

ARGOSY



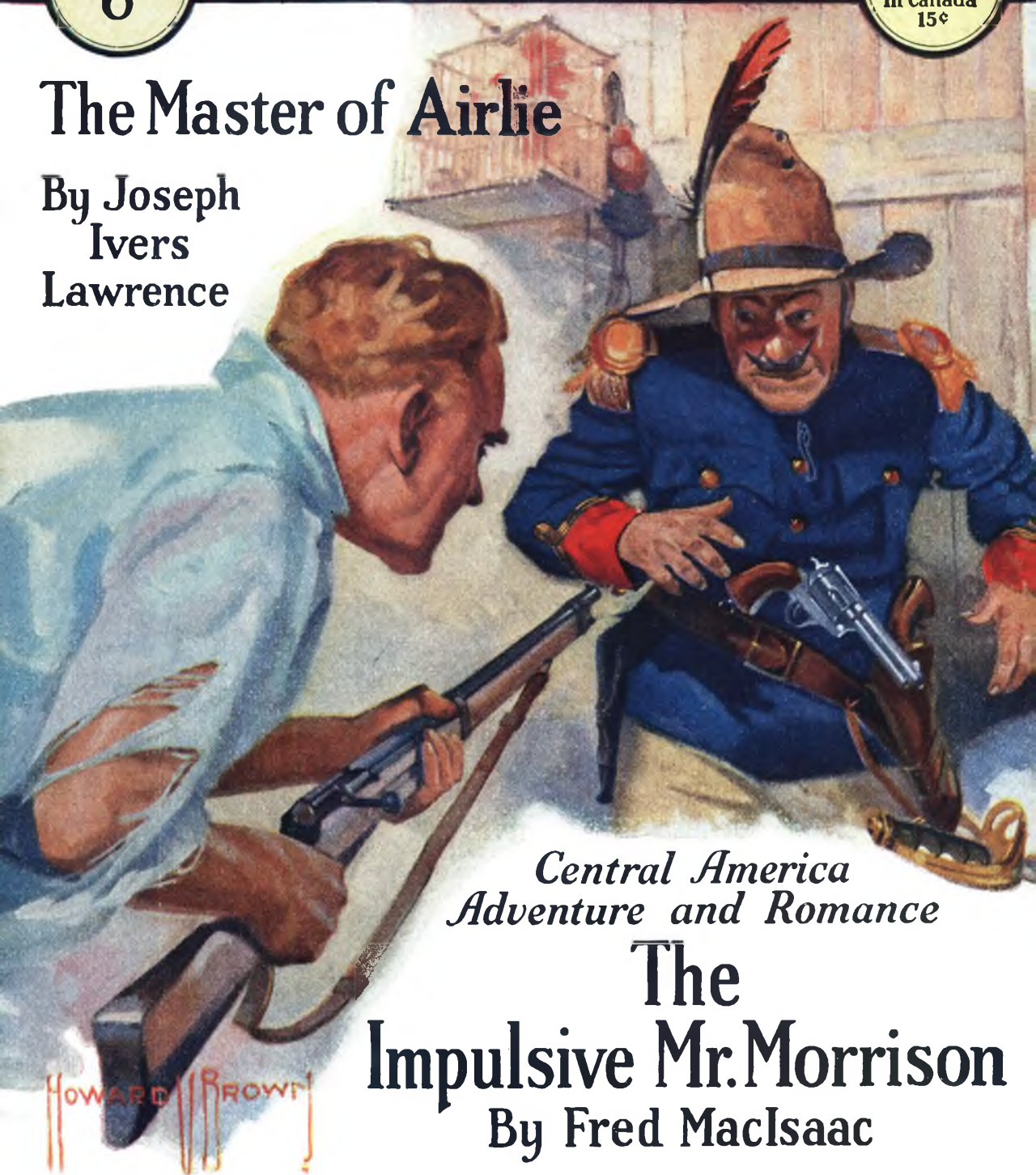
APRIL
6

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

10¢
In Canada
15¢

The Master of Airlie

By Joseph
Ivers
Lawrence



*Central America
Adventure and Romance*

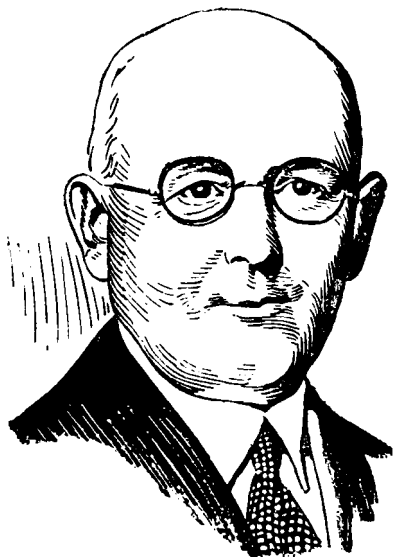
The Impulsive Mr. Morrison

By Fred MacIsaac

HOWARD BROWN

An Opening

FOR 250 MEN OF GOOD STANDING IN TERRITORY NOW BEING DEVELOPED



"Experience though valuable is not essential I am interested in reliability rather than experience. The men selected at this time will be given a thorough training in our business methods and will be established in a business of their own."

Ray C. Hahn

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A partial list which shows the calibre of business done by our representatives:

Bethlehem Steel Corp., General Motors Corp., Diamond Match Co., Eastman Kodak Co., Standard Oil Corp., International Harvester Co.

The full list of customers includes over 4,000 nationally known firms, city, state and national governments, hotels, railroads, etc.

Mail Coupon for Application

A nationally known Ohio Corporation with an annual business of several million dollars announces an expansion program that will create exceptional openings for 250 reliable men. A new addition to our line will open up a field of several million prospects. The openings are such that the men appointed will be assigned productive territories which will not necessitate a change of address.

For the past five years our firm has been recognized as having one of the best paid selling organizations in the country. The records of incomes of our men bear out this reputation—(book sent on request). Our sales policies and our extensive national advertising, coupled with an epoch making new addition to our line, assures the right type of man an income of from \$4500 to \$6000 the first year. Earnings will increase each year as the local business expands. Earnings from \$8,000 to \$12,000 a year are possible for those who are willing to put their best effort in the business.

No investment in stock will be required. The firm puts its large factory stock at the disposal of representatives and makes deliveries and collections. The men are given authority to do open credit and "trade-out" business and are protected by the firm against credit losses.

This opportunity is only for men seeking a permanent connection with an assured future. While we prefer men who can devote full time to our business, we can arrange to appoint a few men of serious intent who can spend only spare time at the start.

