steps.

"This will keep you," he told her gravely. "My signal to you is this:—"

He clapped his hands together, and followed with two quick blows. "Whether it is a stamp upon the floor, followed by two quick stamps, or a whistle heard in the same measure, you will be ready to leap out of your bed and to go through that window."

She nodded.

"Good night," said Clovelly. "And I wish to thank Lady Dunstall for playing her part so well."

"But tell me, in thanks," she pleaded suddenly, "why you have taken me, where

you are leading me, what you will do with me?"

"Why do men marry?" asked Clovelly, frowning.

"Because they love the person or the estate of some girl, or because they are tired of living alone, or because they are in an adventurous humor; or for a dozen other such light reasons."

"Well?" Clovelly inquired. "Do I not fit into one of those categories?"

"I have seen scorn in your eyes," she said. "I am nothing to you. I saw you resign your claim to a great estate through me. You want neither me nor my fortune. What is it, then, that you wish to do with me?"

"A thing, madame, for which you will thank me much."

"A thing for which you have to-day risked your life as if life to you were a cheap thing that could be worn out and replaced at the first shop."

"That for which I am playing is worth gambling with death."

"What is it, then?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"In the name of God, sir," she begged, with a tenderness of sorrow and fear coming into her throat again, "have compassion on me. I am haunted with a terrible anxiety all the day. I shall not sleep to-night."

"The stake for which I am playing," he said, with that mirthless and slow-dawning smile, "concerns the lives of a thousand men, I hope; it concerns the lives of whole towns, whether they shall stand or burn; it concerns such things, madame, that your blood would run cold, I hope, if you heard them all. But it is something I can never reveal to you. Only I swear to you that what I am to do for you will, in my estimation and in my reading of you, make you think yourself the happiest woman on earth."

"In your reading of me!" she cried. "But is your reading right? My own father has believed a lie about me; he has read me wrong. How can you tell that you, sir, have not read me wrong? And I entreat you in the name of mercy, let me know to what I am traveling."

He had started, and his dark face grew black, indeed, but now he shook his head.

"I cannot be mistaken," he declared. Suddenly he added: "I wish to ask you, madame, where you learned to care for the scent of the logwood blossoms?"

As he spoke, he drew a stick of the blood-red wood from his pocket.

"The blossoms?" she echoed him. "But how do you even know what they are? I have never before found a man who knew, excepting one. Have you been there, Mr. Clovelly? Have you been on the shores of Campeachy Bay?"

He would not answer her, but as he hung in the doorway, uncertain whether to go or to stay, it might have seemed to Cecily Clovelly that she had indeed shaken this strange fellow.

"Good night," he said at last, and left her.

As for Cecily, she dropped into a chair and sat for a long time with her chin in her palm, watching the fire, until some of her terror passed, and eventually, as though she remembered something, she began to smile. But Clovelly went out from the interview and stamped into the night.

A rattling rain had blown up, but he hardly knew that the drops were falling, stinging his face and his hands and drenching his clothes; for his mind was rioting wildly. He could not take a dozen paces together without stopping for thought, and every time he stopped he ground his knuckles against has face.

"If there was ever," communed Clovelly with his dark soul; "—if there was ever one who spoke with the voice, and looked with the eyes, and stood with the courage of the pure of heart, it is she. And if she is pure, I am damned utterly and terribly if I bring her to the dissolute Ipswich."

This surmise made him halt again, groaning; but he would say to himself: "No. These round-eyed girls with their bright hair and their sweet smiling could cover up the black designs of the devil himself in their secret hearts."

And, with this comfort, he would stamp on again. It was late before he turned back. Then, coming to himself, he discovered that he was tramping almost to

the ankle in mud across an open field, with only the pitch dark and the slanting rain around him.

It cost him an hour of exhausting labor to find his way back. He had to guess the direction by remembering how the wind had been blowing that evening when it began to roll up the clouds of this storm in the sky. Then, by the slant of the rain, he guessed at the points of the compass and started to explore for the inn.

When he came to it, it was so late that he had to tap at the door and get mine host up, who grumbled and growled about "drunken fools serving great ladies" until he unbarred the door and saw Clovelly go past him, streaming mud and water as he stepped. Mine host was then too astonished to protest against the staining of his floor and he gasped as Clovelly went up the stairs.

Clovelly was recalled from his reveries by the boring of the eyes behind him. When he whirled about suddenly and looked down, he saw the dismayed and suspicious face of the host.

"I have played the devil with my secrecy," he said gloomily to himself as he went on toward the attic. "If there is the least chance of exposing us, mine host will do his best. He trusts me now as he would trust a tiger; he probably thinks that I have been out doing a murder."

There was nothing for him to do, however. So he went straight on to the attic, took off his clothes, wrung the water out of them hard, and then put them on again, rolled himself in a blanket and in spite of his drenched skin went instantly to sleep with a faint, dreamlike recrudescence of the delicate savor of log wood blossoms in his nostrils.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MINX!

IT was a thread of sound as sharp as the edge of a Damascus blade; it not only awakened Michael Clovelly, but it brought him at once into a sitting posture and then upon his feet. His head rang and sang with it. But just what it had been he could not tell, for it had struck him, so to speak, in the very heart of his sleep, and he could not carry his understanding of it into his waking moment.

The smoking light was still burning in the room, but now, as he looked about him, he saw that Dunbar was not in his place where he had been when he himself returned from the midnight walk. The wet clothes of that walk were growing icy cold upon his back and now a draft which stirred through the room made him shudder. It, at least, cleared his mind a trifle and he said to himself: "The rat has left me; he guessed that the ship was sinking."

The instant he had muttered that to himself he was sharply aware that there was no one in the attic chamber to overhear him. He stared about him again. The ragged blankets lay here and there where the wretched grooms had lain in sleep. But they themselves were gone; there was not a man in the place, of all those who had been there earlier in the night.

Now he was wide awake. These movements of his mind had taken the space of a second or two only, but as full consciousness dawned upon him he knew the thing that had roused him from his sleep—it had been a scream. In the night a woman had shrieked as if in mortal terror or in an agony.

At that, he was through the door and the rapier flashed into his hand. There was a chance, and it seemed a large one to Clovelly, that the cry had come from the lips of the girl he had married. When he thought of that, he forgot all the disgust with which he had looked upon her before, remembering only her clear eyes, her beauty, and the sad sweetness of the fragrance of the logwood blossoms.

He leaped down the narrow stairway to the first turning. As he swung around it, he heard a whisper like the hiss of a blade coming from its sheath. At his very feet he saw two bulky shadows crouched upon the stairs with the dull glimmer of steel in their hands and Clovelly, leaping back, swung his sword in a sharp circle before him.

His speed of foot could not have saved him here, but that "universal parry," as

the rascally Italian fencing master and street brawler had called it, stood him in stead. His slender weapon clashed against two, flung their points aside, and gave him the tenth part of a second to decide whether he should try to break through them or retreat.

They did their best to help him come to a decision. The two were not alone. Others were looming in the shadows behind them.

"Cut for his legs, Charlie," growled one voice. "I'll put my point through the throat of the dog."

And they lunged at him in unison. There was no time for circular parries now, no matter how universal might be their nature. Clovelly, like a man of sense, turned on his heels and fled for his life. He gained the attic room again in time to slam the door and shoot home the bolt which guarded it.

But that frail security promised to hold only the briefest moment. The thrust of one heavy shoulder would break the door in. He added another bolt of a differing nature by shouting:

"I'll pistol the first rascal to come in!"

"Bear back, mates!" roared a thick voice. "The main thing is to keep him here while the other work goes on. Steady, lads. We'll have the fox out of the hole when we're ready to take him. There's time enough on our side."

Clovelly was already at the window, but, hearing this, he had half a mind to go back, open the door, and strive to rush down the stairs while they were taken by surprise, but he was no reckless madman. He controlled that impulse at once.

Whatever might be the "other work" which was going on—and he needed small wits to guess that it had to do with Cecily—he could not help by attempting to storm a fortress. Instead, he looked down to the ground through the window, and he had no sooner taken the survey than he acted to take advantage of it.

He swung himself through at the very moment that a newcomer up the stairs hurled forward at the door and brought it down with a crash. Clovelly climbed like a cat to the ground and crouched there an instant.

Voices were bawling in the room which he had just left. The whole hotel was wakened; here a woman screamed; there a man was shouting for a light; another was cursing at the top of his lungs; heavy feet crashed against the floors; lights swung in the windows.

But Michael Clovelly felt that his grand adventure was completely lost. The girl was gone from him, and he would never be able to retake her. And, writhing and grinding his teeth, he cursed himself as a fool for ever pausing to take shelter in a hotel. He should have made straight on until the horses died—then still ahead with others until they came to the lights of London and victory.

A door was being battered in the lower part of the building. He followed a blind hope and raced around the hotel to the window of the girl. Luck was good to him here. It was against her very door that they were still pounding.

It was too lucky to seem real. But, after all, it might be that they had presented themselves at that door only a few seconds before. They had gone there at the same instant that the men went up the stairs to reach him.

He was at the window in a trice. Past the edge of the curtain he saw Cecily cowering in a corner of the room, dressed completely. The batterings ceased for the instant. For the door was of the stoutest oak, secured with two thicknesses laid in opposite directions. It had defied the assailants so far, although they had sadly shattered and broken it.

"Cecily! Cecily!" bawled the angry voice of her father. "What the devil, you stupid minx? Will you undo the bolts?"

"Father," cried the girl, her voice trembling with fear, "I cannot manage them—there is some trick—I cannot tell—"

"You lie, you little fool!" thundered the irate squire. "You've grown enamored of the cutthroat who has taken you off. But I'll have you back from him. I've sealed my bargain by letting the knave take you; now let him keep you if he can. Lads, have down the door. Damn the host. I'll manage his business for him later on."

The last no doubt implied that the land-

lord had attempted some mild remonstrance for having his house broken into, his guests roused from peaceful sleep, and his doors battered down. Clovelly had not the slightest doubt that the squire, with a few weighty gold coins, could make all right and well. Medhurst was too rich to be treated like a common law-breaker.

At the same instant a guarded voice panted close beside him:

"Mr. Clovelly—in God's name—off with you! I've hunted the place up and down—"

It was Dunbar. He gasped out that he had had only a short sleep that night, awakened smelling trouble, and had gone out to saddle the horses and have them ready in case of an emergency. He had heard the disturbance—now the horses waited at the edge of the wood. He had "borrowed" a third saddle. There would be no driving in the light coach that night.

"Go back to the horses," said Clovelly, when their location had been pointed out to him, "and stand by. I am coming with the girl, or not at all."

There was a startled: "Aye, aye, sir!" from out the darkness, and then Dunbar was gone. Clovelly instantly threw up the window while the battered door sagged at the center under the impact of the next blow. It cracked from top to bottom and plainly could not hold out against many more strokes.

He was ready to enter the room and carry her away by force, but there was no need. At sight of him, she held up her hands in a mute thanksgiving and ran to the window. One frightened glance she cast toward the door; then she was outside and at his shoulder.

"Much as she loathes me and dreads me," thought Clovelly to himself, "she dreads and loathes her father still more."

He helped her to the ground; at the same instant, four men turned the corner of the building at the run.

He heard the girl's moan of terror, felt her sink against him in the weakness of dismay, but he had no time to do more than close his hand strongly upon her shoulder before the four were around them.

"Who's this?" called one, and another took Clovelly by the shoulder and turned him toward the light which streamed down from the window.

Clovelly struck the rude hand away.

"What ails you, fool?" he shouted. "The rat hasn't come this way. Have you had a sight of him yet? Is that why you're so hot on a trail?"

The other replied with an oath.

"I thought our fortunes were made a second ago," he grunted. "And here's nothing but some of the hotel's party. But head on, friends. We may round him in later. Keep your eyes sharp. Remember that the man to seize him will never have to work again. The squire has sworn it."

They dashed away, and Clovelly felt the girl straighten beside him once more.

"Brave, by the Lord!" he said as much to himself as to her. "If you had let them see you wince an inch, they would have had us! Cecily, you should have been a soldier!"

As he spoke, he was hurrying her across the field toward the place where he could already make out the glimmer of huge White Harry. But not he alone, it appeared, had been able to distinguish the outline of the giant stallion. The door to Cecily's chamber had gone down at last.

There was a thundering shout of rage and dismay when the empty chamber was discovered, and now the window was filled with the head and shoulders of the squire himself, crying:

"Look alive on the outside! The bird has flown! The bird has flown! All the devils have come out of hell to help her! A hundred pounds cash to the first who sees them—a hundred pounds cash—!"

It was a fortune, and the thought of a fortune will make men see through the very darkness itself. Some one made out the gray horse at the edge of the trees, and, of course, that color was known as the horse which Clovelly had ridden.

A shout went up to tell of the discovery, like the opening bay of the hounds when they first cry on the trail, one loud cry to give the signal, and then a score of voices chiming in to take up the trail.

"Run!" Clovelly pleaded to the girl.

But she had already taken to her heels and raced across the field as if she had been winged.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNSEEING.

WHEN they reached the horses, Dunbar was there, ready for his work, and he tossed Cecily into the saddle. Clovelly saw her dexterously gather the reins as the horse reared and plunged away. She clung like a cat, and was instantly in command of the excited brute.

Dunbar, however, had no such easy task. His mount had caught the contagion of excitement and began to dance with a head thrown high and foolish panic in its eyes. Dunbar dangled at the end of the reins, making ineffectual efforts to master the head of the horse.

So much Clovelly saw as he whipped onto the back of White Harry. And doubled was his strength when his knees pressed against the smoothly muscled sides of the charger, and when all that thunderbolt of courage and power and weight and speed was gathered in the hollow of his left hand where the reins joined.

The men had far outstripped the rest of the pursuers, sprinting desperately in the hope of attaining that rich reward which the squire had promised to the lucky man who first laid hands on Clovelly. They were closing fast, one with a sort of cutlass flourished in his fist and the other poising an old broadsword which had seen service in the armor-hewing contests of an earlier war.

The challenge of Clovelly checked them. Then, in a leap, White Harry was upon them. Imposing at all times, when he plunged forward with the wind lifting his silvery mane, and his ears flattened along a snaky head, the great animal appeared half demoniacal. The two stalwarts aimed feeble blows at the thin air, and then fled for their lives.

But it was not the purpose of Clovelly to pursue. Three strides of White Harry would take him among the main body of the squire's hired bullies.

Clovelly veered the charger about and found Dunbar even then settling himself in the saddle and, with one foot in the stirrup and the other iron flying wildly in the air, galloping full speed to the assistance of his master.

Such dogged loyalty touched even so grim a nature as Clovelly's to the heart. Yonder was the girl, too, flying among the trees. Once he lost sight of her, he might as well strive to find a ghost on this dark night, for though the moon was high in the heavens, the wind was hurling black cloud-masses into its face and it looked down on them only with short, wild glances; it gave only enough light to show the picture of the wild storm which was making riot through the upper air, while mere vagrant breezes skirmished across the ground.

So he cried: "Follow me, Dunbar! Let the others go and be damned to 'em. Ride for your life, man!"

With that, and a mere loosening of the reins of White Harry, he was off—truly like a white arrow from the bow. Before the disappointed men of the squire could level their pieces, he was out of sight, and they fired their random shots at Dunbar, who pursued hotly the form of his leader.

Even all that speed could not bring Clovelly up with the girl. She had twisted away among the trees, and he lost her; he had to shorten rein and raise his head to listen before he heard the crashing of her horse through the underbrush.

Again he glimpsed her, as White Harry stormed forward like a creature possessed, literally beating his way among the saplings as if they were stalks of brittle grass; but again the girl disappeared among the thousand alleys of the woodland. He drew rein again, breathing hard and cursing his fortune, but a rattling which he heard was the first of a brisk shower which, with a fresh gust of wind, soon filled the forest with noise.

The last guide which he could follow to her was lost to him. Here was faithful Dunbar shouting behind him, hopelessly lost. He called, and the stout fellow spurred instantly to his side.

"Is all well?" he cried.

"Be silent!" answered Clovelly, full of grief and malice.

Then, with a ringing oath, as he saw his protracted efforts fail and the stirring vision of that tall ship sailing for the Spanish Main vanished from his eyes, he touched White Harry with the spurs and galloped away blindly through the wood, careless of what he should find. But how miserable a failure was this—to have baffled so many attempts of strong men, and then to be given the slip by a girl—by a mere child!

The rain roared in a sudden torrent about him. He raised his naked face to the downpour, heedless of what boughs might loom to knock him from his seat, only feeling in the sting of the rain a fierce pleasure.

The rain stopped as quickly as it had begun. There was only the dripping of the water from the soaked leaves, and the rushing of White Harry and of Dunbar's horse well in the rear. They came out into a road, splashing through a puddle that dashed him with muddy water to the knees. He drew rein again, and as he stopped, above the panting of the horse he heard, in the thin distance, the wailing cry of a woman: "Michael! Michael! Oh, Michael!"

It was a thunderbolt of amazement to Clovelly, for why should she be calling, and above all, in his name? Would the prisoner call for the jailer when once the sweet air of freedom had filled his nostrils?

But an explanation came hastily to him: The horse, plunging through the wood, had brushed her from her seat. And now she lay bruised and sick, half buried in the wet mud, broken in spirit, and crying for help.

He was off in the direction of that cry before the explanation had taken full form in his mind. He shouted. The answer came tingling back to him, far richer to his ear than the cry of "Sail, ho!" on the Spanish Main. For she was that prize to redeem which Ipswich would pay the value of a tall ship and a tight ship, and a crew of hardy ruffians such as he yearned to lead.

So he broke out into an opening and there—ah, double wonder!—she was sitting quietly on her horse, which was perfectly under her command, and above her head a great branch projecting gave her shelter. It was not need which had made her cry out his name, and had she willed it she might have taken her way whithersoever she chose, and above all to the arms of that infamous old dandy in London, Marberry.

For she had not flown. The bird had seen the cage opened and yet had fluttered back to imprisonment, of its own free will.

Compunction came rarely upon Michael Clovelly, but it smote him now as he reined White Harry so sharply that the great stallion leaned back on his haunches and came to a stop throwing up a great spray of water and mud before him. There was something, then, which Clovelly did not understand, but this was only the beginning, for a greater wonder lay in wait for him.

She rode out to him from the shadow of the tree and so into the white downpouring of moonshine as the wind scoured the clouds away from the heart of the sky for that instant. She came with that light in her face, and a smile of welcome.

She came holding forth one hand to him, and as she drew near he heard her breathe: "Oh, for a moment, Michael, I thought the firing of those guns meant—but that was a horror, and here you are, come to me!"

The heart of the pirate rose in him. The high ship, and the ranged cannon, and the dark-faced men, and the heaving deep-blue ocean were all blotted from his mind, for they were as nothing compared with her loveliness.

But the heart of the pirate died again in his bosom. For she had been the light-of-love of another man, and all that beauty was tainted, and all the radiant charm of that smile was fool's gold, and no better. So his face grew stern as he looked down on her, saying:

"You were free, Cecily. You were free from your father and you were free from me. Why did you stay?"

All the joy went out from her eyes. He thought at first that she would break into a storm of protestation, but although the words trembled in her throat they were not uttered. She only bowed her head and murmured brokenly:

"You will never understand—you will never trust me, Michael!"

"Never!" he answered savagely. "God be my help that I may never lose the wits of a man because a girl simpers at him! I tell you this frankly, Cecily, in order that you may know me. If you can go free of me once again, do so in the devil's name, and never come within the reach of my hand. If you can leave me once more as you have left me to-night, ride, ride till your horse falls dead, and then run on foot to put miles between us. I tell you this, in order that the game may be even between us."

He added slowly: "And yet, why should I tell you this? For the thing to which I take you, you will consider a paradise!"

He struck his hands together and broke into a loud laughter that had no cheerful ring of mirth in it.

"Where will you take me, Michael?" she asked him.

"A short road to heaven on earth—for you!"

"Heaven on earth for a bad woman—that is how I read your words!"

"Good and bad are things to be juggled with—not to be understood. No more of this."

"Only this much—that I shall never, never try to escape from you. And if others were to take me away from you, I should try with all my might to come back."