The coupon will bring full details of our proposition and an application for those who are in earnest. Send to-day to

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39-R Fyr-Fyter Bldg. . . Dayton, Ohio
PRODUCTS NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

RAY C. HAHN, Director of Sales,
Fyr-Fyter Co.,
39-R Fyr-Fyter Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

Please send full details of the position you have open. Also information concerning the new Patented Product you are now placing on the market.

Name.....

Address.....

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



FREE
Radio
Handbook



IMPROVE TONE AND
VOLUME OF OLD SETS



MODERNIZE OLD SETS
WITH ONE DIAL CONTROL

5

Easy Ways to Make \$3.00 an hour in Your Spare Time in RADIO



REDUCE
STATIC BY
MARVELOUS
NEW METHOD



RADIO-FY & ELECTRIFY
PHONOGRAPHS

Each of these plans, developed by the Radio Association of America, is a big money-maker. Set owners everywhere want to get rid of static, to have their sets operate from the electric light socket, the tone improved, and the volume increased, and transformed into single-dial controls. Phonograph owners want their machines electrified and radiofied. If you learn to render these services, you can easily make \$3.00 an hour for your spare time, to say nothing of the money you can make installing, servicing, repairing, building radio sets, and selling supplies.

Over \$600,000,000 is being spent yearly for sets, supplies, service. You can get your share of this business and, at the same time, fit yourself for the big-pay opportunities in Radio by joining the Association.

Join the Radio Association of America

A membership in the Association offers you the easiest way into Radio. It will enable you to earn \$3.00 an hour upwards in your spare time—train you to install, repair and build all kinds of sets—start you in business without capital or finance an invention—train you for the \$3,000 to \$10,000 big-pay radio positions—help secure a better position at bigger pay for you. A

membership need not cost you a cent

The Association will give you a comprehensive, practical, and theoretical training and the benefit of its Employment Service. You earn while you learn. Our cooperative plan will make it possible for you to establish a radio store. You have the privilege of buying radio supplies at wholesale from the very first.

Earned \$500 in Spare Time
Frank J. Deutsch, Penn.: "I have made over \$500 out of Radio in my spare time."