He raised his hand.

"Do you think that you have here before you," he demanded, "some callow boy who has never heard the wiles and the oiled tongue of a woman before?"

"And yet, Michael, suppose that you should be wrong? Suppose that you should be wrong about me?"

"Can the eyes of a man lie—can his ears lie?" he cried at her, enraged by such brazen outfacing of the horrible truth.

"Only once in ten thousand times. Only once!"

Deep masses of cloud washed across the moon again, and deeper darkness rolled across the mind of Clovelly. She had put into words the very doubt which had leaped into his brain the evening before. If he were wrong—

He looked about him. Save for him and the girl, the clearing was empty. Dunbar had ridden out of sight. And that angered him. Did the tactless fool think that he, Clovelly, would waste time and thought on sentimental speeches to another man's mistress?

But still that thought rang in his mind like a bell: What if he were wrong?

He rode close to her, and, leaning from the height of White Harry, he passed one arm about her and with the other hand he pressed back her face until he saw the glistening of her eyes just beneath his own.

"Say it, girl," he commanded fiercely, "as you hope for heaven, say it if you can after me: 'I am free from spot and stain, body and soul!'"

There was a little pause; the water dripped steadily from the trees; the frogs droned in a chorus from a near-by pond.

Then she said:

"I am free from spot and stain, body and soul!"

"You lie from the bottom of your heart!" he cried brutally. "Tell me again in another way: Have you never loved a man?"

There was quiet again, and the beating of his heart shook both their bodies, and he breathed the sweetness of her rain-wet hair.

At last she sighed: "Oh, Michael, Michael Clovelly!"

"Is that an answer?" he cried in rage.

She did not speak, and, releasing her, he reined back the stallion.

"Ride on at my side!" he commanded her curtly. "Dunbar!"

Dunbar rode out before him, and so, all three, they turned again into the open road—but, alas, how the heart of Michael Clovelly was aching!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A VENAL RAPIER.

HIS grace of Ipswich had thrown off his waistcoat. He had jerked from his neck a collar of the most precious lace and opened his shirt at the throat for easier breathing. And now with his hands

clasped behind him, walking up and down the room, or standing in an inspired attitude, or pausing at a table upon which stood two bottles of old Medoc with the chilly, damp cobwebs still clinging about them, and from which he poured a glass from time to time, the nobleman dictated line by line to Randal, who sat in a corner, quietly attentive, scratching down the words with a hasty quill the instant they were uttered.

"What will you say of her, Randal?" asked the master, coming to a halt in his pacings.

"Your grace, it is far from me to—"

"No hypocrisy, rascal! You have opinions. Every man has where a woman is the subject. Your lame beggar who knows nothing more than the price of oranges feels free and able to pass an opinion about a queen; for the worst of those who go in trousers feel, in some devilish fashion, that they are able to speak down to the best that dress in skirts. Am I right?"

"I have no doubt that some—"

"Nonsense! I say, you have seen her. I'll have your opinion!"

"I should say, then, that the lady is generally considered extraordinarily proud, your lordship."

"Proud she is. It is grained in her to the bone. Proud, then, and witty?"

"I have not heard it."

"And you will not. Is she lovely, Randal?"

"She is—unusual, your grace."

"Unusually odd in face and figure. There is the sum of the vixen, then—a proud termagant, stupid, ugly, and distinguished only for her loose manners and her self-esteem. Then answer me a riddle."

"To the best of my ability."

"Tell me, admirable Randal, why I am dolt enough to waste this evening composing a poem which the fool cannot understand when I deliver it to her hands?"

"I have only the ability to guess, sir!"

"Guess, then, and be damned!"

"It is because another person, of the greatest distinction, has chosen to honor the lady with his attentions—"

"Randal, you are profound. That is it. It is because Old Rowley has chosen to waste time on this creature that I see something in her. Any deer is worth a man's marking when it lives in the king's park. Am I right?"

"Most unquestionably, sir."

"Then my time is not wasted."

"May I dare to suggest—"

"Out with it! What will you say?"

"That your time may be worse than wasted. His majesty has a hard way with those who venture to poach upon his own—"

"A hard way with any but me. But I bear a charmed life with him. A charmed life, Randal, because I fought and starved and went through beggary for his sake in the old days—but in the meantime, where is Lascelle?"

"I have sent for him, sir. I have put upon him your express command, and he has vowed to come to you this day."

"It is already nearly night. Does the dog dare to put me off?"

"That is not possible, sir."

"Tell me, Randal—for you have made the fullest inquiry about him—is this Lascelle indeed such a mighty blade?"

"He is considered matchless."

"So I have heard—so I have heard! Would God I were five years younger and in exercise—I should test the sharpness of that matchless point. But perhaps he dares not show his face since he killed poor young Godfrey."

"I believe that there is no fear of harm coming to him on account of that; at least, not from the crown's officers. Old Godfrey, the squire, came and fell on his knees and begged the king for justice."

"Did he do so?"

"This morning. And the king vowed to him that Lascelle should not escape from the kingdom alive."

"What!"

"But after Godfrey went off, his majesty explained to some about him that it would be a pity that so able a swordsman should ever leave the realm, though there was no reason why he should die in it until age took him off—or a better fencer. The rumor has it that Old Rowley intends to use Lascelle in some of his own affairs. He has rivals to chastise."

The last words were said with a certain meaning which made the duke frown.

"Do you intend me by that phrase, you rogue?" he said to Randal. "Well, though I am far from my best practice, I shall not turn my back on any blade in the world.

"But to continue with Lascelle's qualities: if he be not of the finest mettle, I fear for him at the hands of Clovelly. That piratical scoundrel is a fighter of parts."

Randal waved the suggestion away. "I have the entire history of Lascelle," he replied. "The truth is that he is the man who killed Darnac in Orleans two years ago."

"Is it possible?"

"It is the very truth!"

"Then he is matchless. I saw Darnac fight young François Grise, and at that time I considered Darnac peerless with the cold steel. But it was Lascelle who killed him? I thought it was a street brawl and that numbers did for poor Darnac!"

"I have the whole story from the lips of one who saw the fight. It was in the street, to be sure, but it was fairly contested. Lascelle killed his man after he had himself been run through the left arm."

"Good! Skill and a touch of the lion heart, also That is what we need to mate Clovelly."

"I only wonder that your grace should have designs—"

"Against Clovelly?"

"May I be pardoned for wondering?"

"You may. In short, by all the gossip that flies about the town, Clovelly has escaped ten thousand dangers and is fast approaching, bringing me the lady according to the contract. But I begin to regret that contract, Randal. The lady is lovely, but the price is high. A ship fitted from bow to stern and manned with choice cutthroats —that is a great deal for one amour. If Clovelly has won her by the sword, it is only fair that he should lose her by the sword, is it not?"

"Assuredly."

"But now to return to madame. Since she is a proud vixen, I must address her as a gentle and lovely saint. Begin again and tear up and burn what you have already written. If she is proud, I shall be humble."

He began to dictate:

"Lady, since bitter darkness was poured down
Upon me by your silence and your frown,
My heart is lost in shadows manifold,
My heart is lost and lonely and a-cold.
Cruel and sweet, look forth on all that's living:
Those only are content who most are giving.

"There's a line that is not bad, eh?"

"An excellent line, sir. Worthy of John Dryden himself."

"A fig for John Dryden! He is a fashion, not a poet. But to continue:

"Consider, God enriched us with His treasures
Not to be hoarded but to spend in pleasures.
Oh, lovely miser, what a wealth has lain
Untouched in you, who only spend disdain!
But if you scorn my person and estate,
Yours is the touch of gold to make me great;
For only the simple magic of a smile
Shall so transform—"

A knock sounded at the door.

"Whoever it is," said his grace, "be it Rowley himself, send him about his business. The muse! The muse! I feel the muse upon me. Now every second is turning to diamonds of beauty. Alas that they should be wasted upon the person of a fool! Go to the door, Randal."

Randal, accordingly, went to the door. But when he saw who stood without, he made no attempt to execute the order of his master, but instantly stood back, setting the door wide ajar.

"Your grace," he said, "M. Lascelle is here!"

A tall, big-boned man, whose sunken cheeks and deep-set eyes were given a yet fiercer appearance by the narrow trim of his beard and by his long, well trained mustache, stepped into the doorway, and, sweeping his cloak about him, made a profound bow to Ipswich.

The latter forgot his poem in a trice. He started from his chair with a smile of pleasure.

"You are Lascelle!" he said. "So? So? You are Lascelle?"

"I am he, your grace," said the hired swordsman.

The duke waved him into the room, signaled Randal to leave and close the door, and then drew himself up to his full height, facing the Frenchman, while his glance went over the bravo from head to foot.

"The peerless Lascelle!" muttered Ipswich again. "Peerless? Well, well—let it pass! I see you wear the new rapier—the bodkin pattern which lets out a life with a needle prick."

"It is true, your grace," said the other, speaking in perfect English but very slowly. "And there is no sword, permit me, except this. The others are clubs, axes. They hack and beat out the life; this little tool of mine makes the meeting with death as short and as sweet as the kissing of lovers' lips."

"H-m-m!" murmured Ipswich. "Well, Lascelle, I am about to give you a commission which, if you execute it, will make you rich in my favor, burden your purse with a hundred pieces of gold, and give you so great a name that you can coin your reputation into a thousand pounds a year."

Lascelle bowed again.

"In short, Lascelle, you are to encounter, in my behalf, a man about whom half of London is at this instant buzzing. I mean, Clovelly!"

There was no doubt that that name had reached the ears of Lascelle before this moment; instinctively, his long, powerful fingers touched the hilt of his sword. Then he bowed again.

"I know of M. Clovelly," he said significantly. "Did your grace say a hundred pounds?"

"For such an encounter? Certainly not! Two hundred, Lascelle!" Ipswich explained smoothly.

"It is enough," said the other judicially.

"Good! Randal will tell you the details of the plan and lead you to the place. But here it is for you, in short: While all London knows that this madman, Clovelly, is driving on toward the city and making his way in spite of the devil himself, no one can quite guess his goal. But I know it. It is a certain small house on the edge of the town, where there is more country than city and the smell of the fields in the air. To that place Clovelly comes, and the lady with him. And there, Lascelle, you must go to encounter him with your sword."

"And the lady?" asked the villain, lifting his brows.

"She is not to be touched. As for her, she will be provided for in different fashion. You understand, Lascelle?"

"I do," growled the Frenchman.

"Another thing," said his grace, catching at a new idea. "If you meet him fairly and squarely, sword to sword, I shall add another hundred pounds. For I wish to be hidden near by to enjoy the battle. If what I hear of you is the truth, it should be worth that price!"

"It will be short—but priceless," said Lascelle, with a smile of satisfaction.

His grace frowned.

"Beware of confidence! And remember that while your mere reputation may kill men for you in France, in England you will find different metal. Be sure of that! Drink no wine from this day. Take enough exercise to be sure of your wind. I swear, Lascelle, that you will need all your wits and every scruple of the length of your arm!"

"I shall kill him," said Lascelle slowly and sneeringly, "by bits. He shall die five times instead of once, for the pleasure of your grace."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MURDERER'S ART.

THE little villa of his grace of Ipswich lay on the Oxford Road on the edge of the town. It was no pretentious place for so great or so rich an owner. It was hardly more than a cottage settled well back in a wild tangle of trees and shrubbery through which a winding carriage road approached its door.

And along that road three riders slowly rode their horses on this evening. The sun was already down and the last color had faded from the sky, but still a pale band circled the horizon and the twilight was stronger than the radiance of the moon

which hung well above the tops of the eastern trees.

In front rode Cecily and Dunbar, weary riders upon weary mounts. In the rear White Harry and his master were as alert and untired as when the long ride began. The great stallion danced upon a loose rein, restrained rather by the voice than the hand of the master, turning his head here and there to look among the tangles of the undergrowth, stopping once with a snort to look up as an owl drifted low above them and across the white face of the moon.

They came before the black front of the house. There Cecily Hampton reined back to the side of her legal husband.

"This is the place, Michael," she said with a sort of sad foreknowledge. "But what will you do with me here?"

"God knows, Cecily," he answered. "Wait here with Dunbar."

He rode around the corner of the low building. Now he saw one light burning dimly behind a single window. The back of White Harry raised him to a level with the casement and, looking in, he saw an old woman sleeping in a chair, her head twisted sidewise with weariness and the relaxation of slumber. But, even in her sleeping face, there seemed to Clovelly to be more bitter malevolence than in any waking countenance he had ever seen before.

He tapped at the pane. Instantly she started up. There was no fear in her at this summons. She went straight to the window and raised it.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Open the door to us," said Clovelly. "Go to the front of the house and open the door to us. I bring a guest for your master."

The crone yawned, leaning into the darkness so that she might see him more closely.

"You're Clovelly," she nodded. "You're Clovelly!"

And she began to laugh in a shrill, broken voice that made the blood curdle even in the veins of that captain of the Spanish Main.

"Old witch," said he, "you need the whip! Open the door, and at once."

She hesitated, as if a burning retort were upon the tip of her tongue; but, changing her mind, she closed the window and disappeared.

Clovelly went around to the front of the house again, and presently the door was opened.

Through it he led Cecily, with Dunbar close behind them. They came into a little reception room, warmly and delicately furnished. A hanging lamp was lighted.

Then Cecily, as if all at once she understood, took his arm and clung to him. Her breast was touching his hand, and he felt the hurried beating of her heart.

He knew her face was white and raised to him, but he dared not look down, for he had turned sick in his soul. He saw Dunbar, scowling with doubt, facing him on the farther side of the room. What other eyes might be peering at them from the doorways which emptied into thickest gloom on either side of the room?

"Cover your face!" he commanded.

And she, without a word, lowered the hood of the riding cloak which she was wearing. It did not cover all her face; it merely placed it in shadow out of which great eyes burned steadfastly at Michael.

He felt himself growing weak. There was such an atmosphere in this house that he could not breathe. Yet it was not overwarm, and he wondered at himself. He dashed open a window, drank in a long breath of the chill night air which instantly rolled in against his face, and turned to the hag again. Her eyes had not left the face of Cecily, prying and glittering at her with a pitiless speculation.

"Is there no one here to meet me?" asked Clovelly.

"In the court! In the court!" chuckled the crone. "There is some one to meet you in the court, sir."

Clovelly stared at her. He had grown half suspicious, and yet he knew that sometimes extreme old age made people gibber like fools or madmen. He could not but attribute the sinister ways of this hag to the same cause, and yet he thought it as well to investigate.

"Dunbar," he said, "go into the court and find who has come there to wait for me, and why the devil they wait in the court—"

He turned to the hag.

"Conduct this man," he said, "and have a care that there are no tricks. I come from a country where old witches are hung up by the thumbs. D'you hear?"

She shrank from him, but still sneering, and so took Dunbar from the room. The interval Clovelly spent in pacing to and fro, turning hastily at the end of each beat back and forth that he might not be forced to face the girl.

She had grown more terrible than a regiment of soldiers to him, and yet she was doing no more than following him with her eyes, back and forth, back and forth through the room. He strove with all his might not to see her, but he could not help but notice, now and again, the glistening of her eyes and the pale glimmer of the hands which were folded in her lap.

Why did not Dunbar return? For every instant with this suspense continued was putting the greater weight upon him.

Once he paused just before her and cried: "Cecily—"

She half raised from her chair. There was a broken and a panting tenderness in her voice.

"Yes?" said she eagerly. "Yes, Michael?"

Instead of continuing, he turned sharply about and resumed his pacing. But he was trembling from head to foot; there was such a hunger in his arms to take her body in his arms; there was such a hunger in his heart to be possessed of her soul; there was such a mad, sweet knowledge in his blood that if he so much as stopped frowning she would weep with delight—that all of these things stopped his breath and made his heart riot.

Yet, Dunbar did not return.

He stamped his feet and shouted:

"Hallo! Hallo! Who's there? Dunbar!"

The long echoes boomed softly through the house, whispered, died and whispered again, but the honest roar of Dunbar did not reply. Only the crone came again to the doorway.

"Old she-devil," said Clovelly, "where is my man? What have you done with him?"

"I took him to the court, fair my master."

"What kept him there?"

"The wine, I doubt not. There is good drinking there—"

"I'll be at the bottom of this foolery. If you are right, Dunbar shall sweat for this. Come, Cecily!"

The crone led the way. He cautioned the girl as they went on:

"Stay close behind me. If there is danger, press close."

Then the old woman opened a door and bowed them through. Clovelly found himself looking into a sort of Spanish patio—more of a garden that a court, and with a stretch of smoothly shaven turf in the center of the plot. There were a half dozen strong lights hanging under the eaves, and these made a bright illumination. He saw no men at first, but as he stepped through the doorway he was seized upon either side. It was useless to struggle. Upon each hand one man held his arm, and farther back stood assistants with leveled weapons. A tall man with a pointed beard and long mustache was approaching across the court.

"Hold fast, my friends!" he commanded. "Take the girl—"

Clovelly struggled so suddenly and desperately that he half freed himself.

"Touch the lady," he said, "and I'll find a way of cutting your hearts out!"

"Let her be, then," the tall man ordered. "She shall look on, for this will be worth observing."

He came before the captive.

"You, sir," he said, "are that famous man, Michael Clovelly?"

"I may be Michael Clovelly," said the latter, "though not 'that famous man.' And you, whatever you may be, must know that the owner of this house is no common man. You will wish that you had entered hell sooner than invaded his property."

The other waved his hand, so lightly dismissing such thoughts of unpleasantness to come.

"I may be known to you," he suggested proudly. "I am Pierre Lascelle!"

"Lascelle? Lascelle?" muttered Clovelly. "I have heard that name. Ah—Darnac—by my life, it is the same! One Pierre Las-

celle was he who killed the great Darnac in Orleans."

Lascelle bowed.

"Then, sir," cried Clovelly, "I have the pleasure to tell you that from one who saw it I have learned that you won with a foul stroke!"

Lascelle stiffened.

"A lie, monsieur!" he said.

"Tush!" Clovelly sneered. "You say that to one whose hands are held."

"They may be at liberty sooner than you wish," the other remarked darkly.

"Call off your bloodhounds," said Clovelly, "and give me freedom to answer."

"It shall be done," Lascelle agreed in his slow voice, in the meantime running his eye up and down the body of Clovelly as if he were choosing in what place he might kill his man. "It shall be done. But, *monsieur,* you are newly alighted from a weary journey. I would not have any advantage on my side. Will you first rest?"

"Bravo!" said a distant voice.

"By heavens!" murmured Clovelly. "I am brought here to make a show for spectators. Who spoke there? I know that voice! Who spoke there?"

"One who will see your body interred properly and decently," Lascelle replied. "Have no fear of that! Come, *monsieur!*"

He turned his back, and walked out to the center of the turf. There he removed his coat, tucked up the sleeves of his shirt, cast off his hat, tied back his long, flowing hair with a ribbon, and, drawing his sword, tried its flexible strength and the agility of his arm with two or three passes into the bodiless air.

By his instructions, in the meantime, Clovelly had been released, and he hurriedly made the same preparations, then stood forth, sword in hand.

"Here," said Clovelly coolly, "are four men of yours. Yonder I see poor Dunbar bound hand and foot and even gagged. Suppose, Lascelle, that I should win—what would my victory obtain for me?"

"Suppose that you should win?" echoed Lascelle incredulously. "By Heaven, *monsieur,* do you hope for that? Well, in case you win, no hand will be laid on you. You depart?"

"What assurance have I of that?"

"A better than mine!"

"Yes!" affirmed the same distant voice which had spoken before.

Clovelly turned toward the point from which he had heard it proceed and bowed low.

"Most excellent and invisible spirit," he said, "I thank you from the heart. M. Lascelle, begin."

"First," Lascelle demanded, "upon what particular quarrel?"

"First," Clovelly replied, "because you have given me the lie. Is it enough?"

"Enough! Begin, *monsieur!*"

"Second, I accuse you here, formally, of killing my master, Darnac, with a foul stroke."

"Ten thousand devils!" groaned Lascelle in fury. "Begin! Begin! It is more than enough!"