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Claude DeGrave, Canada: "I knew nothing about Radio when I joined a year ago. I am now a member of a very exclusive organization of Radio Engineers, and my income is 225% greater than it was."

Doubles Income in 6 Months
W. E. Thon, Chicago: "Six months after I enrolled I secured the management of large Radio store and doubled my income."

ACT NOW—If You Wish the No-Cost Membership Plan

To a limited number of ambitious men, we will give Special Memberships that may not—need not—cost you a cent. To secure one, write today. We will send you details and also our handbook filled with dollars-and-cents radio ideas. It will open your eyes to the money-making possibilities of Radio.

Radio Association of America, Inc.
4513 Ravenswood Ave., Dept. MSC. 5. Chicago, Ill.

Radio Association of America, Inc.
Dept. MSC-5, 4513 Ravenswood Ave., Chicago
Gentlemen: Please send me by return mail full details of your Special Membership Plan, and also copy of your Radio Handbook.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

ARGOSY



ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 202

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RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary

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**Made-to-Measure
Suit of**

**All
Wool**

**Cassimere
with Extra Pants!**

Amazing offer! Splendid made-to-measure suit of all wool cassimere with extra pair of trousers, sent for only \$1.00 deposit. Then, 6 months to pay the special bargain price. Suit is tailored of fine smooth finished cassimere suiting in an especially attractive pattern, beautifully toned with contrasting neat shadow stripes.

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Order by No. A-7010S. Terms \$1.00 with coupon, then only \$5.25 a month. Total Bargain Price only \$32.50

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to Pay!**

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Send Only \$1.00 Now!

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Established over 20 years

Dept. 2834 W. 35th Street, Chicago

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Height.....Weight.....Chest.....Trousers
Waist.....Inseam.....With Cuffs ☐
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Name.....

Address.....

P.O.....State.....

(Be sure to fill out simple measurements above thus assuring correct fit)

No Risk

**No
C. O. D.
to Pay**

**Send
Coupon
and
Only
\$1.00
NOW!**

**Send
for
Free
Style
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The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs 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.

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TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

Tobacco Habit Cured or No Pay. Any form, cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chewing or snuff. Guaranteed. Harmless. Used by over 600,000 people. Full treatment sent on trial. Costs \$1.50 if it cures; nothing if it fails. Superba Co., N14, Baltimore, Md.

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STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND CHARGES BATTERIES INSTANTLY. GIVES NEW LIFE AND PEP. IMMENSE DEMAND. BIG PROFITS. LIGHTNING CO., ST. PAUL, MINN.

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MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. \$10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS. BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. SWIGART & CO., M-1276, FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING, CHICAGO.

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MEN—WOMEN, 18 UP. Government Jobs. \$105.00—\$280.00 month. Steady. Common education usually sufficient. Valuable book with list positions—sample coaching—FREE. Write immediately. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. P-1, Rochester, N. Y.

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HELP WANTED—FEMALE

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INVENTORS—WRITE FOR OUR GUIDE BOOK, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for inspection and instructions free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

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Keep your teeth clean, of course. But when you brush your teeth brush gums vigorously with the dentifrice made for the purpose . . . Forhan's for the Gums.

The formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S., this dentifrice helps to firm gums and keep them sound. As you know, disease seldom attacks healthy gums. In addition it cleans teeth and protects them from acids that cause decay.

Visit your dentist at least once every six months. And start brushing teeth and gums with Forhan's, every morning, every night. The immediate results will delight you. Get a tube from your druggist today, 35c and 60c.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's

for the gums


YOUR TEETH ARE ONLY AS HEALTHY AS YOUR GUMS

WILL YOU . . “Deliver the Goods” if we pay you **BIG MONEY?**

IT doesn't matter whether you are a crack salesman or just think you can be, whether you make \$125 a week or \$25. Here is the greatest chance you ever had to make more money, big money, every week the year through!

“Delivering the goods” is exactly all there is to it. In a few weeks the men of America will be reading large-space national advertising about the most remarkably low priced line of high quality, tailored clothing ever presented to them—August Nogar's new line of beautifully textured, smartly cut, made-to-measure suits and overcoats, for general wear, at prices as low as \$26.50.

That means “hot leads” to keep you busy, customers ready to buy the moment you show them samples. Experience entirely unnecessary.