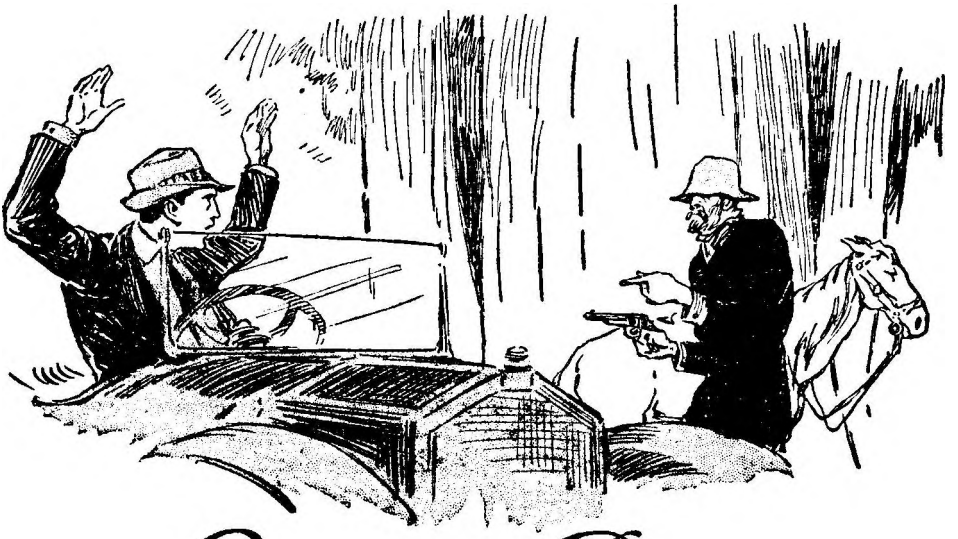
"After you, Lascelle!"

The latter did not wait for a second bidding, but instantly leaped to the attack with a long lunge full at the throat of Clovelly. The stroke was parried. They circled each other with dainty, mincing steps, light as thistledown in the autumn wind. Now one darted in, the swords tangled with a light, fierce chattering of slender steel against slender steel. Then they leaped back with the blades still humming from the force of the parries. And the narrow weapons seemed a length of shivering light from the many strong lamps which were burning under the eaves. Three times and again they closed, but still there was no result.

Clovelly set his teeth. He had lived his life with the feeling that the greatest master of all had been Darnac. Now a cold doubt entered his mind. Perhaps this long, grim-faced murderer was a still greater man with a rapier.

For his own part, the long ride had made his knees weak, his feet heavy. The chill of the night air was not yet out of his muscles. And he knew that a desperate struggle lay before him.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



Good Buy

By ERIC HOWARD

FIVE minutes before he had been happy; now he was miserable. Then, everything was roseate; now the lonely, deserted forest road was the gloomiest place in the world.

Bob Adams sat on the running-board of his small car, and held his head in his hands. It was a good head, ordinarily, but at this moment it was entirely occupied by an unsolvable puzzle. What the devil should he do? What could he do?

He had been humming along as smoothly as if his car were a Rolls-Royce, which it was far from being, and as if the dirt road through the redwood forest were the finest boulevard. He was on the last lap of a two weeks' vacation. And what a vacation it had been—until now!

He had planned on making this trip half the year. It was his one chance to see the country he had long dreamed of seeing. And, as it happened, it gave him an opportunity to show old Spear — of Spear, Gray & Company—that he was a man of resource and ability, a man capable of being intrusted with any important business.

If, in combining business with pleasure, he made good, he would be made a Buyer. Bob always spelled it with a capital B. And as a Buyer, most of his time would be spent driving the little car up and down the State. Besides, there would be more money than there was in the desk job he had held for two years. And more money meant, in Bob's case, what it often means in the life of a young man—a girl.

Old Spear had assured him that if he showed resource — the old man's favorite word—he would be made a Buyer. When Bob announced that he meant to spend his vacation on a long trip up the coast and down the valley, Spear had suggested that he attend to a little business along the way. Bob had left the office with a large bundle of bills to be collected from merchants.

"And if you get a chance to buy anything," said Spear, "at the right price, do it. Especially peaches and prunes. Use your own judgment, but be sure you're

right. And we'll allow you ten per cent on your collections."

What a chance! He would make money on his vacation, and when he came back he would be a Buyer, at a good salary. Then —well, the next time he made a long trip like this he would be accompanied by Mrs. Robert Adams, née Betty Burgess.

Betty had practically said so. She would leave the office as soon as he became a Buyer, and they would be married; and life would be one long picnic. That was the way Bob thought about it.

He had started out with all the enthusiasm of a press agent. And he had made good. His collections were better than he had expected. His ten per cent grew into quite a respectable little nest egg. Spear would see that he was a good man, and he would get that Buyer's job.

And then—this had to happen!

Most of the bills he had collected had been paid by check, but a number of the merchants in the smaller towns and the lumber and mining camps had paid cash. He had collected about seven hundred dollars in cash. As soon as he got to Crescent, one of the larger towns, he intended to send it, by draft or money-order, to Spear, Gray & Company.

He could reach Crescent in two hours—but the seven hundred dollars were gone! The man who had relieved Bob of this monetary burden was by now several miles away, secure in the depths of the forest. Bob didn't know the country; the robber probably did.

Bob had seen him, on horseback, ride into the road from the trees. He had waved his hand, and Bob had stopped. His thoughts were miles away, just then, and the bandit had ample time to level a revolver at him before Bob knew what was happening. But even if he had known it, he could have done nothing. He was unarmed, and, whatever they may do in the movies, one cannot leap from the seat of a small automobile to attack a man with a gun—and get away with it.

The robber had calmly got off his horse, thrown the reins over its head, and stood beside the car. He was a tall, awkward-looking fellow, with a beard of several weeks' growth that effectively concealed his features; and he wore a felt hat that came far down over his eyes.

He pantomimed, with all the art of Bill Hart, that Bob should disgorge. Bob did, with the bandit's deft assistance. Perhaps, if he had been an athlete with a knowledge of jujutsu, he might have resisted. But he was not; he was a surprised young man, for the moment incapable of believing that he was really being robbed.

"Say, that's not my money!" he protested, when he recovered the use of his voice.

But by that time the robber had galloped away into the forest. Bob jumped out of the car and ran after him. But he had disappeared from view, and as the full realization of the consequences of what had happened swept over him, Bob sat down on the running-board feeling suddenly sick.

The loss of the money was bad enough. To make that good would keep Bob poor for months to come. But that was far from being the worst of it. What an idiot he had been to carry all that cash! He had thought of sending it off early that morning, from the town in which he had spent the night. But there was another small bill that he hoped to collect before he reached Crescent. Then he would send it all from there. Never having been held up before, it had not occurred to him to take any precautions.

Old Spear admired resourceful men. This would finish him with Spear, all right. It would be bad enough to be short seven hundred dollars, but it would be worse to lose that Buyer's job. And that's what it meant. Spear would see that he couldn't be trusted, that he wasn't resourceful.

There was Betty, too. She would be disappointed in him. They had counted a lot on that Buyer's job. On their long Sunday drives—Bob had acquired the little car by the monthly payment method just to make possible those drives—they had often talked of the longer trips they would make after he became a Buyer for the firm.

He wondered, forlornly, if there was any chance of recovering the money. He couldn't trail the robber, he knew that.

But possibly the sheriff at Crescent might be able to find him. Bob was skeptical. The fellow had taken only cash, ignoring the checks and his watch. He was probably a native; he knew the country. There wouldn't be a chance of getting it back, even if the bandit were captured; by that time he would have disposed of the loot.

If he had had enough money in the bank to make good the loss, Bob would have said nothing. But his bank balance, from which the final payment on the car had been made, showed only two tiny figures on the left side of the decimal point. That sum, and his commissions on the checks he had collected, wouldn't cover the loss.

No, he would have to repay it out of his salary, month by month. That meant that he would be tied to the same old desk, at the same pay, for months to come.

"Of all the rotten luck!" he groaned.

Then he checked himself. There was no use sitting here sobbing; surely something could be done. Spear expected his men to be resourceful.

Bob took the wheel of the car and drove off. The sound of the engine was soothing. If he had only suspected that fellow of being a robber, he'd have driven like the devil and taken a chance on getting shot. If—

But that was done. Now it was up to him to be resourceful. To-day was Thursday. He must be back in the office on Monday morning. He was a good day's drive from the city. Maybe, in that time, he could find a way, if he were resourceful enough. If he could make good the money without letting Spear learn what had happened, he would be promoted. If he couldn't— He sighed, then thrust out his chin and frowned. He was determined to be resourceful, though he didn't see how he could make seven hundred dollars in four days.

II.

THE letter carrier handed Betty Burgess Bob's letter from Crescent early Friday morning, as she was leaving home for the office. Although this happened every morning, it never failed to set Betty's heart to leaping.

She read Bob's description of the robbery with tears in her eyes. When she came to the loss of the money she uttered a little cry of dismay. She hurried on through Bob's determined reassurances, in which he made light of the loss and said that it would really give him a better chance to show what he could do. Betty wisely saw, between the lines, that these words of assurance were for her benefit, that Bob himself was by no means sure that he could accomplish a miracle.

His one opportunity, it seemed to him, was to sell a large enough order of goods to earn a commission that would cover the loss. That meant, at ten per cent, that he would have to sell seven thousand dollars' worth of goods. He wasn't a salesman, but he was going to try. Luckily, Crescent was the head office of the Northern Stores Company, a firm that operated a chain of shops in twenty different towns in that part of the country. He would see them in the morning—

There was a lot more in the letter—a lot of rather bad poetry of the kind that is written by young men in love. It would seem absurd to us, but it didn't to Betty; and, after all, it was addressed to her.

She set off down the street, walking with the free strides of one who really likes to walk. Her figure expressed the joy of physical well-being, but she was frowning solemnly.

Poor Bob! Betty had worked beside him in the office for long enough to understand him and his problems. She knew his ambitions, and shared them. She had set great store on the opportunities given him by this vacation trip. She had looked forward to his return, and had visualized it as that of a conquering hero.

She had seen him, in her mind's eye, sweep into the office, walk with confident nonchalance into the private room of Mr. Spear, and come out, after a decent interval, with that old gentleman's arm over his shoulders.

"I wish to announce," she had heard Mr. Spear say, in her mind's ear, "that young Mr. Adams has shown unusual resource and is now a Buyer."

Such a moment of victory—for Bob—

would have pleased Betty more than any personal triumph. Anyway, it would be a personal triumph.

Betty dashed for the trolley at the corner, made it with a calisthenic leap, and settled into a narrow seat beside a fat man. The latter's outspread newspaper furnished her with a safe retreat, behind which she read again Bob's letter. Before, her disappointment and sympathy for Bob had been uppermost in her mind; now she concentrated on the wordy and rather foolish poetry, enjoying it in a complete forgetfulness of place.

So absorbed was she, in fact, in the very free verse of Robert Adams that not until the car came to a stop with a sudden jerk that tossed her like a chip against the pillowy mass of the man beside her did she see and recognize him as Mr. Smithson, chief purchasing agent for Spear, Gray & Company. In that moment, too, she had the uncomfortable feeling that from behind the ambush of his morning paper he had been reading parts, at least, of her letter.

She hastily thrust the sheets into her bag, as Mr. Smithson smiled a good morning. There was that in his rather fishy eyes, set in their circles of flesh, that convinced Betty that he had recognized Bob's handwriting and had read the letter, or more of it than she cared any one to read.

They both got up as the trolley approached their corner, and Smithson, having considerable difficulty in getting his own bulk off the car, gallantly tried to assist Betty. She, however, jumped lightly from the top step to the ground, and would have gone on alone.

"When is young Adams coming back?" his words overtook her.

"Monday, I think," she replied with a little flush.

"He hasn't sent in any report this week," said Smithson, "but I thought maybe you'd know." His laugh bubbled up like the gurgles of a baby geyser. "I guess he's having trouble collecting those bad accounts, eh?"

"No, I think not," replied Betty. "I think he's doing—extremely well."

"Oh!" Smithson knew he had been rebuked.

And Betty knew that he had read enough of Bob's letter to know of his difficulty, perhaps even of the robbery. She blamed herself for having given him a chance of reading the letter; and she hated him for having taken advantage of that chance.

Smithson had two personalities. Towards Mr. Spear, Mr. Gray, and the other members of the company, he was genial, pleasant and capable. His very bulk gave him an air of authority and success. It seemed impossible for so great a man, physically, to be anything but great in other respects. Towards the buyers whose destinies he held in the palms of his large hands, he was overbearing and often scornful. That, indeed, was the one thorn in the rosebush of Bob's dream of being a buyer. He wasn't at all sure that he could get on with Smithson.

Betty rushed into the office ahead of the purchasing agent, glad to get away from his bubbling laugh and air of being in on a romantic secret. She was in a state of nervous excitement. She was afraid Smithson would tell Mr. Spear what had happened to Bob, and she knew that Bob wanted, if possible, to keep it a secret. The purchasing agent had never shown any interest in Bob's ambition to become a member of the purchasing department; in fact, Bob had suspected him of active opposition. If he told Mr. Spear what had happened, if he knew that Bob had foolishly—no, thoughtlessly, Betty corrected herself—carried the firm's money with him and had been robbed of it, all their high hopes would fall to earth with a dull thud. As she tremblingly inserted a letter head into her typewriter, and began to transcribe notes taken the day before, she felt that she must do something, anything, to prevent Smithson from bearing tales to Mr. Spear.

So sure was she that Bob would somehow, triumphantly, make good his loss and prove that he was resourceful, that it did not occur to Betty to consider the larger chances of his failure.

She typed the first sentence of the letter she had begun three times before she saw her mistake. As she removed the paper, the office manager stepped to her desk.

"Miss Fair is ill, Miss Burgess," he said,

"Will you take her place, please? Mr. Spear is waiting for you."

Betty caught up her notebook and pencils, hardly realizing what she did. Miss Fair was the old gentleman's secretary; she was to take her place! Maybe—there was a chance—she might get an opportunity, if Smithson had already given Mr. Spear the news, to plead Bob's cause with him.

Betty had recently seen a movie, in which the heroine had made the hero a great success in Wall Street by means—so far as the picture made clear—of her wide eyes and dazzling smile. Betty entered the office of Mr. Spear as the cinema lady had entered the den of the Wall Street wolf. But Mr. Spear's first words were a rude jolt to her histrionism. They were:

"Uh! Here you are at last! Well, take this telegram: 'Robert Adams, Crescent, California. You're an idiot. Come back before you lose your shirt.' Sign my name. Now take this letter. What's the matter? Say, are you going to be sick, too? Oh, Lord, Miss Fair ill, and now you! Here, here, this won't do!"

Whether it would or not, it did. Betty Burgess had fainted.

III.

PERHAPS "faint" isn't just the word to describe accurately what Betty did that Friday morning. True, a kind of dizziness came over her, and her notebook and pencil fell to the floor. But Mr. Spear, who, in his youth, had often known women to faint—it having been done then—considered it a simon-pure swoon.

He quite startled Betty, as she was coming to, by pressing to her lips a flask of aged brandy, which he ordinarily kept locked in his desk. Next, he dampened a clean handkerchief and pressed it solicitously to her brow—this having been the correct thing to do for fainting young ladies in the days of his youth.

His treatment was most effective; Betty's cure might have been described as instantaneous. She at once picked up her notebook and was ready for work. But that Mr. Spear would not permit. His prized secretary, Miss Fair, was ill. Now Miss Burgess, his second choice as stenographer, was on the verge of succumbing to the same stenographic epidemic. There was nothing for it but to send her home, before she, too, became seriously indisposed.

And when Betty rather violently opposed his suggestion, the old gentleman called his own car and commanded her — gallantly, but nevertheless with finality — to permit him to escort her home. And he did.

Mr. Spear had a way of winning confidence, as he also had a way of inspiring awe.

Betty found herself confiding deeply in him too late to halt; he threatened to send his own physician to see her, if she did not explain the cause of her momentary illness. Trying to think of a satisfactory explanation, she could hit on nothing but the truth. And, as is its habit, out it came —*kerplunk!*

Well, Mr. Spear returned to the office, and the telegram to Robert remained buried in Betty's notebook. And Mr. Spear fumed through the day, dictating letters—and spelling them—for a perfectly healthy stenographer he wished would faint.

Saturday morning was the busiest time in Mr. Spear's week, for in a few hours he had to hurry through a stack of mail, direct a conference of his executives, compare the week with previous weeks, make decisions for the future, and so on—all of which he did with one eye on his golf clubs and half his mind on the fairway.

This Saturday morning was particularly exasperating. Everything went wrong. At the conference of executives Smithson was especially annoying. Spear hadn't noticed it before, but now he saw that the man was gross. He had thought of him as a fine, big fellow, genial, pleasant, likable. Today he felt a peculiar dislike for him. He ought to play golf, ought to take off some of that useless weight.

The sales manager predicted a shortage of certain products, and wanted Smithson's opinion. The latter smiled amiably.

"Well, what about it?" snapped Spear. "Why haven't we bought? There's every reason to believe the prices are rising, and—"

"Oh, just temporarily, just temporari-

ly!" smiled Smithson. "They'll come down again; and then we'll buy."

"And if they don't? We've orders to fill. It's better to pay a little more, within reason, of course, if our volume of sales is great enough to make it pay." Mr. Spear's voice rose; it was the tone that inspired awe. "I want to see more coöperation between the purchasing and sales departments. There's no room for selfish or complacent individualism in this organization. In fact, I've been thinking" — he hadn't really thought of it until this moment, but it sounded like the expression of a mature conviction—"I've been thinking of making every salesman a buyer, and *vice versa,* so every man Jack of you will really understand this business!"

Smithson laughed, amiably enough, it is true, but his laughter annoyed Mr. Spear. He became more wrathy. He raised a long and impressive finger.

"Another thing I want to see!" he said. "I want to see more loyalty between employees. I'm loyal to everybody that works for me; I'll stick by 'em through a lot. I expect them to be loyal to me, to the company. But I know this: nobody can be square with the company that isn't square with the boys in his department. I don't want any tattle-tales or any back-biters currying my favor, for they won't get it!"

He rose and stormed out of the room, leaving the conference to discuss his suggestions and his unusual ill-humor.

For the rest of the morning Mr. Spear struggled to instruct his healthy stenographer in the art of spelling. At last, determined to put the day's problems out of his mind, he took up his bag of golf clubs. As he did so, the door of his office opened, and he turned, with a frown that meant "I can bear no more," to be reminded of the existence of Robert Adams by that young man's presence.

Robert had not yet lost his shirt, despite Mr. Spear's ill-natured prediction. but it did appear that he had lost his goat.

"Well, young man?" Mr. Spear had not relinquished his hopeful hold on the golf clubs.

"Well — I'm back," Robert informed him, unnecessarily. "Had a great vacation, and all that." His tone was as lifeless as an undertaker's. He was, indeed, a lugubrious lad. He had come directly to Mr. Spear's office; he couldn't bear, just now, to see Betty.

"Yes, I'm back," he repeated. "And I won't be pestering you any more for a buyer's job"—it was a very small "b" now—"because I guess I'm not cut out for that sort of thing. And I've made an awful mess of things, Mr. Spear; I'm about as resourceful as a baby."

"Well, some babies I've known were uncommonly resourceful," observed Spear, letting go of the golf clubs and sitting down. "What happened?"

"I started out all right," said Bob. "I was doing well with the collections, better than I had expected. Here's about three thousand dollars in checks that I gathered in; besides, there was nearly seven hundred in cash. There was, but there isn't now.

"I was going to send it from Crescent. On the way I was held up and robbed. I did not report it because I thought I could be resourceful enough to make it up somehow without letting you know how foolish I'd been. I figured I might be able to sell the Northern Stores Company a big enough order to make it up in commissions. Well, I didn't. I guess I'm pretty rotten as a salesman, but I'm worse as a buyer!"

Mr. Spear made no comment. Bob drew a long breath, and went on.

"Of course, I reported the robbery to the sheriff at Crescent, and he promised to investigate it. But he didn't locate the thief, and I guess he won't; the man took only cash, and he looked like a native. I don't think they'll find him; they never do. Well, I'll pay back what I lost—if you'll let me take the old job back.

"If I hadn't been such a complete idiot, I might have sold the Northern Stores people. But I am an idiot. I fell hard for a put-up job that some other salesmen framed for me. They wanted to get me out of the way, so I wouldn't see the Northern Stores general manager. I had all his department heads ready to buy, and was waiting for him. They — the hard-boiled salesmen—

made me believe he wouldn't be in Crescent at all, that I could see him at Red Bluff on the way down. And one of 'em told me a pitiful tale about a rancher out in the country near Crescent—a man with a sick wife and child and no money. He made me feel sorry for the rancher, and he told me the fellow had a lot of peaches for sale. I remembered what you said about buying peaches, and went out to see him.

"Well, the poor devil was up against it, all right, and I forgot everything Smithson ever said about hammering down prices. I pitied him—you would have, too, if you could have seen him, and his wife, and the fight they were making. Several buyers had tried to sting him—one of our men among them; they knew what he was up against, and were waiting until he had to sell, at any price. What they offered him wouldn't have paid for a tenth of his work. He was bitter against the whole fruit industry; at first he wouldn't talk to me at all.

"That's the way the farmers are getting, too, everywhere! Well, when I saw what he had been through—and saw that the buyers were a pack of wolves waiting for him to weaken—it got me. I offered him a fair price, and he took it. I suppose Smithson and you will say I was crazy, that we might have waited until his wife was dying and bought for next to nothing. I guess I'm no good as a buyer."

"And the Northern Stores manager?"

"I missed him, of course. When I got to Red Bluff, he had gone to Crescent, as they knew he would. So I guess somebody else sold them. I lost out there, and I paid a good deal more for the peaches than was necessary."

Mr. Spear did not speak for several moments.

"I'm sorry," he said then, "that you have had such luck, and weren't resourceful enough to turn a failure into a success. I had hoped that you would take advantage of the opportunity I gave you. By the way, did you tell your poor rancher about being held up?"

"Why—yes, I believe I did tell him. Why?"

"I received a curious letter this morning," said Mr. Spear. "Let me see. Yes, here it is."

The letter was no more than an illiterate, anonymous, penciled scrawl. It read: "Made a mistake when I stuck up that young Adams feller. He's a square shooter. Give him this."

"Did he send the money?" cried Bob.

"Yes, here it is. Do you suppose there's any connection between your poor rancher and your bold bandit? Shall we swear out a warrant against him?" There was a lively gleam in Spear's eyes.

"No, no! I couldn't identify him!" Bob exclaimed. But now he remembered that both of the men—rancher and bandit—had been tall and awkward looking. The bandit had worn a beard; the rancher was smooth shaven. Still, razors—

Spear cut into his reflections.

"Also," he said, "we received a fair-sized order this morning from the Northern Stores Company. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you're not exceptionally bad as a salesman—or a buyer. In fact, you can have that buyer's job at once—if you want it."

"Want it? Good Lord, I—" Bob seized his hand, and, suddenly, turned to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To see Betty—Miss Burgess, I mean," Bob shouted. "I want her to hear you say that!"

"Miss Burgess is at home, ill!" Mr. Spear informed him.

"Ill? Seriously ill?"

"No, I'm not!" said a gay, lilting voice from the doorway. "I'm right here, and I did hear what he said, Bob!"

"Betty!"

Mr. Spear glanced at his watch, and again took up his golf clubs.

"H-m! Not enough time for nine holes, even. Business, business, all the time. And when it isn't business, it's love! H-m!"

His tone was the awe-inspiring one, but he was smiling as he closed the door. The others didn't know, for many minutes, that he had gone.

THE END

S. O. S.

IT'S Larsen an' me on the wheel-spokes,
An' Larsen, he's six-foot-two,
An' *I* ain't no shrimp, when you come to that,
But we both got enough to do!

Fer the wind, it's a howlin' terror,
The sea is a bilin' hell,
The needle goes spinnin' around the card
Like a blessid ol' carrousel.

Mate's dead asleep in his oilskins,
Th' Ol' Man swings to the rail,
A-smellin' our road through the smother,
Into the teeth o' the gale.

Fer an S. O. S. from nor'ard
Has called us back to th' storm,
An' they ain't no rest an' they ain't no meals,
But the coffee it keeps us warm—

Warmer, that is, 'n *them others*,
A-waitin' in sore distress
(Their hands froze blue to th' riggin'),
Fer help from their S. O. S.

Fifty to one if they're livin',
A hundred, they'll never be found;
Fer they likely broke up when th'r wireless quit—
Hammered to splinters 'n' drowned!

But the Ol' Man says he'll find 'em,
An' we'll play to the end of his game
(Thirty-five years a master,
An' the winds they knows him by name!),

She lifts, with her forefoot drippin',
She falls like the Crack o' Doom,
A-splittin' the sea like Moses,
An' the foam biles over the boom!

Port! An' you're movin' a mountain!
Starb'd! You stand on y'r head!
But some way or other we'll jam her through—
Fer *that's* what the Ol' Man said.

We'll follow the Ol' Man's orders
(We *can't* go farther 'n hell!)
An' we'll lay the ol' hooker along their beam,
Er they won't be none to tell!

Austin Tarrant.

The Snow Patrol

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Out of the Silent North," "Smoke of the .45," etc.

CHAPTER XXI (*Continued*).

"YOU ARE SAFE!"

THE Gulf narrows to the mouth of the Coppermine at MacLeod. I knew I had but to go on to reach the post eventually. I could hardly miss it, and yet, I was within fifty yards of the cabin before I realized that I had reached the river. It was late—midnight at least—but a light burned faintly in the cabin window.

A light at that time of night could augur only something evil—sickness, death, crime! I left the team and floundered to the door. I wondered what I would find on the other side of it. I told myself that I was prepared for anything; but one never is, of course.

Ledoux's voice reached me. He was singing — singing "*A la claire fontaine.*" I have heard that romantic *chanson* sung many times, and in circumstances as far apart as the poles, but never have I heard it on the lips of a French-Canadian peasant without its reaching my heart; and only those who have heard it sung as I have can appreciate the amazement that was mine.

Ledoux's great voice seemed softened—even tender. His was the tone one uses at night to a troubled child.

The snow was whirling about me madly. Pushing the door open, I stepped inside. The picture that met my eyes passed belief.

Here was no strife, no turmoil, no sign of crime or evil.

Sheila was in my bed, her eyes closed. Beside her, his head nodding, half asleep, sat Ledoux, singing his song to her. He held her hand lightly in his, as though to assure her he was there watching over her.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 4.

I glanced from him to Sheila. Her face looked unusually white against the pillow. The faintest of pinks tinged her slightly parted lips.

Ledoux opened his eyes the next instant and stared at me with surprise and frank hostility. His eyes lost some of their baleful glare as he recognized me. He put his fingers to his lips, cautioning me to be silent.

His manner filled me with fear.

"Is she sick?" I demanded tensely.

He shook his head and got up and led the way to the kitchen. When he had closed the door he said:

"A good rest is all she need; she do too much. When the snow begin, she break down all at once. She sure you get los'. She say it her fault you go."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"And you're all right again?" I asked.

"Pretty good," he answered laconically, shrugging his shoulders.

"You came back sooner than I thought you would," I said to him. "You were a sick man when I left."

He laughed mirthlessly.

"I tol' you I was a strong man," he muttered, busy with the fire.

"I'm a little bit surprised to see you still here," I admitted frankly. "I'll not forget what you have done when we go south."

"We never go south, Deveraux," he answered without hesitation. "If you ever tak' me, you tak' a dead man."

The suddenness of this made me raise my eyes searchingly. I felt that his answer had been ready and waiting for me long before it had been voiced.

"You seem pretty certain of that," I said. "What makes you so sure?"

He grunted without looking up. It was his only answer. He reached for his coat and put it on as I brushed the snow off my clothes.

"You didn't find him, eh?" he asked without warning.

His eyes were on me now, and I felt his close scrutiny.

"No, I didn't," I replied slowly. "I didn't find a sign."

"Humph!" His tone was skeptical, even contemptuous. He paused for a moment and then asked pointedly:

"How far you go?"

I told him where I had been. He shook his head thoughtfully.

"I guess he is dead all right?" he hazarded.

I recognized the fact that he put the observation as a question.

"I—I'm afraid he is," I answered; "I hate to tell her."

I started to turn away, but Ledoux's impudent grin stopped me short. "What is it?" I snapped, thoroughly irritated.

"Oh, not'ing — not'ing," he exclaimed, raising his hand impatiently, and with a sly, mocking laugh he walked to the door.

"What's so damn funny about it?" I exclaimed angrily.

"Oh, not'ing — jes' pretty fonny t'ing, dat's all."

Infuriated, I went up to him and grabbed his arm.

"See here, Ledoux, if you've got anything to say to me, say it! What are you driving at?"

He wheeled on me of a sudden and stood searching my eyes. He chuckled to himself at last. I was aware all at once that I understood perfectly the thing he was intimating. I felt my cheeks burning. I didn't want to hear what he was about to say. I wanted to stop him, but I was helpless.

"Ev'ryt'ing works out pretty good for you, eh?" he muttered. "Me, I steal her away from Simpson. I don' know she is got husban'—course dat mak' no difference —but husban' go look for me and now he is dead. You love her, and now you get her. Huh! Mebbe white man call that luck; Eskimo call it somet'ing else. Mebbe I'm jus' savage beas' lak you say; but it seem lak pretty fonny t'ing to me."

"Good God!" I cried, "do you mean that I didn't try to find him?"

"Well," with an exasperating shrug, "I guess you look, all right—"

"What is it then? If you had gone I suppose there'd be a different story to tell!"

"No-o-o! Mebbe not. Of course I'm pretty good man on the trail; I find him if anybody find him. He can be dead, meb-

be he is; but she is damn fonny how ev'ry-t'ing work out right for you. Huh! Well, you get somet'ing to eat; I put up the team."

He was gone, then, and I was left alone with his taunting, insinuating words ringing in my ears. What an interpretation to make! I wanted to rush out and beat the life from his leering face.

I ran to the door and flung it open and called to him to come back, and as I stood there, waiting for him to answer, Sheila tottered into the kitchen.

"Deveraux!" she cried, "it is you; you are safe!"

There it was—her first thought of me and not of the man for whom I had searched. Ledoux's laugh came back to mock me. The grinning devil! Had he foreseen this moment and with fiendish cunning deliberately poisoned it for me? And the world—would it believe what he inferred?

How could it? It was a lie—a cowardly, contemptible lie! And yet I stood there peculiarly embarrassed, struggling for words, my conscience clear, but unable to throw off the memory of Ledoux's accusing eyes. My voice trembled as I murmured awkwardly:

"Yes, I got in all right."

CHAPTER XXII.

OUT OF THE STORM.

WE stood facing each other without speaking as the seconds slipped by. I knew she was waiting for me to tell her what I had found. The desire for speech was great in me, but the words would not come to my tongue. Her grave, inquiring eyes searched mine as though she would learn the result of my trip even though no word passed my lips.

I saw her sway suddenly and reach out to catch the door for support.

"I shouldn't have kept you standing here." I exclaimed, berating myself for my stupidity. "You're worn out; I can see how tired you are. Come—take my arm and let me help you back to bed."

She shook her head so determinedly that I stopped before her with arms outstretched, realizing the folly of trying to persuade her.

"No need for me to ask," she murmured then. "Your manner is answer enough: you didn't find him."

"No, I didn't," I answered, glad that she misunderstood my perturbation. "I covered a lot of ground, too. I didn't spare the dogs nor myself. I didn't find a sign—not a trace of him."

"Not a sign—gone!" she gasped, her voice choking her. "This terrible country—oh dear God—"

For a moment I thought she was going to faint.

"It's not so hopeless as all that," I hastened to say.

"Oh, no, Deveraux. It *is* hopeless. Please don't try to deceive me. I know you are hoping only to soften the truth. Crosbie's gone." She covered her face with her hands despairingly. "**It's** my fault," she exclaimed; "I am to blame; I know it! If I had only been frank with you from the first! I never should have come here."

"Please don't say that," I begged; "you are not to blame for what has happened."

"Oh, but I am, I am—you don't understand, Deveraux. When he didn't come in the first day, I should have gone out after him."

"You don't know what you are saying," I pleaded. "You couldn't have gone. Muir was strong, wise. Surely you don't believe you could have succeeded where he failed? The three of us were helpless here for days. We have no cause to reproach ourselves; least of all, you."

A sob shook her, and, in spite of her obvious effort to restrain herself, tears filled her eyes. I don't know what I had expected her to do, if not this; and yet, to hear her crying softly, her back half turned to me, as though she would exclude me from this moment, stabbed me to the heart.

I had always deferred to her wishes, in one way or another, but I realized that I must assert myself now; that I must not let her stand there, overwrought as she was, the cabin far from warm and she clad only in a night dress and a robe of some flimsy material she had found in Simpson's stock.

"Come, Sheila," I declared emphatically, "you can't stand here like this; it's time you gave a thought to yourself." And half carrying her, I succeeded in getting her back to bed.

I sat down beside her, in the chair Ledoux had occupied, and closed my eyes. I found nothing to say. Indeed, there was little that I could have said. Tears at such moments bring relief to some, but only to those who give way entirely to their emotions, and Sheila was not doing that. I sensed the check she had put on herself.

"Maybe you would like to be alone," I said to her, getting to my feet.

"Don't go," she murmured. "I feel that I must confide in you; you were closer to Crosbie than any one I know, and yet you do not understand what happened here at MacLeod."

"Don't think that you owe me an explanation," I insisted.

"But I do! I owe it to him, too; he was not 'wanted,' as you think. Simpson came here as my agent. I sent him here to bring Crosbie back to New York."

I stared at her with mouth open.

"He was innocent—and yet you sent a detective here to get him?" The words fairly tumbled from my lips in my surprise. I could not believe that I had been so badly mistaken.

Sheila was silent for a minute. She shook her head slowly at last. "He was not innocent," said she. "He made a very foolish mistake—he took money that did not belong to him." She paused for a moment as though she found it hard to go on. "I wonder if you have ever heard of Samuel Dryden, the banker?" she asked then.

"Why, yes, I have," I answered. In a vague way I knew that S. S. Dryden was one of the "big" men down town in New York.

"He is my father: I am Sheila Dryden, or rather I was until I married Crosbie Carden."

That his name was Carden and not Muir surprised me very little. If it did anything, it convinced me that I had been right in surmising that the paper he had tossed into the fire that night had held the secret of his identity. I had felt right along that his "mistake" had been concerned, in some way, with money. Why, I cannot say, no more than most of us can tell why we form such definite opinions about the innocence or guilt of men only from seeing their pictures in the daily papers.

Sheila went on, presently, and at first I was at a loss to understand the significance of what she was saying.

"A man and a woman can't be happy unless they have many interests in common. Girls never think of that—I guess men don't either. Surely, mothers never do. I married Crosbie Carden to please mine. It didn't take me long to find out that the things I was interested in meant little to him. Selfishly, I kept it from mattering very much. I guess he came to feel the same way about it. I made it easy for another woman to take my place in his life. If I hadn't failed him, we'd have got along after a fashion. Those years of senseless drifting! I've never forgiven myself for them. Once I did try to be a real wife to him, but I'd lost my chance. I was at Daytona when I first heard his name coupled with another woman's—a notoriously beautiful dancer.

"I was hurt, of course, but, although you may not understand me, I was not angry with him. I felt that I was to blame, in part. I didn't return to New York at once, I felt that I couldn't. Father called me back, and when I got home it was to find that Carden and Company had failed—for a staggering figure. Crosbie was gone; he must have realized that the truth could not be concealed for long. Several days later they found that he had forged father's name in order to negotiate some worthless paper."

Sheila paused to put her hand on mine impulsively.

"You see, Deveraux," she said earnestly, "he was not bad; just weak. There was no need of his doing what he had done. We had never spoken about money; I always believed he was very successful. If he had only told me the truth we could have saved, and my father would have stood by him, too. In fact, he did take up every note Crosbie left."

"And you never heard from him?" I asked wonderingly.

"Yes. Weeks later I received a letter from him; he was truly sorry. I think I came nearer to loving him then than I ever had. I've employed detectives for years, trying to locate him. Simpson found him. The news reached me in August. I couldn't wait until next May to see him, so I came north. I didn't realize what I was undertaking or how great a mistake I was committing."

I could not bear to hear her go on accusing herself. Certainly she was blameless. I knew of no woman who would have dared what she had done in venturing into the Arctic. Her sense of duty commanded my respect, but I could not help feeling that it was more than Quixotic. She had not failed him; he had been the weak one.

I told her that, and begged her to believe me.

"It's no use, Deveraux," she murmured patiently. "It was foolhardy of me to dare the north. If I had not come he would be alive now."

"We cannot be certain that he isn't. He may be at Melville Sound. I'll take Ledoux and make the trip."

"But the snow will not be fit for traveling for days. If he had gone to the Eskimo camp he would have returned long before this. I am sure we shall never see him again."

I didn't have the heart to awaken hope in her again, feeling so certain that he was dead. Simpson's conduct was still a mystery to me. Subconsciously I had been trying to imagine just what had caused Muir—or Carden, if you choose—to threaten his life. The enmity between them had been marked from the start. I knew that Muir believed he was "wanted." That could mean only that Simpson had not told him the truth.

I asked Sheila if she could recall just when she had received the letter from him.

"Late in August, I can't name the date."

"That's near enough. If you received it, say, the last week in the month, it must have been mailed about the first. Just what reason did Simpson give for saying that he could not return until spring?"

"The weather. He said it would be too dangerous to attempt the trip then.

"The weather?" I queried skeptically. "I suppose you realize now, as well as I, that he was lying?"

"Of course I do," she exclaimed, "now that you mention it; but why do you ask?"

"I am trying to understand what went on here before you came. I believe Simpson would have stooped to anything. I feel that he double-crossed some one, maybe both of you. Had you promised him a reward?"

Sheila caught her breath sharply at my question.

"Why, yes," she said; "he asked for it in his letter. He said he would need it to carry him over the winter here."

I began to see light.

"I think I see through his pretty little game," I declared; "Simpson was taking money from both of you."

"But how could he have done that?"

"Well, Carden had no reason to suppose that he was not wanted. If Simpson led him to believe that he had come to get him, why the answer is not hard to imagine. This thought occurred to me days ago, not in this connection, of course. If Simpson had been playing square he would have come here with credentials from the department. He didn't come that way. I am morally certain that he extorted money from Muir. I think it would be just as well if we continued to call him that; there's no need of sharing our confidence with Ledoux."

Sheila signified her acquiescence to this.

"If this is true," she murmured slowly, "I am almost glad that Ledoux killed him."

"I share your feeling," I admitted. "If you had sent Simpson the reward he would have stayed on here until spring, bleeding Muir of every cent he possessed. He would have left then, but he would have gone alone. I don't think there is a doubt of this left in my mind."

"I hope you are mistaken. It would only add to my burden."

"No, Sheila," I cried, "you must not say that. You are not to blame. If Simpson failed you it was not your fault. Your

motives were the highest. At this time it is impossible for me to say the things I want to say. You must realize that I am yours to command; that I will do anything for you. I want you to get your strength back. I realize that you can't stay here for months. In some way I will get you out. I know you have received a blow—a terrible one; but even though I am willing to do anything I can to soften it for you, and to console you, I can't let you go on accusing yourself of things that were beyond your power to prevent or see. I'm not a religious man, and I would not presume to understand God's mysteries. We must take life as we find it, and life doesn't end here in this lonely cabin. We've got to go on."

Ledoux slipped in without warning just as I finished speaking. I had raised my voice unconsciously in my earnestness, and it hung on now as if intent on delivering me to him again.

The amazement which suddenly blazed in Sheila's eyes brought me to my feet with a jerk. I looked at Ledoux. His face was white. We never thought of bolting the door, but as I watched, he dropped the bar into place. He looked for all the world like a man who had just seen a ghost. Without a word he started for the kitchen.

"Why bother to bolt the door?" I asked.

He ignored my question, and as if to cover the fact, he said over his shoulder:

"The storm is over; the win' is shifting."