FREE kit that shows you just how to do it and makes it easy to sell everybody, goes now to first to apply. Don't procrastinate. Get the facts. Send this coupon now!

NOGAR CLOTHING MFG. CO.,
Reading, Pa., Dept. 44

Send me by return mail your FREE kit which will show me how to make big money through the remarkable new Nogar proposition.

Name

Address

City State

A letter with this coupon telling more about yourself will be much appreciated.



Feed away the Wrinkles

WRINKLES appear when the flesh and tissues under the skin become soft or lifeless. Babies and children never have wrinkles; their flesh is firm and live

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For three generations women have used Dr. Charles' Flesh Food. 50c the box, \$1 the jar, at any druggist.

Dr. Charles FLESH FOOD

This coupon will bring you a **FREE** sample jar of Dr. Charles Flesh Food. Dr. Charles Flesh Food Co., Dept. A. F. D. 220-36th Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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Save \$10 to \$25 on the Mead Bicycle you select from 44 styles, colors and sizes.

30 Days Free Trial We ship on approval. If not satisfied after trial return the bicycle. We make no charge for wear and tear during trial period.

Free lamp, wheels, equipment at half actual prices. Write for marvelous new prices, wonderful 30 day trial offer and terms.

Mead CYCLE COMPANY Write us today for free catalog
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MAX BRAND

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A rapid-fire tale of the West, full of action, suspense, dramatic conflict and romance.

Read it in

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For MAY

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\$25
A WEEK

MECHANICAL DENTISTRY

Learn in a few months to make plates, crowns, bridges, etc., for dentists. No books. Day or night schools in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Boston, Philadelphia. Write for Free Book.

MCCARRIE SCHOOL OF MECHANICAL DENTISTRY
1338 S. Michigan Avenue Dept. 274 Chicago, Illinois

Play for Money

It's Fun!

PLAY in a dance orchestra! It's the most enjoyable way to make extra money—\$10 to \$50 weekly in spare time. Meet new people. Make new friends. Be the welcome guest at every party.

You can do it with the **OCTOFONE**—Eight Instruments in One. Can be tuned and played like a "uke", tenor banjo, tenor guitar, mandolin, mandola, mando-cello, tippie or taro-patch.

Easy for Beginners—Free Instruction Book shows you.

OCTOFONE
FREE INSTRUCTION BOOK!

\$15.00

No obligation. Mail coupon to:

Regal Musical Instrument Co.

3211 W. Grand Ave., Dept. 1102E, Chicago



"I Lay Off Sweets and smoke Lucky Strikes"

"Mickey" Cochrane
Voted Most Valuable Player
American League 1928.

Gordon S. Cochrane



"Spring training is going to be a cinch—I won't have to take off any weight. Instead of growing fat and flabby, I'm going to be full of 'pep' because I lay off sweets and smoke Lucky Strikes. The marvelous toasted flavor of Luckies brings complete enjoyment and relaxation. I'm strong for Luckies—they bat .400 in the cigarette league."

GORDON S. COCHRANE

THE modern common sense way—reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet. Thousands are doing it—men keep healthy and fit, women retain a trim figure. Lucky Strike, the finest tobaccos, skilfully blended, then toasted to develop a flavor which is a delightful alternative for fattening sweets.

Toasting frees Lucky Strike from impurities. 20,679 physicians recognize this when they say Luckies are less irritating than other cigarettes. That's why folks say: "It's good to smoke Luckies."

Note: Authorities attribute the enormous increase in Cigarette smoking to the improvement in the process of Cigarette manufacture by the application of heat. It is true that during 1928, Lucky Strike Cigarettes showed a greater increase than all other Cigarettes combined. This confirms in no uncertain terms the public's confidence in the superiority of Lucky Strike.

"Mickey"
Cochrane
Star Catcher
Philadelphia
Athletics

Reach
for a
Lucky
instead
of a
sweet.

"It's toasted"

No Throat Irritation—No Cough.

© 1929, The American Tobacco Co., Manufacturers



A 10-minute rest-cure

When the sun is dropping low, and you come home a little worn by the pace of the day—

Then—to the tub where Ivory cheerily sails upon the crest of your own snug sea!

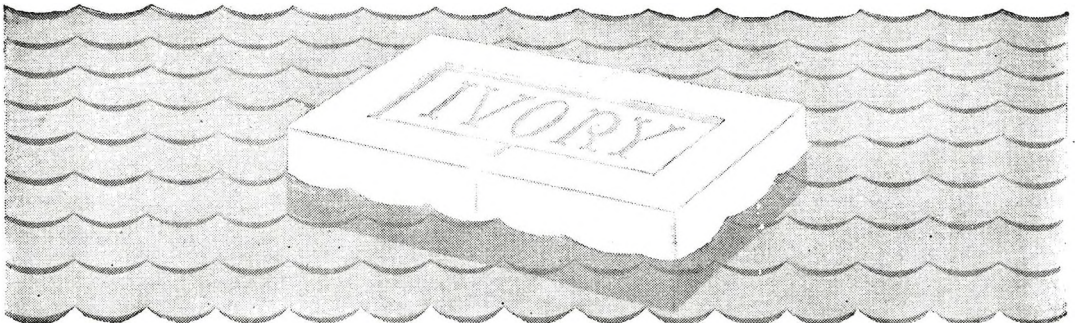
Kindly the water cradles you, covers you warm and deep. To you comes rest as soothing as sleep. . . .

Slowly you turn. Luxuriously you clothe yourself with rainbow raiments of Ivory foam. And then, if you're still too delight-

fully lazy for even one splash, you merely need to slip down . . . down . . . till the water encircles your chin. So easily is that rich Ivory coat entirely rinsed away!

Why is an Ivory bath so restful? Because Ivory lathers and rinses and floats so pleasantly, of course. But the best answer comes after you've toweled yourself dry. How smooth and silken and refreshed your skin feels! *That* is because Ivory is kind enough to be a baby-soap.

. . . kind to everything it touches • 99⁴⁴/₁₀₀ % Pure • "It floats"



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

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 202

SATURDAY, APRIL 6, 1929

NUMBER 5



Every struggle of the mountaineer caused his captor to apply more pressure to the tortured arm

The Master of Airlie

Old General Peyton, of Lee's army, cast a bombshell in the ranks of Virginia aristocracy when he picked the heir for Airlie—but he never guessed what havoc the explosion would cause

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Drums of Peace," "Heartbreak Trail," etc.

PROLOGUE

MRS. NOEL PEYTON was "The Signora" to all the scandalized Peytons of Airlie; never Signora Peyton, and was Mrs. Noel Peyton only when it was incumbent on the family to perform a conventional presentation.

1 A

The Signora flung away a cigarette petulantly and rose from a decrepit veranda-chair to stalk dramatically about the terrace in unrestrained agitation.

"No—no—no—no! I do *not* see!" she cried, in the precisely articulated English of the educated European, as she glared with her fine, disquieting

eyes at grim and uncompromising Robert Peyton. "I do not see that my husband should now live forever in this—this so strange place; to live here, for that he is Noel Peyton. You do not know, Robert! We have live' in Firenze—so beautiful, so fine! At Como we have live', and in Capri—and you think very strange we do not prefer to live here at your Airlie. Sometimes, yes, it is green, you say—but I see nothing but gray forests and old cotton fields, and those animals—those dogs that do not bark, but moan and cry—"

"Those dogs!" exclaimed the handsome Colonel Robert impatiently. "The Airlie pack has been famous for five generations, Signora. The baying of hounds is sweetest music to the ear of a sportsman. You have fine packs on the Continent, for that matter."

"Be calm, Emilia! Please sit down," Noel Peyton implored patiently and quietly. "What's the use of quibbling about dogs? It's not the dogs, it's not the cotton or the dried-up woods," he added, turning his gentle smile upon his younger brother. "We're nomads, Emilia and I, and we've been here at Airlie a month. The road is calling us, and it's time we were moving on."

"Since the Peytons left the court of Charles the First and adventured to the colonies," said Colonel Robert pompously, "the family has never produced such an oddity as you are, Noel. You're an exotic—it seems almost that you're neither Virginian nor American. It's always been useless to argue with you, but it should be enough, I think, that the general wants you here. You're the next head of our house, and the master of Airlie belongs at Airlie. These—these vagaries of yours are very wearing on the general."

"I'm sorry for father—sorry to be such a disappointment to him," said Noel gravely. "I don't know where I got it; I'm a strange throw-back for this family; but I've had to roam. I

love Airlie, and Virginia, and America—but I love the world too. I know how hard this Spanish War hit the general: he couldn't go, and my absence made it all more bitter. But you know how it was: I was on that sailing vessel, and she couldn't make any better time. The little war was over when I got here, but I did my best."