There was nothing in this innocent remark to explain the fear that was in his eyes, or the whiteness of his face; but that was all he said. As Sheila and I stared in his direction the kitchen door banged shut behind him. Dumbly we turned from him to face each other.

"Something's up," I whispered; "he's seen something that has scared the life out of him."

I had not stopped to think how Sheila might interpret my remark, but as she suddenly sat up, her fists tightly clenched and her eyes a trifle wild, I divined her thought.

"Crosbie?" she gasped. "Do you suppose he has found him?"

"I don't know. It could hardly have been that, though."

I went to the window and peered out, but it was still snowing, and the night was dark. The moment had a weird drag for me. That feeling of impending danger, which had gripped me as I crossed the ice, returned to me now. A shiver ran up and down my back. When a log creaked I whirled, ready to meet—I don't know what.

I knew well enough that I had unwittingly communicated my feeling of alarm to Sheila. I was reluctant to face her for the moment. I stood at the window sparring for time, intent on pulling myself together.

It grew unnaturally still in the cabin—that stillness which one feels, as though it were a tangible thing. Out of that sepulchral stillness something thudded against the door.

Rap—rap—rap!

A human hand rapping for admission!

Icy fingers clutched my heart. I glanced at Sheila. She was half out of bed, her eyes on the door—wide, staring!

"Wait!" I exclaimed. "Don't let yourself go like this, Sheila. I'll open the door."

She groaned as she sank back upon the bed.

That ghostly rapping began again as I hesitated. I leaped for the door and unbolted and flung it back with all my strength.

"What do you want?" I shouted. "Who are you?"

Into the room there stalked a squat figure, wrapped in snow, eyes alight with a strange fire.

I fell back.

"My God!" I groaned in surprise and relief. "You—"

It was Wageesh, Ledoux's Eskimo woman!

Her flaming eyes did not tarry on me, nor on Sheila, but searched out every nook and cranny of the room. I had never thought her dignified or majestic, but there was that in her bearing now that compelled the thought.

No wonder Ledoux's face had blanched; he knew, and I knew, why she had come!

She walked around the room, her feet making no sound as they slipped over the planks. She tried the kitchen door; it was locked. Like an avenging Nemesis she

turned to us and, in a voice that seemed to come from the grave, said:

"I want Ledoux! My people have come for him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WITH HANDS TIED.

MY first feeling of astonishment gave way to one of admiration for the primitive, half savage woman who confronted us. Once again I caught myself asking why the world in general looks upon the Eskimo as a stolid, even placid people. They are not, of course. They are vindictive, revengeful; and they are seldom turned from their purpose.

Wageesh had certainly walked that great distance to Melville Sound. I could appreciate the effort it entailed. Here she was now, demanding Ledoux, and I knew well enough that she would not be easily dissuaded. If her people were worked up about Ledoux, and resorted to violence, as they well might, we would find ourselves in a pretty fix.

I had heard a thing or two about Eskimo vengeance—tales that we handed back and forth in the north. They were not pretty stories, either. The wrongs Wageesh had suffered at Ledoux's hands were enough to arouse any savage people to fanaticism. Experience told me that to deliver him into their hands was to condemn him to a cruel and lingering death.

Obviously I could not do that. Ledoux was my prisoner. He had broken the white man's law, and he must pay as the white man dictated. I knew such an argument would be wasted on the Arctic air; and yet it was the very thought I had to remember. Looking ahead, I could see the issue clearly defined—tribal law against the law which I represented.

We had never been more than a handful in the Arctic. What prestige and power we held had not been gained by force. We had succeeded because we had appealed to primitive imaginations. The red coat had become a symbol of government and law and justice.

The Mounted had never given ground. What there was of empire in the north, we had established and held together. I found myself suddenly thrilling to the small part I had played in the undertaking. I wondered if I had not stumbled upon the thing that had kept me in the service so long.

I promised myself that I would not fail those others, who had fought the good fight with me, that I would not let any feeling of personal danger, or danger to her, whom I loved so dearly, defeat me.

"Where are your people, Wageesh?" I asked.

"Outside on the barren, mebbe half a mile."

"They are camped there?"

"They make camp now. We just come."

Evidently Ledoux's ears had caught the stir of their arrival and had sent him rushing back to the cabin to bar the door.

Apparently we were in for it. I turned to Sheila with as brave a face as I could muster.

"We can't let them have Ledoux," I said. "You must understand why."

"They will kill him. We can't give him up. I understand that perfectly."

I was glad she felt as I did about it. Wageesh understood what we said. As determined as ever, she exclaimed again:

"I want Ledoux!"

"I'm sorry," I told her, "but you can't have him. He has broken the white man's law. He is a prisoner. He stays here until the time comes when he goes south to Chippewyan with me."

"White man's law?'" she retorted sullenly. "My people make the law here long before the white man come. My people will do whatever I say. They have not come here to harm Ledoux. I asked them to come. You cannot take Ledoux to jail. I want him; I have forgiven him. He is safe with us."

I could not believe my ears. Sheila was no less astonished. "You mean that you want to take him back, to let him kick you and beat you again?"

Wageesh smiled sadly and shook her head.

"Better he beat me," she muttered, "than that he be here and I out there alone. I have been a wife to him. I have

borne his children. I want him. He is my man, just as this man here is your man!"

"No, no!" Sheila gasped, her face crimson, "you must not say such things. Please—"

Wageesh turned to me imploringly, now.

"It's no use," I warned her; "you can't have him. Even though I were convinced that you meant him no harm, my answer would be the same."

"Mebbe you change your mind to-morrow. At least you let me see him, eh? You let me speak to him alone, just for a minute?"

I shook my head. Back to me there came the picture of her armed with my knife that day at the old seal camp. A minute would be all she would need to work her revenge.

"What harm can that work?" Sheila surprised me by asking. "What she says is true; she has been a wife to Ledoux."

Wageesh raised her hands above her head.

"Search me!" she exclaimed. "I am unarmed. Tie my hands if you must; but let me speak to him!"

She looked to Sheila appealingly, and, unconsciously, I looked to her, too, as if asking her to decide the question. Wageesh had done Sheila a great service in helping her to escape from Ledoux when he had first brought her to Cape Nelson. I thought of that now and wondered if that was why Sheila seemed disposed to side with her. The next second she proved that it was.

"Don't forget," I said, when she had finished recalling the incident and stating her debt to the woman, "that it was only her own selfish interests that she was thinking of in getting you out of Ledoux's hands. She knew how slim the chances were of your getting through the storm."

"Perhaps so; but life is continuously asking us to be magnanimous to others. Now I am disposed to obey that impulse. If Ledoux were in prison she would be permitted to see him."

"Under certain conditions, yes. I'm going to put this matter in your hands; I'll do as you wish. But—I want you to search her. I'll tie her hands."

A grin spread over Wageesh's flat face. She held her hands out in back of her for me to bind them. I took down a length of rope, which hung in back of the door, and bound them securely. She rewarded me with a smile in which I thought I detected cunning of a high order. It caused me to ask Sheila if she had searched carefully for a hidden knife.

"She is not armed. I am sure of it."

"All right," I answered, and going to the kitchen door I called to Ledoux.

He replied with a grunt.

"You've heard what we said?" I asked.

"I hear, you bet!"

"Well, unlock the door; we are going to let Wageesh speak to you."

"Oh, no, I don' open the door!" he exclaimed. "I can hear what she's got to say where she is; let her talk if she wants to talk."

His voice was strained. I could picture him cowering on the other side of the door. The moment was a delicious one for me. I could not refrain from taunting him.

"Strong man," I mocked; "you are the strong man, eh? God! Don't be a fool. Hear what she's got to say. It may mean your life and ours, too. Open up!"

Wageesh said something to him in dialect. A minute or two later I heard Ledoux unbar the door. He opened it wide and backed away. His eyes were haggard-looking.

I don't know what it was that Wageesh had said to him. It certainly had had an immediate effect on him, but the fact that he had caught up the heavy poker and held it now as a weapon with which to protect himself, said plainly enough that he was far from convinced that her intentions were peaceful.

Wageesh did not hesitate. She brushed past me and went up to him with measured tread. The glance which they exchanged was shrewd and wary. Neither of them made any attempt to close the door, so I stood there, seeing, but unable to hear what they said.

Wageesh had her back to me, but her eloquence and earnestness were unescapable. Time after time Ledoux shook his head, as if he were refusing her request.

It was a strange scene which they enacted, the woman pleading and the man aloof and scornful.

Wageesh turned and darted a glance at me without warning. She put her lips up to Ledoux's ears then and whispered a word or two to him.

Years have passed since that unforgettable night wrote its story in my mind. Then, I did not know what those cryptic words of hers were. I know now. The change in Ledoux was instantaneous. His shoulders went back. A cold, leering grin creased his lips. He actually laughed as he turned his sneering, contemptuous eyes on me. He pushed Wageesh out of his way with a great sweep of his hand and came up to me. Beside himself, he cried:

"I t'ought it was pretty fonny how t'ings come out so well for you. *Mon Dieu!* Now we see who is the liar, the thief, and the cheat!" And he cursed me in his patois.

I was stunned. I didn't know how to answer him. I couldn't imagine what I had done to bring this denunciation down on me.

How could I know that Wageesh, with fiendish cunning, was playing us off against each other, that even then we were hopelessly caught in her trap; that her one purpose, I was sure, was to get Ledoux out of our hands?"

And how was I know the fateful import of the words which Wageesh had whispered in Ledoux's ears?

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHEILA DECIDES.

I WAS past losing my temper with Ledoux. I resorted to his tactics and laughed back at him. It infuriated him. He raised his hand to strike me, but Wageesh deflected it by raising her bound arms.

"Go on," I encouraged him, "don't be bashful. If you've got anything on me, now is the time to tell it!"

I believe he would have blurted out his secret if Wageesh had not interfered.

"Forget what he says; his mouth always run away with him." She turned upon Ledoux and lashed him with her tongue.

"You think that is the way to ask a favor?" she exclaimed angrily. "This man is not bad man; he do what he think is right. You talk like that he not let you come with me."

"Oh," I smiled, "have no fear of that; he won't go with you, Wageesh. He stays here."

"But he wants to go," she insisted. "You ask him."

"So you want to go, eh, Ledoux?" I queried lightly.

"Yes, I go with her," he answered sullenly.

"I'm surprised," I admitted, "but that's all; you stay right here with me."

"But mebbe you change your mind," pleaded Wageesh. "I don't say he *must* come. No! Nor do I say we take him if you refuse me. I beg you, please, let him come with me; he is my man."

The diplomacy with which she made her demand was not lost on me. I could appreciate it for what it was worth, but my decision remained unchanged.

"If you let me go, I come back nex' spring," Ledoux promised.

"I may not wait for spring. In three or four weeks, if the weather breaks right, I'm going to take a chance on getting out. I'll need you. I'm willing to admit, Ledoux, that you are a good man on the trail. There isn't a better one in the north. The help you give will go a long way toward softening what you get. It will be a chance for you."

He was frankly taken back by this, and yet it appealed to the gambler in him, for he knew what the odds against our getting out were.

"I come back, then, next month," he declared.

"You might change your mind," said I, turning away, shaking my head. "Your word doesn't mean a thing to me."

"But he cannot run away," Wageesh exclaimed. "You can find him when you want him. I promise you *I* bring him back to you."

It was idle to continue this. I walked away from them, refusing to listen further.

Wageesh did not follow me. She turned to Sheila, who had been a silent witness for the past few minutes, and asked if she could speak to her alone.

It was a surprising request. I felt that she was seeking only an opportunity to enlist Sheila's sympathy. No good could come from it, and it certainly would add to the weight Sheila was bearing so bravely. She hesitated as if sensing my thought. I was about to beg her not to consent when Wageesh said to her:

"I have news for you."

It was a clever bait. News could come about but one; his name formed on Sheila's lips. Regretfully I watched her lead Wageesh into the kitchen. Later I learned just what was said at that strange interview between white woman and savage. The door had no more than closed behind them when Wageesh began her impassioned plea.

"I said I had news for you, and I spoke the truth. It is news of one you never expected to hear from again."

I can imagine the effect of this on Sheila. She told me afterward that her very heart seemed to stop beating.

"Corporal Muir!" she remembered having gasped. "Is it of him that you speak?"

"It is of him," Wageesh answered tersely. "My people found him. He is in our camp now."

Thus armed, Wageesh could not fail to win her way. Looking back, I can see that her diabolical cunning was something to marvel at. Untutored and half savage she was, but she was wise with the wisdom of a race that is by nature sly and insidious.

"This man Deveraux is like snow in your hands; he will do what you ask him to do. So, I make a bargain with you! I want my man; if I get him, you get Muir."

Sheila thought of me.

"Why not tell Constable Deveraux that Corporal Muir is with your people?" she asked. "He is in charge here. He would not be deaf to such an appeal. You make a great mistake by not being frank with him. Let me call him and tell him the truth."

"No! He is a policeman; you forget that. I know them. They don't care for themselves—only for that red coat! You think he make bargain with me? Humph! Never! He has got to show Eskimo he is boss. White man is always think he is better than us. If he know we got Muir he say we must give him up. He come take him if he can. But you—if you ask him for me—ha!—he not refuse. He do what you say; he loves you—"

Sheila warned her to stop.

"If you go on like this I will not listen to you," she exclaimed. "You must not—"

Wageesh, sure of herself now, shrugged her shoulders.

"But what I say is true," she dared. "Will you ask him for me?"

"If I refuse, what then?"

"I make no promise," Wageesh replied craftily. "But you won't refuse. If Ledoux goes with me, I bring the white man to you to-morrow; if not, he stay with us!"

How could Sheila refuse her?

It was not necessary for her to tell me that she hesitated over her answer, or that she felt she was conniving against me. Trickery of any sort was foreign to her. She was ever unselfish. If she came to me now, pleading for Wageesh, it was only because she was human. In her place I would have done as she did.

Her voice trembled as she asked me to allow Ledoux to go. In my ignorance I quite misunderstood her excitement.

"He is a dangerous man," I told her. "I'm not judging him only by what you know of him, but on his record for ten years. He has always flirted with the edge of the law. If I let him go, no matter what the circumstances, Wageesh's people will interpret it but one way—that we had to give him up."

"But I am asking it as a favor to me," she replied. "I forgive Ledoux for all that he has done to me. As for Simpson—he really killed the man in self-defense. And we do owe him a great deal, even though you have always been reluctant to admit it. I know you feel that if we owe him anything it is because we made him serve us. But even though we took from him what we owe him, the debt is still a debt."

"You think he has paid, eh?" I questioned rather impatiently.

"Well, I'd hardly care to pass judgment on him, or on any one, for that matter. He is not all bad, of that I am certain. He was very kind to me while you were gone. Given a chance—"

"Given a chance he would perhaps crawl over the snow and pick me off with his rifle. You heard what he said to me only a minute or two ago. Common sense tells me that if I let him go, he will not come back. I'll have to go after him."

"He may, perhaps, surprise you," she murmured.

"I wish I shared your confidence in him," I answered skeptically, "for I am going to abide by your wishes. If I had only myself to think of, Ledoux would stay here. In my judgment it is a mistake to let him go; but I'm going to do as you ask, I hope to God it works out all right."

I called Ledoux over to us.

"I want you to hear, too, Wageesh," I said. She nodded her head ever so slightly and moved across the room in our direction. Ledoux was just behind her. I glanced from one to the other as they came toward us. The woman's eyes were as deep and inscrutable as ever, but Ledoux was patently well pleased with himself. I did not doubt but what his keen ears had overheard what I had said to Sheila.

Of course it wasn't that at all. I didn't know that he was already picturing me crushed, humiliated, my air castles crashing down on my head, or that even then he was gloating over the revenge which would be his to-morrow. Even less did I suspect that in consenting to go with Wageesh he knowingly put his head into a noose that he might strike me down.

"I'm going to let you go, Ledoux," I began, not realizing how completely my words convinced him that I had delivered myself into his hands. He rewarded me with a smile of utter contempt.

Wageesh started to thank me. I stopped her abruptly.

"Thank this lady, not me, if it pleases you to do so. It is because she wishes it that Ledoux goes with you." I glanced at him. "I want you to understand that, too," I went on. "I am not going to ask a single promise of you, but if you want to play square with me, let me hear from you every ten days or so."

To his credit, he laughed. I can appreciate now what a joke it must have been to him, my asking him to report to me every ten days, when he believed he would no sooner reach the camp than his punishment would commence.

Wageesh raised her eyes to his, and as I remember the look in them, I suspect that she came near to reading his thought.

"I have taken the responsibility for this on my shoulders, Ledoux," said Sheila. "I have faith in you. I—I hope you will not disappoint me."

The expression on his face changed as he looked at her. He shook his head regretfully.

"I guess you never forget your dog-man, huh? Me, I don' forget either." He raised his head and stared at me for a second. "An' you, Deveraux," he went on, "I sen' you a little token of my regard to-morrow. Jus' little souvenir from Ledoux."

Of course Sheila understood what he meant. She went to the door and opened it, that I might not notice her nervousness. The storm had passed. The Northern Lights were dancing in the heavens. Ledoux was ready to leave presently. Wageesh called her team. The dogs were buried in the snow where she had left them.

Ledoux got them straightened out. To my surprise, then, Wageesh got in the komatik and he mushed trail for her. I had often seen them in the past. In those days Ledoux had ridden and Wageesh had mushed. Charged as the moment was, I could not help smiling. I explained my amusement to Sheila.

"You evidently taught her a lesson," I said.

"Evidently," she murmured, pointing to the whip which Wageesh raised and cracked about Ledoux's ears.

We stood there until they were lost to sight. Even then Sheila seemed reluctant to go inside. I saw that her eyes were wet with tears.

"Oh, you brave, wonderful woman," I exclaimed, "I don't see how you are able to stand up as you do under all this. I'm almost glad Ledoux is gone. Perhaps now

you can get the rest and quiet you need. If Ledoux plays square, we'll try to get out of this place next month. I'll mix you a hot drink and see if it will not put you to sleep."

"I couldn't sleep to-night," she murmured unhappily. "My head is bursting." She took to pacing back and forth across the floor. I pitied her from the depths of my heart. She stopped short at last and closed her eyes.

"I can't keep this back any longer," she cried; "I've got to tell you the truth."

"The truth?" I gasped, pulled out of my chair.

"Forgive me, Deveraux. I hope you will try to understand what I have done." Her voice broke so that she could not go on for a moment. "I've been unfair to you—there was nothing else for me to do. Those people have found Crosbie. He's in their camp now."

"Muir! They've got Muir?" I almost shouted the words.

"Don't you understand? That was what Ledoux meant when he said he would send you a souvenir to-morrow. Wageesh is going to bring him to us in the morning. That is the bargain I made. She promised to give Crosbie to me if I got Ledoux for her."

I just stood and stared at her, unable to summon a word to my lips.

"Don't look at me like that," she begged. "It was a treacherous thing for me to do—you've been so kind—"

She threw herself down on the bed and sobbed. Bit by bit I re-arranged in my mind the happenings of the last hour. I realized how Wageesh had toyed with us. I was not angry with Sheila. Indeed, it was better that things had shaped themselves as they had, than that I had been appealed to directly. I would have found it almost impossible to refuse to let Ledoux go. As it was, my official face was saved in a way. Not that this was the important consideration. Muir's return dwarfed all else. I think I must have repeated his name at least a hundred times as I stood there.

No wonder Ledoux had laughed. He would have this to chuckle over for the rest of his days. What a grim jest fate makes of life!

Out of chaos there flashed on me the true understanding of the bitter words he had hurled at me when he came out of the kitchen—liar, cheat, thief! Perspiration broke on my forehead. I glanced at Sheila. I groaned at the thought that gripped me. God! Could she believe that I had not tried to find Muir; that I had reported him dead that I might advance my own cause with her? It couldn't be. Certainly she could not believe me so base.

I wanted to hear her say that she believed in me. I went to her and put my hand upon her shoulder.

"Sheila," I murmured, "you should not cry. I am not angry with you. There really was nothing better that you could have done. This news is a great shock, I know, even though it is good news. You must try to bear up under it."