"It was hard on the general that the sword of the Peytons had to be offered to their country by the youngest son," said the colonel heavily. "But he was comforted, thank God! when he saw me at the head of my regiment."

"Even though you didn't get farther than Tampa," Noel chuckled, a little cruelly, sensing the approach of one of the colonel's exalted moments, with the menace of emotion and rhetoric.

"I—I beg your pardon!"

"Forgive me, Bob! I know you were a splendid soldier, but I was always pricking your balloons, you know. You're the grand *seigneur*, the landed proprietor, the lord of the manor. I'm nothing but a shabby sort of a tramp. You mustn't mind if I'm a bit envious."

"Why be envious? Your demesne is here waiting for you. You are the heir, Noel, and I'm doing all I can to persuade you to come back to your own. The Peytons have never been jealous or grasping. You'll be the head of the house, and it will be my pleasure to pay you homage."

"Ah, so much talk!" moaned the Signora, who had solaced herself with a furious consumption of cigarettes. "Santa Lucia! I should die in this place. Better we should live in Algiers; there we should see something!"

"The Peyton womenfolk have always come to Airlie thankfully, and been proud of it!" declared Robert indignantly.

"Let's not quarrel!" protested his brother. "You and Emilia could never understand each other, Bob; she's a gypsy like myself, and you can't

domesticate wild creatures like us. No, we can't stay here. We must move on; there are continents that we haven't seen, rivers and oceans still unknown to us. I'm sorry, old boy, but I'll have to tell father just that. It might as well be now."

HE left Emilia with his brother and went to his father's room on the second floor of the great house. The general—one of Lee's brigade commanders—was seated before an open fire with a plaid rug spread over his knees, though the day was sunny and mild. The eagle eyes rarely gleamed, now, through the lenses of the spectacles, and the beard, once so smartly trimmed, was growing rank and white and patriarchal.

The old man raised his head and stared at his eldest son. Noel had never looked like the men of Airlie. There were lines in his face that told of hardship and experience, but it was still a delicate, sensitive face. Some might have found it womanish, some might have called it weak, but the general never would admit that a Peyton could be either weak or effeminate. He glanced, however, with disapproval at the Windsor tie sprawling over the foreign-looking waistcoat of his wandering artist son.

"Well, well," he said, "you told me that you'd be making up your mind about this business, Noel."

"That's why I've come to your room alone, sir. I'd like to please you, father—I've so rarely done anything to please you—but it seems that our ways always diverge. Robert is the man for Airlie, and I'm not; I'm the black sheep—the runaway sheep; I'm hopeless."

The general made as though to rise, but sank back and sighed heavily.

"I should have known it. What more could I expect of you, suh? It's always yo' will—never mine! Yo're mother—dear creature, she's a saint in Heaven!—but she gave me two strange

sons, you and Claude. Noel and Claude! She gave you those names. I named Robert myself, and he's a Peyton in every fiber of his being."

Noel reflected grimly that the Peytons had ever ascribed peculiar developments in the race to the unhappily necessary admixture of the blood of less exalted families. The general went on:

"Poor Claude is living—or existing—with his mountain woman, in their mountain home. An outcast, an exile, a pariah!" the old man went on bitterly. "And you—the eldest son!—go rambling over the waste places of the earth, painting pictures! And you come home to us with this—this foreigner, this Italian woman, smoking cigarettes and talking gibberish, and tell us she's your wife."

"If I were a true Peyton I should resent that, father," Noel said quietly, "but I understand your feelings, and I forgive you. Emilia is the daughter of Cavaliere Steretti, as I told you. Her father was a soldier, knighted for gallantry in battle. The family is as good in Italy as the Peytons ever were in America. But we'll have to let that pass. It seems that Claude and I were fated to disappoint you, in all manner of ways. Claude went into the mountains and found a pretty face. I'm proud of him because he was man enough to marry the woman he loved."

"Did yo' ever know a Peyton to do a dishonorable act, suh?" the general challenged sharply. "Of course he married the creature, and I've never blamed him for that; but he should never have yielded to his animal instincts. Robert is a Peyton, and he has the head of the Peytons. Here are these lovely little Enderby girls, our friends and neighbors, all setting their caps for 'im, but do you think he'll lose his heart for any of 'em? No, suh! They're poor as church mice, and so are we! Their place is going to ruin, and so is Airlie. It's no time for a love match. Robert will marry Susan

Fothergill, of Richmond; they're as good as betrothed. She's a fine woman—a little older than Robert, but that's nothing. There'll be a dowry, and she and Robert will make Airlie habitable again.