She sat up as I stood beside her, but she turned her face away from me.

"Look at me, Sheila," I begged. "You know what Ledoux meant when he called me a cheat. Tell me, is there any thought in your mind that I didn't try to find Muir?"

A tender smile parted her lips as she shook her head. "Oh, it should not be necessary for you to ask me such a question," she murmured softly. "My faith in you is implicit. I know this news which we have received is good news. I should be glad—and I am; but a terrible feeling of loneliness is crushing me. If life had only been different—"

How alike her thought was to mine! If life had only been different! I couldn't trust myself to speak. The longer I stood there beside her the more afraid I became of myself. The words that trembled on my lips I dared not voice.

Sheila could not have realized the struggle that was going on within me. She seemed obsessed with her own thoughts. I got up at last and went to the window. I could see a fire burning out on the barrens. The sound of voices came to me faintly. Ledoux and Wageesh had surely reached the camp before now. I could not help wondering if he already had cause to re-

gret his bargain. Had Wageesh tricked him as she had me?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRAIL AHEAD.

I CANNOT remember having slept at all that night. I was at the window with the first light of day. The camp was just a blur against the whiteness of the snow.

Sheila raised a wan face and gazed at me questioningly.

"They'll not come for another hour," I said. "I'll get you a cup of coffee."

To my ears it seemed that everything I touched clattered and scraped noisily. The stillness of the cabin made me feel as though this was a household waiting for the judgment of God to be passed on it.

I fell to thinking about Ledoux. I knew he would lose no opportunity of speaking to Muir. I could imagine his tale—a word of truth here and there to give the whole structure a touch of sincerity, and then the venomous lies.

I stayed at the door as Sheila forced herself to sip the hot coffee. Out of the gray shadows, which still lingered over the barrens, a moving speck finally detached itself.

"Wageesh is coming," I muttered. "I'll go outside while you dress."

As the sled drew nearer I could see that Muir was not sitting up in it. Why he should be bound now was beyond me. Sheila asked this very question when she joined me.

"He may have met with an accident," she suggested.

"We'll know very soon," I answered. Wageesh was ahead of her team. She seemed to move sullenly. The oily smirk of yesterday was gone from her face.

Sheila could see that a blanket covered Muir.

"Why do you suppose she did that?" she asked.

"He must be a sick man," I argued patiently. "We know he must have been without food for days."

"Ask her to hurry, won't you?"

I called to Wageesh, but she did not change her pace. It was two or three minutes before she pulled her team to a standstill in front of us. Sheila ran toward her and pulled the blanket back.

"My God! he is white. He must be terribly sick."

Instinctively both of us looked to Wageesh for our answer. She shook her head slowly.

"No, my lady," she said slowly and with awful emphasis, "he is not sick. He is dead!"

As one we repeated that word:

"Dead?"

Trancelike we stood there, unable to move, our tongues thick in our throats. I looked up as Sheila groaned. She had her hands spread out to keep herself from falling.

"Dead!" she breathed.

I got down on my knees and touched Muir's face. It was as cold as ice. I was willing to wager that he had been dead for days. Wageesh had known this yesterday. She had come to us to barter a dead man's body for Ledoux. In a blinding rage I jumped up and grabbed her.

"You knew!" I cried. "You knew this yesterday!"

I sank my hands into her throat until her eyes began to roll. When I thought of how she had made Sheila suffer, in order to further her own devilish scheme, it was all I could do to keep from choking the life out of her right there.

"You'll kill her," she protested.

"I ought to! This is the way she rewards me for saving her life. Why didn't I let you die just as Ledoux had planned you should?"

I flung her from me and she sank down in the snow, rubbing her neck where my nails had bit into it.

"Tell me what happened!" I exclaimed, my voice shaking. "And lie now if you dare."

"His team run away," Wageesh grumbled. "My people find him dead in the snow 'bout halfway to the Sound."

"Knowing this, you were able to come here as you did yesterday?" Sheila whispered.

"I do anything to get Ledoux!" She was truculent again.

"Did he know the truth?" I demanded.

"No," she smiled, "I fool him, too. He get pretty big surprise. I guess he be good man at that when I get through with him."

"That part of it was no surprise to him," I flung back at her. "He went with you, knowing what he was doing. But he was cheated, at that. I begin to believe he got his lessons in cruelty and trickery from you."

Sheila had bent down over Muir's body. As she struggled to her feet, Wageesh put down a hand to help her, but she drew away from it as though its touch were poisonous.

"You hate me," the woman muttered, "but I do a great kindness to you: it is something to know that the dead *are* dead. You are young—and you are free now. When you look at this man, who does so much for you, I read your eyes. I know I do you no wrong. I bring you happiness—not to-day, or to-morrow, but—"

"Stop her, stop her!" Sheila cried aghast.

"That's enough!" I said. "We are not interested in what you think. You wait here."

She was not abashed a bit. She smiled her old, inscrutable smile as I led Sheila indoors. I came out immediately and told Wageesh to drive over to the post. There the two of us carried the body inside. Later it would have to be placed beside Simpson, and with hardly more ceremony than he had won.

I told Wageesh she could go. She started away without a word. Fifty yards from me she stopped and called back:

"I send Ledoux to you when my people think you got a chance to go. They know better than white man."

I didn't answer, and she didn't wait for me to do so. She was far away by the time I reached the cabin. I sat down on the doorstep, loath to enter.

I thought of Muir, as I sat there, and of Ledoux, and of the tremendous changes which the past few weeks had worked in all of us. The course of my existence had been changed. My own words came back to me: "Life does not end here in the lonely cabin."

How doubly true they were now—true with a new significance. Ahead of us the long trail beckoned. "If life had only been different," she had said. She had wished it so. I could never forget that. No matter how long the days or years, that thought would lead me on—and up—to her.

THE END

AUTUMN'S GOLD

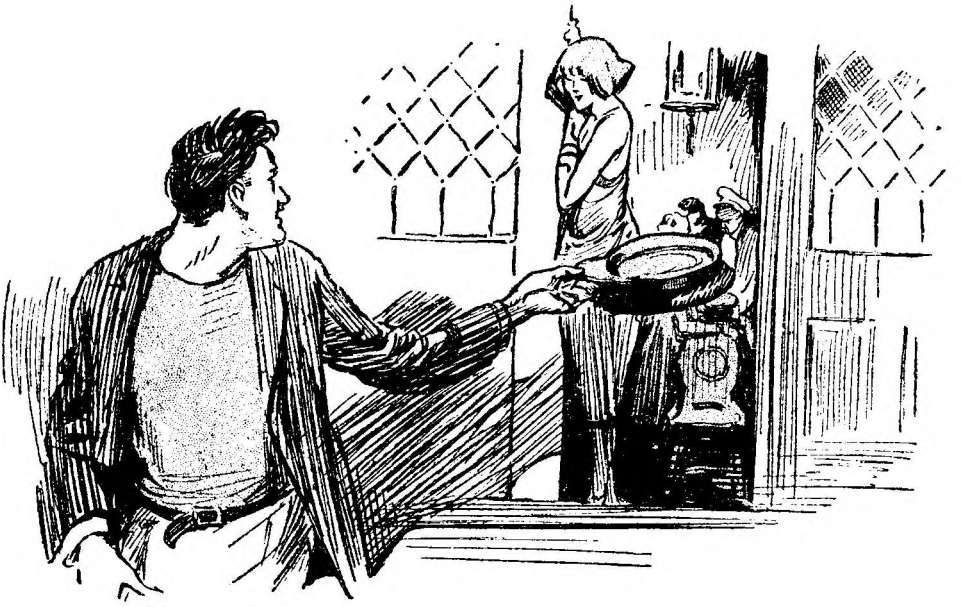
NO silken curtains shade the light,
The rugs grew not in Persian looms;
But everywhere to meet my sight
A golden beauty shines and blooms.

In vases on the mantel shelf,
In sheaves against the unused grate,
Behind the plaque of azure delf,
And in the windows full jars wait.

By mountain paths, by meadows' edge,
This largess for myself I won—
This wealth from out the rustling sedge
Wrought by the alchemist, the sun.

Who would be poor, when to the hand
Such filigrees in splendor nod?
Gold arabesques all o'er the land—
The golden plumes of goldenrod.

M. Hancock.



Ashes of Barbary

By PAUL DERESCO AUGSBURG

Oh, the cable sings in its hollow slot
And the flutes wail wild and the church bell booms,
Just as they did when the slave girls' lot
Was told in the cries from the living tombs:

Hilarious shriek and sailor curse,
Maudlin sob and ribald toast,
Midnight hell and empty purse—
Gone, all gone with the Barbary Coast!

BRANN McDONALD strode through Portsmouth Square, crossed the cobble-stones of Washington Street, and entered that little alley which clings so tenaciously to the lower fringe of Chinatown. He walked hastily—for Brann, you must know, was to keep a rendezvous of eight years' standing.

Weird pagan sounds came to him as he passed into the narrow alley. The shrill cry of a flute, the hollow tattoo of the mook yu, the barbarous rhythm of cowhide drums—played behind a lantern-hung balcony opposite one corner of the square—dinned in Brann's ears. Higher and shriller wailed the flute, while the cries of the singsong girls followed in wild accompaniment.

"Shanghai," muttered Brann. "Here I comes back after all these years, and damned if the Chinee boys ain't making theirselves to home in my own Christian port!"

He shook his head up at the balcony and pushed deeper into the shadows of the alley. His destination was the house of Mme. Emberton—the place with the glazed white bricks, and the iron scroll work over the windows, and the queer opaque color pattern covering the door glass. There, he could see it now! Narrow and just the least bit gray, it was still standing among its fellows in the middle of the block. Time, apparently, hadn't changed it much since Brann last entered there eight years before.

Eight years! They had rolled past, almost to a day, since the tramp schooner Gull slipped through the Golden Gate and out upon the Pacific. Eight years of varied cruising on Asiatic waters—Shanghai, Nagasaki, Singapore, and Java, Calcutta, Colombo and even distant Tamitave—and not once in all that time did less than five thousand miles of high seas separate Brann McDonald from Frisco.

But now the Gull had returned, gliding past the picturesque fort which used to guard the Gate, past the battery-studded hills that now defend it, and on to her anchorage in Oakland estuary.

Yes, the Gull was back and Brann was prepared to marry the girl who had waited all those long eight years. Her name? Pansy Delande, better known to her customers of Barbary as the "Red Headed Queen." Brann—simple-hearted sailor!—cared nothing that Pansy had a past of myriad men. All Brann cared about was her auburn-dyed curls and pretty eyes and sympathetic affection and—this marvel never ceased to make him wonder—the fact that Pansy loved him more than any man she ever met.

Hadn't she told him so herself? "You're the only boy for me, old sweety," she had said as she nodded to the waiter for more drinks. "Sure, I'll marry you, Brann. I'll wait for you till the cows come home—that's the kind of a girl I am. Yes, I'll be right here waiting when next you put in at Frisco. It don't matter how long you stay away from me, Brann; I'll be here ready to marry you." That's what Pansy had said, the first woman the sailor ever knew to speak to him kindly and to really care.

When Brann got drunk enough to sleep, Pansy had appropriated his purse and then busied herself with entertaining a miner from the Mother Lode. But Brann knew nothing of that. He blamed the theft on some rascally waiter when he sailed the following morning. And not once, in all the time he was gone, had the memory of Pansy's smile and the sweetness of her promise left him. The thought of them cheered the lonely watches as he sailed the seas and saved for the day he should wed.

And now Brann McDonald was back!

He halted before the glass color pattern of the door and looked about in some bewilderment. Where were the lights and noise, the shrill laughter of women and hilarious shouts of men? Why was the place so still and lonesome? Over the doorbell was tacked a card: "Private family—No admittance." But that meant nothing to Brann. How could he know that a collection of inhospitable reformers, who did not seem to care whether sailor folk found entertainment or not when they put in at San Francisco port, had closed the Barbary Coast and driven away its sorry citizens?

Brann rang the doorbell and waited for the porter, dusky old Black Ned, to extend the *madame's* greeting. But no one came. Not a sound from behind the opaque glass. The living tomb of bygone courtesans was heavy with the silence of death.

Brann pushed the button again. Listening intently, he could barely catch the faint ringing of a bell. He pounded on the panel and shouted a gruff demand. Then he heard footsteps sounding on the stairs.

The door opened. A Chinese woman, small and wizen, with the black trousers of Cathay hanging about her limbs, had supplanted Black Ned and his purple livery. Brann stared incredulously.

"Pansy," he said. "Tell Miss Pansy that —"

A series of shrill syllables, hurled at him in angry invective, halted the sailor's words. He took a step forward, intending to enter, but the door slammed into its jamb with a crash that reverberated down the alley. Small feet pattered up the stairs.

"Hey!" roared Brann, thundering his fists upon the panel. "Hey, you Chinee—"

Again he was interrupted. It was a hearty laugh this time, and Brann whirled about with fists clenched for battle. Puzzled and chagrined, he yearned to crack his knuckles against something he could hurt. But the stranger was large and powerful; his face was good natured and disarming; and as he reached into a vest pocket for a cigar, Brann caught the flash of a detective's badge. Sergeant Walter Powers, veteran of the Chinatown detail, was looking over his preserves.

"You're out of luck, pardner," he chuckled. "The old Coast is gone—cleaned out like a' earthquake had struck her."

"Huh?" gasped Brann.

"Sure thing; the preachers put the old finasse on the district years ago. But don't take it too hard, pardner; you ain't the only sailor that comes back and finds the old place changed. There's plenty of 'em just as sore about it as you."

Brann's lips moved in a curse—a general anathema, it appeared, to cover all clergymen who interfere with the liberty of sailormen ashore. His face was troubled. A panicky look suddenly came into his eyes.

"How about my girl?" he demanded. "What happened to Pansy, who was going to marry me?"

The sergeant stared.

"Who'd you say?"

"Pansy. Pansy Delande, her that they called the 'Red Headed Queen.' She lived right upstairs in this here house, and I sent her fans and Chinee kimonas from Asie. Our ship put into so many ports I never did meet up with none of her letters; so how could I know about the Coast getting closed?" Brann looked pleadingly into the sergeant's face. "Where'd Pansy move to, sir? You knew about Pansy, didn't you?"

The sergeant's lips parted to speak. Then he seemed to change his mind, shook his head, and eyed Brann curiously.

It was a stocky, big-lunged sailor that he saw, huge of fist and competent of muscle. Wind and sun had leathered his face, which seemed to blend without a hitch into the light brown of his hair. Thirty-seven or thirty-eight was Brann, and his gray eyes had a seriousness of expression that disconcerted Powers. They were simple, trusting eyes, the eyes of a great dog that knows no suspicion of treachery. They looked gravely upon the world and appraised it, unquestioningly, at its own face value. Deceit and double dealing were things which Brann, apparently, could not understand.

"Yes, I remember the girl," said the sergeant slowly. "But I haven't seen her in years, pardner; not in years. They all left town when the Coast was closed—some to New Orleans and Juarez and Tia Juana, some to Honolulu and Japan, some to London and Paris—they're scattered all over the world, I guess. You say you was going to marry Pansy?"

Brann nodded dully. His face had become suddenly gray, and Powers saw with sympathetic wonder that there were tears in the sailor's eyes. Again he was about to speak and again he changed his mind as he studied Brann. Then some one shouted from down near Portsmouth Square. Cries of pain pierced into the shadows of the alley. Hurrying figures flitted past a street lamp at the corner.

"Got to go, pardner. Cheer up!" spoke the sergeant quickly. He broke into a run, one hand reaching for his hip. "A sailor would kill a chink," he muttered as he ran.

Brann stared after him a moment, dumbly considering the tragedy that had thrust itself so abruptly into his life. The shouts from the square were growing louder. For an instant the sailor thought he would join the crowd and watch the excitement. Then he shrugged his shoulders and walked in the other direction. After all, fights were common affairs in the life of Brann.

His mind was dazed. Not until he approached Pacific Avenue did the fog lift from his brain. There was a saloon at a near-by corner—a saloon that Brann remembered well. Now the windows were dull with dust. A heavy padlock hung from the door hasps, and across the portal a couple of wooden braces had been nailed. On one of these braces some wag had scrawled in chalk:

"Closed for repairs—open July, 1942."

And then Pacific Avenue! Brann walked that one city block, beginning at Columbus Avenue, where hell itself had been wont to cut loose nightly in a blaze of giddy lights and noise. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

There was the red-fronted Dragon, to be sure, its upper jaw still agape as in the days when Barbary's hectic throngs entered its clamorous cavern. One eye of the monster was gone. So were the brilliant lights which once had flared their invitation. Theatrical billposters clung to the faded boards. A rat skulked out from the dragon's mouth and pattered over the sidewalk to the gutter.

Across the street stood the Thalia, with its long arcade leading back to that chamber where sailors had danced their wild, crude steps with demimondia's red-lipped daughters. It is now a garage. "Blow your horn," commands a sign at the very entrance where only a few years before "Blow your money!" had been the merry watchword. Two soldiers from the Presidio were staring reminiscently into the passageway.

Past the dead remains of the Moulin Rouge, the Queen's Bar, and the Hippodrome strolled Brann, his thoughts a tangle of bitterness and despair. A grotesque little kitten, with only a funny stump of a tail, slipped across his path and under a swinging door where the high heels of women's slippers once were seen.

But there were no slippers now to lure the restless to a night in giddy Barbary. A mechanical piano was calling from within, bravely striving to keep up the old tradition of the Coast. Close your eyes and blot the present from your mind and you could almost see the wraiths of bygone sinners dancing and drinking, loving and fighting, shouting and singing as in the days of Pacific Avenue's dubious glory.

Brann McDonald pushed through the door and faced a one-eyed barkeep. He blinked up at a sign advertising root beer. Then he gruffly demanded booze, and got it. The man with the single eye, speaking not a word, moved like a dumb automaton, as though he were an apparition still haunting the stamping ground of yesteryear. The tailless kitten arched its back to rub against Brann's ankles.

"Did you know Pansy Delande?" asked the sailor.

One-Eye shook his head. The mechanical piano crashed into a concluding crescendo and expired. Without a word the barkeep walked over to it and dropped in a slug. The brief intervening silence seemed to irk him.

"She lived in that alley hard by the square," spoke Brann hopefully, and again One-Eye shook his head.

Brann set down his glass and strode out the door. The old district was beginning to get on his nerves. It was oppressive with the atmosphere of death. Walking rapidly, Brann crossed the cable tracks and turned back toward Chinatown.

For an instant he looked up at the blazing electric cross atop old St. Mary's, that square-towered citadel of Rome which has stood missionary for generations at the very border of New Cathay. The symbol had been placed at an angle, so that its arms did not parallel the church front. Gleaming down from the hilltop, the cross had shone as a beacon of hope upon the heart of Barbary itself. Thousands of revelers along the garish coast had seen it from the depths. Some, no doubt, had read its mute pleading message and, repenting, had soberly turned aside.

In a few minutes Brann came to Grant Avenue, Chinatown's principal thoroughfare. Years ago it had been known as Du Pont Street. Then—apparently acting on the theory that, given a fresh start, even an erring thoroughfare might possibly reform—they changed its name.

Brann's long sojourn in Asiatic waters had given him a taste for the Chinaman's rice whisky. He craved it now, and the third stranger of whom he inquired knew where such liquor might be had.

"Go up the hill half a block to Ross Alley," directed the stranger. "It's Louis Fung's joint. You'll see his name on the window."

So it was that Brann McDonald entered unknowingly upon the queerest episode of his life. The thirst for rice whisky brought him into a squat little room, two steps below the level of the alley, and pungent with the peculiar odor which hangs over Chinatown. It is as though the very atmosphere had been imported from Shanghai and liberated over the San Francisco hillside which the Orientals have chosen as their own. To describe that odor is futile, for it carries the tang of Far Eastern concoctions and celestial mysteries. It is the essence of Old Cathay.

Plain black tables and straight-backed chairs filled possibly a quarter of the room. Stacked in one corner were a dozen hempen hampers bearing grotesque Chinese characters printed in black ink. An unadorned counter extended the length of the room,

and behind it were shelves stocked with herb-filled jars.

A slatternly white woman appeared from behind a rear curtain as the door closed after Brann. This would be Louis Fung's spouse, the sailor thought; his unknown friend of the street corner had mentioned a Caucasian wife. She was not a woman to inspire Occidental desire. Her dirty blond hair straggled about her neck and ears. Her lips had a vicious, flabby sort of droop. Her cheeks were sallow and puffed. Her figure—well, whatever the creature's physical endowments once had been, they included no figure now. She regarded Brann through lusterless, uninterested eyes.

"What you want?" she asked.

"*Eng-ga-pai,*" said the sailor.

The woman set out a teacup filled with the liquor. She stepped behind the curtain for an instant—then returned to look at Brann with that same gaze of utter detachment. Perhaps he would talk and relieve her life's monotony. After his second drink he did.

"You lived here long?" was his question.

"Yeah—years and years." Louis Fung's wife glanced wearily about the room. "I don't remember how long now. Plenty, though."

"Maybe you knew some of the girls that worked along the Coast," said Brann quickly. The distilled rice of the Chinese had begun to take hold, and the world had a slightly more cheerful aspect now. He tipped his chair against the wall and contemplated Fung's unlovely spouse slumped across the counter.

She was nodding her head in assent, her eyes seeming to brood over dead and half forgotten things. Yes, she knew lots of the girls, she said. Did Brann?

"I knew one in partickiler," he told her. Then he paused while the woman filled the cup again and took his silver. "She was the finest girl I ever set eyes on, barring none, ma'am. I seen plenty women in my day, traveling the seas and putting into dozens of foreign ports like I've done. I've seen plenty of handsome women, but none like the one that I met not two blocks from this here joint. Me and her is going to get married as soon as I find her."

Louis Fang's wife shifted her shapeless bulk a bit and seemed about to ask a question. But Brann answered it before she could speak.

"Her name's Pansy Delande. Did you know her by any chance, ma'am?"

The slattern gasped. Her sluggish eyes jerked open. Her flabby lips sagged lower. She straightened up, the knuckles of both hands resting on the counter. Brann, his words the slightest bit thick, was talking with eager enthusiasm now.

"Maybe you wouldn't know the lady by her name, but they called her at times the 'Red Headed Queen.' She had a snake tattooed adown her left arm, winding round and round like it was coiled, with the fangs ending up at her wrist. Do you recall the lady now, ma'am?"

A crafty look crept into the eyes of Louis Fung's wife. Picking up the whisky jug, she walked heavily about the counter and poured Brann a drink. Magnanimously she waved aside his money.

"Put it away," she said with a new brusqueness, staring closely at the sailor as she spoke. "Seems to me I do remember that Pansy Delande, now that you mention the snake. Did you say you was going to"—she hesitated at the word—"going to *marry* her?"

Brann bolted his drink and plopped down the cup with a gesture meant to denote, it would seem, great decision. Certainly he was going to wed the lady! She was his affianced bride—had been ever since he sailed from San Francisco port eight years before. With some pomp and not a little pride he recounted his conquest of Pansy and repeated, almost word for word, the promise she had spoken.

"And, mind you, ma'am," Brann concluded, thumping his fist upon the table—"mind you, she picked me out from hundreds, you might say, of devoted sweethearts. Yep, bully old Brann McDonald, o' the schooner Gull, was top choice of the handsome queen. Now, what do you think of that?"

"M-m!" mumbled the slattern, curiously agitated as she poured another drink. Her rough hand trembled and the liquor slopped upon the table. It ate into the lacquer,

too, but that was nothing to distress an able seaman like Brann. Besides, he was in no condition to notice such details. "M-m!" the woman repeated. Then she seemed to catch her breath in a gasp before asking once again: "And so you're going to marry Pansy just as soon as you find her?"

"Yes, I tell you! Ain't she been waiting for me, and me for her for eight whole years? And ain't she worth the waiting, with her pretty pink face and handsome smile?"

Brann fell asleep soon after that, drugged by the powerful spirits of Chinese rice. His head dropped forward upon his arms. His sailor hat slid to the floor. The squat little room two steps below the pavement of Ross Alley became silent again—silent, that is, except for the gentle snores of fat Louis Fung on his chair behind the curtain.

For several minutes the Chinaman's wife regarded the sleeping sailor. A flute sang out from a tong house overlooking the alley. Its whining cadences rose and fell like a dirge of death. Sometimes loud, sometimes soft, but always dismal, the sounds filled the passageway and filtered past doors and windows in a wild, faint threnody. The theme of the song was disillusionment. One verse, translated, goes like this:

"Love opened my heart like a lotus leaf,
But I scorned its warmth for gold;
Love fled and left nothing there but grief;
Now alone am I and old."

Louis Fung's wife spat out a quiet curse. She couldn't abide the heathenish sob of Chinese flutes. They had no tune, in her estimation. They merely wailed like those damned hired mourners at Oriental funerals.

The monotonous song went on and on, and the woman studied Brann. Once she stepped over to the curtain and glowered at the greasy, plump and flabby countenance of her husband. Her lips parted in a sneer that was half a snarl. Then she bethought herself of something and tiptoed into an alcove. From a trunk she drew out a battered make-up box, slipped past Louis Fung, and placed it on the counter. Raising the lid, she first came upon a mirror. For a moment she stared at her image in the glass.

"Fah!" she ejaculated. The mirror plunked back into the box. The cover snapped down over rouge and henna and sticky mascara. Louis Fung's wife returned to the chair beside Brann's table and resumed her mournful reverie. Her shoulders were hunched over dejectedly. Her eyes were moody and far away.

Still the flute rose and fell in weird, dreary cadences. Its mournful cries seemed to give tonal background to the woman's thoughts. It sobbed of the dead past, with its gayety of wine and dance and men—of the equally dead future, with its sordid, humdrum, weary stretch of years. It mocked, that flute; the eerie notes, played in the tong house up above Ross Alley, told of things that might have been if the paths of the past had not led far astray. They were poignant with remorse and despair and dismal resignation.

Louis Fung's wife leaned forward and touched Brann's hair. Her fingers lingered in the light brown strands, touseled and just the least bit curly, like a boy's. Then she placed her hand on his arm. The muscles were strong and firm, so different from the flabbiness of Fung. The skin was brown from sun and wind, but a white man's skin none the less. The hands were those of a *man.*

"And so you want to marry Pansy—Pansy, with her pretty pink face and handsome curls!" she whispered. There was a sigh, a ludicrous grimace. Then once again her fingers fondled the sleeping sailor's hair.

It was thus that Louis Fung, waking and peering out from behind the curtains, found his wife. For a minute he looked silently on, while smoldering little fires crept into his sullen eyes. Then, grunting his wrath, he sprang forward and leaped at the slattern. His fingers felt for her throat—found it—tightened.

Not a sound escaped through her lips as they struggled in the shop below the alley. But there was a crash of chairs and the banging of heavy bodies against counter side and tables. The noise, almost drowning out the shrill call of the flute, awakened Brann. Through stupid eyes he stared at the tussling figures. Then the fumes of the *eng-ga-pai* cleared a bit and he saw a

fat Chinaman choking a woman that was white. The sailor loosed a livid curse.

"You damned brute!" he grunted as his tough right fist cracked against Louis Fung's flabby cheek. "You Chinee pig! You yellow Turk!"

The fists rammed in with a hearty will. Fung's fingers forgot their grip on his white wife's throat. His eyes were bright with hate. Then one of them burned out and went dead as Brann drove an expert left into its socket. The Chinaman's huge bulk began to sink. The rain of blows still beat upon him. With a sort of sigh Louis Fung struck the floor, quivered a bit like a great slain elephant, and finally lay still.

Brann glowered at his fallen enemy. Then, rubbing his knuckles soothingly, he turned upon the woman. She, too, lay on the floor, leaning against a chair and still gasping for breath. A strand of dirty blond hair hung over one eye. Her lips sagged low.

"Nice, sweet husband you got, ma'am," said Brann, grinning. "Think I better go before a gang of cops grab me off."

He picked up his hat and started for the door. But before he reached it the woman had staggered to her feet and, half stumbling, rushed across the room. Almost fiercely she threw her arms about Brann's neck and kissed him.

"Hey!" An epithet scorched across his lips as he shoved her away. His fist drew back to strike, but he changed his mind. "Easy how you take me," he warned with a comical touch of dignity. "Kissing me ain't for such as you. Maybe you're forgetting that I'm Pansy Delande's man—the 'Red Headed Queen's.'"

Louis Fung's wife smiled wanly.

"You can hit me if you want to," she said. "I don't care if you do, but—"

"But what?" roared Brann, and backed away as she approached him.

"I just wanted to tell you about Pansy." A plaintive note came into her voice. "I knew Pansy, mister; knew her for years and years. I was with her last December, the night that—that she died."

"The night she died!" whispered Brann, his eyes wide and staring. "My Pansy, is she—*dead,* ma'am? Did my Pansy—"

Louis Fung's wife nodded her head.

"Yes, she died in my own arms. It was up in a little room on Kearney Street that she died." The slattern halted abruptly and peered up into Brann's eyes. She had bethought herself of something more. "Just one minute, sir."

She ran to the make-up box, opened it, and drew out a diamond brooch that had been treasured from a better day. Eagerly she gave it to the sailor.

"It's Pansy's," she said softly. "Just before the end, sir, she put this in my hand and said I was to give it to you. She told me you would come back to her some day. And—and I've kept it all this time, waiting for you like I promised Pansy I would. Oh, how she loved you, sir!"

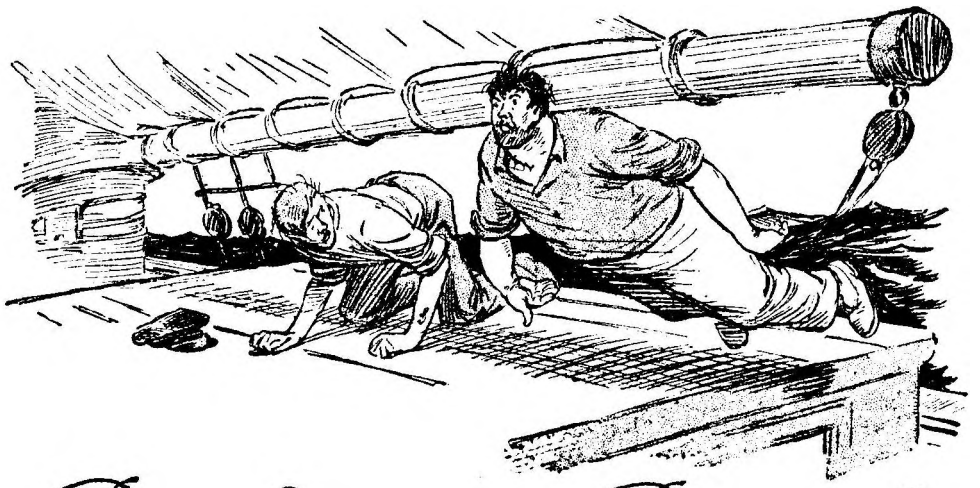
That was about all. To Brann's eager questions she gave answer as best she could. Finally he left, walking up the two narrow steps and along Ross Alley's unkempt pavement. Louis Fung's wife watched him from the doorway. Her eyes were dim. The flute was still.

"I'm damned if I remember that guy," she muttered slowly. "I—I wished I had."

She returned to the little shop, doused a pitcher of water upon Louis Fung's sallow face, and regarded him contemptuously. For a minute she stared while his eyes reluctantly opened. Then she rolled up her sleeves and helped him, puffing and groaning, to his feet. Once she glanced at her left arm and the tattooed snake which wound round and round seemed to leer mockingly up at her.

THE END

NOTHING BUT MONEY - By FRED MacISAAC
GREAT STORY. FIRST OF TWO PARTS NEXT WEEK



Packing a Punch

By ARTHUR LOCKWOOD

RUFUS WOGGLE, cook of the three masted schooner Osiris, strolled out of the cook shack with the air of a drum major. He was still in the first thrill of triumph, and as he tilted his white cap to a still more rakish, though perilous, angle on the brow of his vast and globular head, there was a glow in his little pig-like eyes and a jack o' lantern smile on his countenance.

The carpenter, a wizened and rusty faced little man with a poisonous scowl habitually screwing up his face was coming forward. When his eye fell upon Rufus looking like the personification of earthly well-being, his scowl deepened perceptibly. The miracle was that such bitter enemies as this pair could meet and come out of it alive.

The carpenter resisted the mighty impulse within him to leap at Rufus's fleshy throat, and Rufus was in a much too beatific state to step on the carpenter and crush him as he would any other obnoxious worm. The carpenter noted Rufus's smile and the signal that its wearer was happy, with acute dismay. He hated to see Rufus otherwise than suffering tortures.

"Ha," he said sarcastically. "Ye're feelin' purty good, ain't ye? Wot ye grinnin' at?" His tones were hateful and venomous.

Rufus favored him with a look of vast contempt. "Run along 'bout yer tinkerin'," he answered loftily.

A gleam came into the carpenter's eyes, and he did a strange thing—he smiled. There was no mirth in it, however. It was rancorous and sardonic.

"A hell of a cook you are!" he jeered. "Can't make soup!"

Rufus for a moment looked as though he had just been mortally wounded. What was the good of being triumphant if no one knew you were, especially your enemies?

"Say, listen here, you, you think you gotta laugh on me, don't ye? You think I had to make that soup over because the mate kicked, eh, and said they was soap in it? Well, jest put this under yer hat, that soup I gave him the second time, that he said was all right, was the same soup,

see. Now go on about yer business and don't try to kid me till ye know what yer doin'."

The carpenter received the news with widening eyes. It had taken the wind out of his sails, Rufus thought, as the little man turned on his heel and strode off without another word. The beatitude returned to Rufus's countenance. Now the world would know that his cooking record was still unspotted, and that the mate was proven wrong.

He sat reflecting upon the injustice of the mate's accusation. It had happened at noon, just after Rufus had brought the soup into the cabin. The mate had fairly shaken the after end of the vessel with his profanity and protest. The skipper had made a valiant effort to calm him, but had failed; the mate would be content with nothing but the skipper ordering more soup made. And Rufus, with that confidence that is born of virtuosity, had merely dished up four more plates and set them before the officers. There had been not a whisper of complaint.

And yet it was for this he was logged two days' pay. He knew that it was at the mate's insistence; that the skipper would never have done so unless coerced. Well, martyrdom is expensive and he was satisfied with the bargain.

These reflections were interrupted by the presence of the deck boy.

"Cap'n wants ye," he announced.

Rufus wondered what for. He went aft, and in the cabin, discovered a human tempest of anger in the form of the mate.

"By hickey, cap'n," that dignitary was shouting, "if ye don't log 'im ye kin put me ashore at the first dock we hit. I'm damned if I'll stay in any ship where they feed me boiled soap, then try to make a monkey outa me besides!"

"Now, now, Mr. Blair, I don't see where the thing is half as bad as your makin' out. If the soup was satisfactory, wot's the difference."

Mr. Blair glared at Rufus.

"An' ye're gonna let 'im git away with it?" he fairly screamed. "Gonna let 'im make me the laughin' stock o' the crew. I'm goin' in an' pack my bag right now."

"Jest a minnit now, Mr. Blair, don't do nuthin' rash. What d'ye want me to do."

"If ye don't log him thirty days' pay, you kin ship a new mate the minute we git in. I've stood fer all the indignity I'm goin' to on this here wagon."

"Ain't ye even gonna hear wot 'e's got to say, Mr. Blair, ain't ye gonna give 'im a chance to explain."

"Wot kin 'e say? How's 'e gonna explain tryin' to make a saphead outa me, eh?"

The skipper turned to Rufus.

"We are informed," he began in ponderous judicial tones, "that you did not make new soup as you were ordered this noon."

Rufus knew the carpenter had committed the treachery of telling.

"I—I—ah—er," Rufus gurgled.

"It's disobedience o' orders, cap'n," shouted Mr. Blair; "your orders! If you're goin' to stand fer murder, I ain't, that's all. Log 'im, er pay me off."

The skipper's distress was acute.

"All right, you're logged one month's pay," he said to Rufus. "Go on and don't say any more or I'll put you in irons."

Rufus walked out of the cabin like a man walking in his sleep. He might as well have just heard his doom, for the loss of thirty days' pay at that time was so slightly less than death, that the distinction was picayune.

With that fifty dollars he would have accumulated enough to buy a beloved motorcycle when the Osiris got back to New York. With that motorcycle he could explore country roads, skirt the seashore, make mock of distance and live in the realization of an iridescent and well nigh overwhelming dream.

Almost nightly he took out the catalogue, wherein the beautiful mechanism was pictured and read and read again the details. That mangy looking cut that showed it, was to him a masterpiece of representation. He looked at it as a fond mother looks upon her babe, and the only reason life was worth living was because that fascinating contraption was to become his property at the end of the voyage.

There was the fact that he might wait

and make another trip. The irony of the thought sickened him. There was no such thing as wait. Life was feverish waiting until this voyage was over. Certainly he couldn't survive another. Besides which they would be back in New York in midsummer, and another trip would take them into the fall when he would have to wait through the winter. Oh, misery!

His dream lay a forlorn wreck, but wrecked worse was his resolution. The great incentive to stay sober while in France, whither the ship was bound, had now burst like a bubble. Yes, there was surcease of grief. There was a few hours of forgetfulness at least. What was the use of trying to behave oneself, anyway?

II.

THE gloom in the galley hung like a storm cloud that night and the next day. Rufus, the talkative and good-humored, had been transformed into a man so sullen, taciturn and morose that there was some misgiving about eating his food.

When the ship had docked, he quietly but sadly donned his blue serge suit, his painfully stiff new shoes and his ancient derby and went ashore alone with his sorrow. It was a bright sunshiny afternoon, and Usine-Boule lay like a little fairy city along the Loire. Rufus had no eye for the beauty; he looked only for a café.

As he went along a narrow, dingy street, he was roused from a heartbroken reverie by some one seizing hold of his arm. It was not gentle, it was a viselike grip. His lower arm went numb, as he turned and looked up into a countenance that might have been that of a gorilla.

"Wait a minute, son," the monster was saying. "If ye don't wanta git yourself crippled fer life." This ferociously.

Rufus looked at the massive shoulders.

"Er—yes, sir," he said uncertainly.

"You're a cook on a ship, ain't ye?"

"Er—yes, sir," faltered Rufus. "On the Osiris, yes, sir; ye're right, sir."

"The Osiris, eh? Well now, that's all right. Now that's fine, yer jest the man I want to stow me away in that ship. Yep, I'm glad I come across you."

Visions of further trouble flashed across Rufus's bewildered brain

"But, sir, I'll be logged again—"

"I'll give ye fifty bucks!" interrupted Mr. Gorilla.

Rufus hesitated.

"I can't, sir—"

Mr Gorilla closed a fist that looked like a huge coconut. "All right, I'm gonna bust ye right in the kisser—" he snarled.

"No, no, I mean I'll do it," Rufus hastened to add.

"I see you got sense. Now I might as well tell ye who I am, so if ye start anything ye'll know what to expect. I'm an American professional strong man, see, an' I was over here appearin' in vaudeville, an' got stranded, see. I'm a reg'lar fella if ye treat me right. I usta be a blacksmith in Oklahoma until a bookin' agent saw me straighten a bent crowbar with me bare hands. My right name is Bill Holt, but when I git back they're gonna book me as Blaskoff, the Russian Lion. What's your name?"

"Woggle, sir?"

"All right, Mr. Wobble, I got an idee you an' me are goin' to git along great."

"Sure," said Rufus gulping unhappily.

"When's this outfit goin' to start home?"

"Week mebbe. She jest stopped here waitin' fer orders."

"Good, I'll give ye the fifty bucks after she gits out on the ocean."

"I don't like to take yer money," said Rufus.

That fist closed, that gorilla-like countenance took on a savage look.

"Gittin' cold feet?"

"I mean ye're a good fella to gimme that much," Rufus quickly interposed.

"Oh," said Holt, relaxing apparently all over. It was a process something like deflation.

"I'm gonna leave everything to you," he went on. "You fix everything up so's I'm comf'table until she gits started, then I'll come out on deck and make myself at home. Guess they ain't nobody on that wagon I need be scared of. Especially if I crown one o' them early, so's the others will watch out"

"Yes, sir, that's right, sir."

"An' remember, no monkey business, unless ye wanna git treated awful rough."

The likelihood that murder or at least mayhem would be the immediate consequences of any attempt at "monkey business," did not need to be impressed on Rufus. Every aspect of this Hercules was eloquent with such assurances.

And Rufus found the horns of the dilemma had been nicely sharpened to receive him. The idea of smuggling any one aboard such a small vessel undetected was insane. Even though he was successful in getting him aboard, he would not remain undiscovered long And when he was discovered! Rufus simply hated to think of it.

He visualized the mate's ire, and the skipper's wrath. Ugh! He wondered if he could get his sentence commuted to life. For a moment there popped into his mind a picture of the carpenter, laughing long guffaws. It was raucous, even boisterous. The object of his amusement was a person in irons and behind bars, and that person was none other than himself.

There was still another horrible hazard. If something went wrong who would Holt blame, and who would receive the awful penalty of displeasing him. Terrible!

Rufus did not seek solace in the flowing bowl. He was now in so much trouble even that was useless. He did exactly as Holt told him, and even made a sickly attempt to seem willing when Holt arranged to meet him again for the purpose of reconnaissance, ere boarding the vessel.

Among the things Rufus would have loved at that moment would have been to fade into thin air, to flee somewhere, anywhere, leaving all behind. If he only had that motorcycle—aye, but an aeroplane or a Zeppelin was what he needed now.

For practical purposes all was well on the Osiris. The skipper was pleased that he had been able to get away from Usine-Boule without delay, and fair wind and weather promised a fast passage to New York.

Even Mr. Blair seemed better natured than he had been in months. He actually smiled at times.

One morning as he sat in his room he acted more strangely than ever. He was singing! His wheezy tenor was lifted approximately to the strains of "Darling Nellie Gray." The skipper in the cabin heard faint echoes of it and smiled. The mate was happy, there was peace on the ship. He felt good.

Even Rufus Woggle seemed strangely content in those days for a man who had been logged a month's pay. True he was not boisterously happy, but his misery seemed to have waned. The skipper had noticed, however, that at times a wild look of apprehension would show itself in his eyes.

The fact that Rufus had succeeded in getting Holt on board without detection, was one that caused him to congratulate himself on his run of luck. But the cook knew that Fate has a way of letting down on her favorites at the most embarrassing moments, and he was in far from anything like a peaceable state of mind. He was simply biding his time; for he had the feeling that something was going to happen. He only hoped he would come out of it alive.

Mr. Blair in his room, continued to sing: "Darling Nellie Gray." He opened his mouth wide as he repeated the refrain, and the sirenlike notes came louder and more penetrating. He cocked his feet up on the table, half closed his eyes, and began with renewed enthusiasm his assault of that tune.

He did not see the bulky giant who with a curse, climbed out of the lazarette, and cast bloodthirsty eyes in the direction of that voice. His gorilla-like countenance was accentuated by a snarling, teeth-showing grimace that had murder limned in every line of it.

He didn't stop to replace the hatch cover, but paused in the passageway to relocate the direction whence that voice was coming. And as Mr. Blair hit one of the high notes, Holt winced, gritted his teeth and started for the door of the mate's room.

The composer of the music had intended one note to be held a full measure. Mr. Blair had intended to hold it, but in the middle of it his voice suddenly became paralyzed and the tone ended in a wheeze. His eyes opened upon the person who had just opened his door, and the sight was one that man seldom sees outside of a delirium.

Mr. Blair's panicky eye ran over that chimera of a face, noted those bulging muscles, saw the glint of homicide in those eyes.

"So, you're the guy that's keepin' me awake, are ye?" The voice was a beastly growl. If Holt had delivered a two hours' oration, he could not have more clearly apprised Mr. Blair of the danger in which he stood.

Mr. Blair looked nervously at a porthole, his thought being to dive through it. He made a fidgeting movement with his hands as Holt clenched his fists again and advanced a step.

Then Mr. Blair saw an opportunity and thanked God he was thin. It was one of the quickest moves Mr. Blair ever made in his life, he fairly dived between Holt's legs, made a couple of bull-frog leaps out on deck and scrambled to his feet.

It had happened so suddenly that Holt's phlegmatic brain had not acted with sufficient speed and Mr. Blair got a good start. The chase led forward, but Mr. Blair discovered that the ship was amazingly short. He wished it was about five miles long. He dashed up on the forecastle head, around the capstan and aft again, with Holt just out of reach behind him. He yelled for help, begged for mercy.

Then Mr. Blair made a grievous mistake. He looked around to see how near his pursuer was, and as he did so he tripped on a snatch block and went headlong

Holt picked him up by the scruff of the neck and held him at arm's length with his left hand. Mr. Blair's legs dangled three inches from the deck.

Mr. Blair's yellings and the commotion had attracted all hands. The skipper and second mate stood on the poop, the boatswain and crew were working amidships. They stopped, stood aghast and watched.

They saw the giant pick up the mate as though he were a rag, they saw those savage eyes measure him, that huge right fist draw back and land on the mate's jaw. And they saw the mate's head go limp, like that of a man hanged, then that left hand relax and drop him. He fell to the deck like an old shirt dropped. And he lay there still.

"I'll teach ye t' keep me awake," snarled the ape-man with a voice like a bull. "Now is they anybody else on this boat that wants to get the same thing."

His eyes roamed toward the boatswain and crew. His limbs moved and he started toward them. There was a scattering like ducks when the hunter arises in the blind. The rigging was alive with sailors scrambling aloft.

"Come back down here," yelled Holt, "and I'll crack the skulls of every last one of ye."

The response was only increased zeal in climbing higher. The skipper, second mate and helmsman on the poop had seen all. They were standing agape.

Holt's eyes, with the blood lust gleaming in them, now descried them, and he started aft. The skipper fairly dived into the ratlines, but not sooner than the second mate and helmsman. It had been years since the skipper had gone aloft, but he moved with the agility of a man inspired.

Holt pursued as far as the foot of the shrouds, but dared not go farther. He liked to have a firmer and more secure understanding than that web of standing rigging. He scratched his head in perplexity, looked up hungrily, then went to the mast and tried to shake it as he would an apple tree.

"Come down outa there ye yella bellies," he yelled. There was no move to accept the challenge.

Holt was standing beneath the mainmast pondering the problem of how to get them down, when the carpenter, never an expert aloft, missed his footing in his hurry.

There was a swish and snap and a thud. The falling carpenter landed directly on Holt.

Holt picked him up and hit him an unmerciful clout. The carpenter went into dreamland like a felled ox. Holt tossed him on the deck where he lay cold.

Holt now paced the deck like an angry beast. He had tasted blood. He passed the cook shack. Inside Rufus was bustling among the pots and pans.

He looked up, just as Holt was coming through the door. Rufus went out the other as though sprung by a catapult.

"Help! Help!" yelled Rufus. "He's killin' me!"

"You got me into this," snarled Holt. "Now I'm gonna take it outa yer hide."

Rufus's legs worked like piston rods. He ran aft, around the wheel and forward. His eyes were popping out of his head. He dashed up the forecastle companionway, around the winch and aft again. The race was doubtful. Holt gained in the straightway on deck, but Rufus made up the loss when dodging around obstacles.

Three times they ranged the ship's length, then encircled two masts. Once Rufus scrambled on top of the cook's shack. Holt was after him.

The ship was now completely unmanned. Every last hand except Rufus was in the rigging. A stiff breeze was blowing and her bow had fallen off. The wind was on her quarter. The skipper at the mizzen masthead saw what had happened and yelled.

"Lookout, she's gonna jibe." Rufus heard from his perch atop the cook shack and paused to look up whence the voice came. To see the skipper thus aloft, was such an unusual thing he forgot for a moment his own peril. And it was peril, indeed. Holt was now on top of the shack reaching after him.

At that moment the boom came swinging like a huge bat in the hands of some giant Babe Ruth. Rufus ducked, but Holt did not. The boom caught him back of the skull, the crack resounded and the Russian Lion toppled off the cook shack and fell in a heap on deck.

"Put 'im in irons," yelled the skipper.

Rufus ran aft, secured a pair of manacles and bent over the prostrate Holt.

He was just about to clamp them on those piano-leg wrists when Holt opened one glazed eye.

"Wot hit me?" he asked weakly.

Rufus was about to run again, but a brilliant thought crossed his mind.

"I hit ye," he replied.

The impact of the information served completely to restore Holt's consciousness. He sat up and stared in wonderment.

"Gawd! You hit me that wollop?"

"Yes"—Rufus nearly added "sir."

Holt's jaw dropped. "Gawd, an' I was pickin' on a man that kin hit like that! Fer Gawd's sake don't hit me agin. I could never live through another!"

"As long as ye don't git frisky, yer safe with me," said Rufus severely. "I jest wanted to impress on ye who yer monkeyin' with. I didn't mean to hit ye so hard."

"Gawd!" said Holt, rubbing the back of his head.

Holt got to his feet slowly and painfully. He looked aloft. Somebody had to suffer for that blow.

"There's the bird I want," he said looking at the skipper.

"Why don't ye go up after 'im," said Rufus, in whom memories of having been logged were now burning.

"Will them rope fixin's hold me?" asked Holt.

"Sure," said Rufus.

"Stop; don't let 'im come up here," called down the skipper hysterically.

"Hellup! Hellup! He'll kill us," yelled a chorus of sailors.

"Log me, will ye?" shouted Rufus.

"No, no, I take it all back. I'll take ye off the log an' give ye a bonus besides," yelled the skipper. "Only fer God's sake stop that critter from comin' up here."

"An' will ye log the mate?"

"Sure, anything."

"An' will ye fire the carpenter!"

"Anything ye want. Help, quick."

"All right, come down here, Holt, an' behave yerself."

Holt started down not reluctantly for he didn't fancy climbing.

Three days later Holt was interrupted in the business of peeling spuds outside the galley door, by the displeased voice of Rufus.

"Hey, don't cut half the spuds away peelin' 'em. Peel the skins thin, er I'll give ye a poke in the nose."

"Yes, sir," said Holt, cringing.

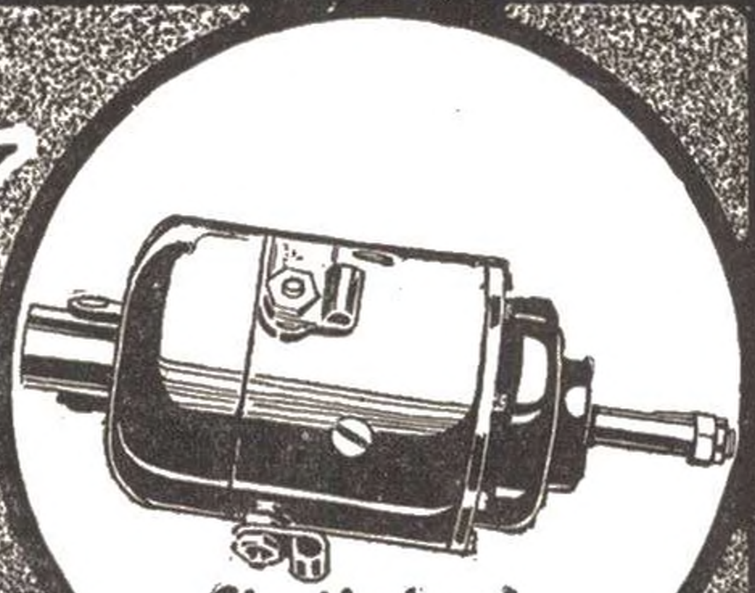
"Now, I tol' you to say aye, aye, sir, when I speak to ye. None o' your landsman's language in this galley."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Holt very meekly.

THE END

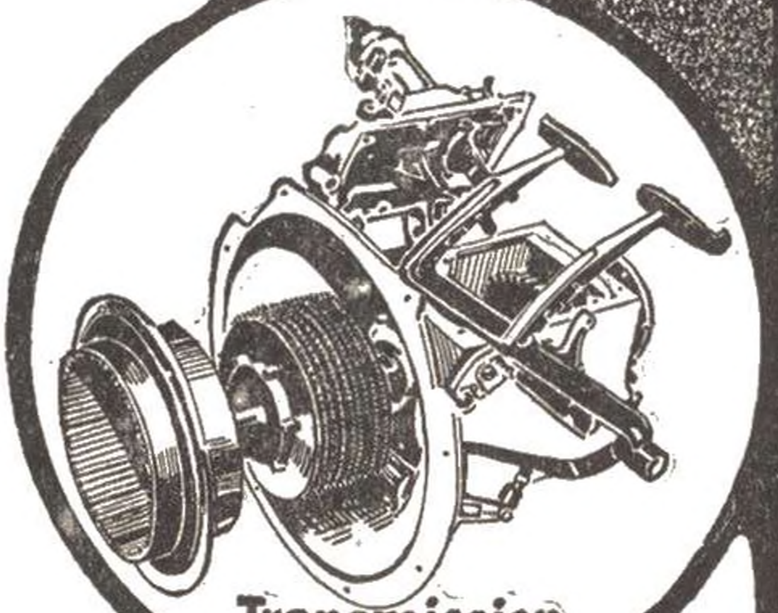
Repair Any Auto or Auto Truck

Examine These NEW AUTO BOOKS FREE

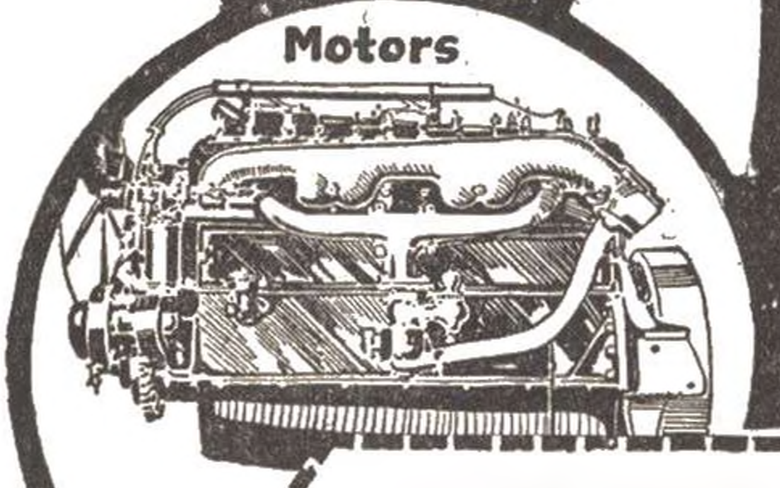


Starting and Lighting

Welding



Transmission



Motors

Be an expert auto repair man. You can have the skill that makes every complicated trouble as easy to fix as taking out a spark plug. Learn every detail of all makes of cars and trucks. Know exactly how to find what's wrong and how to make all repairs quickly. These great new Auto Books show you how.

Make Money Repairing Autos

Over 9 million cars are in operation and thousands of men are needed to keep them in good going condition. There are more jobs open than there are good men to fill them. Never before have expert auto repair men been in such great demand and made so much money. Now is your great money-earning opportunity in the auto repair business. Every mechanic, every chauffeur, every car owner needs this great **New Library of Automobile Engineering.**

Tells About

Explosion Motors, Welding, Motor Construction and Repair, Carburetors and Settings, Valves, Cooling, Lubrication, Fly-Wheels, Clutch Transmission, Final Drive, Steering Frames, Tires, Vulcanizing, Ignition, Starting and Lighting Systems, Shop Kinks, Public Garage Design, Equipment and Operation, Electrics, Storage Batteries — Care and Repair, Steam Cars, Motorcycles, Commercial Trucks, Glossary, More than 100 blue prints Wir'g Diagrams.

75c a Week

If You Decide to Buy

Let us send you the complete five-volume set of Automobile Engineering for one week's examination. Read the simple directions for repairing every automobile trouble. Five thick volumes 5½ x 8¾ inches, flexibly bound and stamped in gold, 2,650 pages, 2,100 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc. Everything in plain, every-day language simple to understand. If you decide to keep them, send only $2.80 in seven days, and $3 a month thereafter until the special introductory price of $19.80 has been paid. The regular price is $37.50 so you save $17.70 by acting at once.

Send No Money

Don't send a penny! Your name and address in the coupon brings the five books to you at once for seven days' trial.

Mail Coupon NOW

American Technical Society
Dept. A-7160 Chicago, U. S. A.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. A-7160 Chicago, U. S. A.

Please send me the five-volume set of Automobile Engineering for seven days' examination, shipping charges collect. If I decide to buy, I will send $2.80 within seven days and balance at $3.00 a month until $19.80 has been paid. Then you will send me a receipt showing that the set of books are mine and fully paid for. If I think I can get along without the books, I will return them, after 7 days, at your expense.

Name.....

Address.....

Employed by.....

4 CONGOLEUM GOLD SEAL Rugs *for* Less than Price *of* One

$1.00 Brings All Four Rugs on Month's FREE TRIAL

GOLD SEAL CONGOLEUM GUARANTEE
SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK
REMOVE SEAL WITH DAMP CLOTH

3 Rugs Free

One big rug—full 9 ft. x 12 ft. size. Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum—no seconds. The most popular pattern ever produced in any kind of floor covering. Three small rugs to match, identical in every way. One dollar with the coupon brings all four rugs, immediately, to anyone, anywhere. 30 day's free trial. Money back, if desired. Year to pay, if pleased. Regular price of big rug alone, everywhere —$18.00. Our price is only $17.95. Instead of one rug, get **four rugs** for less than the **regular** advertised **cash** price of **one.** Pay almost as you please.

This Offer *Ends* in 30 Days!
Use Coupon NOW—Full Year to Pay

Ours is the only house in America that can make you such an offer. Congoleum is known everywhere, and the price is the same everywhere.

To get the **three rugs free**—four rugs for less than the price of one—you must use the coupon at once. This special offer does not appear **even in our own catalog.** A dollar with the coupon is enough — **then take a year to pay.**

Don't Scrub Your Life Away

It's bad enough to deliberately waste money. It's a real sin to waste your strength and health. There's no meaner or harder work than scrubbing floors. Congoleum ends this sort of drudgery. A damp mop keeps it clean and fresh looking.

Guaranteed Wear The Gold Seal protects you against dissatisfaction and gives you an unconditional Money Back Guarantee. You will never be allowed to be dissatisfied.

Waterproof Nothing in its material or manufacture that can rot. The surface is hard, smooth and wear-resisting. Does not stain. Not marred or hurt by spilling of hot liquids.

Lies Flat from the very first moment, without fastening. Never curls up at edges or corners. No need to tack or fasten down. Dirt cannot accumulate underneath.

No Seams Made all in one piece. No fitting or piecing together. No bother or trouble of any kind. All four rugs come in one neat package, ready to put down in a jiffy.

Less Work Dirt, ashes, grit, dust or mud cannot grind into these beautiful rugs. Lovely colorings easily kept bright, clean, beautiful.

No Expense No laborious beating, no sending to cleaners. Absolutely sanitary. The trail of muddy boots and tracked in dirt disappears like magic with the least possible effort.

Blue and Stone Gray— Famous Tile Pattern No. 408

A superb tile pattern that looks like mosaic. Lovely robin's egg blue, with shadings of Dutch blue and a background of soft stone gray, give a matchless effect. Splendid for kitchen or dining room.

No. G4C408—9 ft. x 12 ft. Congoleum Gold Seal Rug with 3 small rugs to match, each 18x36 in. Only $17.95

Other Furniture Bargains

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.

FREE Catalog Ready

1261 West 35th St., Chicago, Ill.

Pin a Dollar to this Coupon

Spiegel, May, Stern Co., 1261 35th St., Chicago

I enclose $1 for the 4 Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs —exactly as described—pattern No. 408, on 30 days' free trial. If I return them, you are to refund my $1, also all transportation costs. Otherwise I will pay $1.50 monthly until special price of $17.95 is paid.

Name.....

Street, R. F. D. or Box No.....

Post Office..... *State*.....

Shipping Point.....

If You Wish a Free Copy of our Big Catalog of 10,000 Other Bargains, Put a Cross (X) in This Square ☐