"Don't smile!" he snapped, as he caught a fleeting smirk on the face of his son. "A dowry's not to be despised. We were ruined in a great cause. Any true woman of the South would be proud to match her fortune with the name of our family."

"Of course, of course!" Noel agreed, yielding to the tradition. "I understand, sir. Robert is a good fellow, and the proper master for Airlie; he'll do the proper thing, always—even if it's the getting of a dowry. I've often wished I could earn money and do something toward restoring Airlie, but I'm not much of a business man. My pictures sell rather well now, in Paris, but—"

"We have never been in business!" the old man reminded him sternly. "And we have never painted ridiculous things on canvas for money. If Airlie were restored, and we could employ labor, the plantation would safeguard the family fortunes. Robert will take care of that, you may be sure."

WHEN Noel returned to the terrace he found Wallace Enderby, brother of the "lovely little Enderby girls," engaged in a lively exchange of badinage with Emilia. Robert was smiling politely, but he was bored and annoyed; the dramatic ways of his alien sister-in-law were inimical to his peace of mind.

"Hello, Noel!" Wallace cried gayly. "I say, the Signora is a caution, isn't she? Quite a bit of a wit, too, by Jove! She's had me on the gridiron here for the last half hour, I assure you."

Noel replied with his patient smile, but all things bore out his conviction that he and Emilia could never stay long at Airlie. It was a moribund

estate, gone to seed; and the people in and about Airlie were gone to seed.

The first of the Enderbys had been, according to history, a British baronet, a soldier and courtier, but young Wallace was merely a well-dressed countryman. He was without knowledge of the world beyond his hills; he regarded Emilia as a curiosity, and appraised her as he did his hunters, hounds, and bird dogs.

"How did you find the general?" Robert inquired frankly, for Wallace Enderby was an intimate, familiar with the household secrets.

"Much the same as ever," Noel answered wearily. "Poor old chap! We shouldn't have come, you know; it has made it worse for him. The sooner we're gone the better. I'll pack our traps and be off, to-morrow, I think."

Robert sighed profoundly. It was pleasant for him to think of Airlie as his own, but there was something irritating about the indifference of the rightful heir; there was no zest of victory when the prize was won without a struggle.

"I can only say I'm sorry for you, Noel. Too bad you can't let the Signora rest here awhile. I wonder when we'll see you-all again. Where will you go? Some new place, I'll be bound!"

"Some new place!" echoed Noel thoughtfully. "Yes, I dare say. Poor Emilia is ready for her dear Florence, but there are strange cities, strange countries, and new waters to explore—"

"For my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset
And the baths of all the western stars
Until I die.

It may be that the floods will wash us
down,

It may be we shall see the Happy
Isles,

And meet the brave Achilles whom we
knew."

Emilia listened with sympathetic approval, nodding and smiling. Colonel Robert was bored, and he exchanged

glances of secret annoyance with Wallace Enderby, who considered Noel a specimen scarcely less curious than the Signora.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE MYSTERIOUS EAST.

GENERAL JOHN PEYTON, of a long-lived race, lived even longer than the other sturdy galants of his line. There were persons of mature age near Airlie and about Peytonville who could not remember seeing him save as an old man. He had served with distinction as a general officer in the armies of the Confederacy, he observed the prosecution of the Spanish War as a critic and a sage, yet the World War found him still observing, still keenly critical and alert.

The World War was a source of irritation for him; the methods were beyond his comprehension, and the decline of the house of Peyton was too obvious to be ignored. The Peytons were a race of generals, leaders, but Robert went out in '98 as a mere colonel of a regiment, and in 1917 Robert's son Arthur sailed for France in the uniform of a lieutenant, while "Jeb," son of the outcast Claude, was a private in the ranks.

It was all discordantly tuned to the minor key of the last stanzas of the Peyton saga, and the general sat in his large, low chair on the veranda with the plaid rug across his knees, looking like a venerable Wotan as he contemplated the twilight of his race.

Arthur Peyton came home from New York at the Yuletide of 1922, and there was a gathering of the clan at Airlie. Robert's other child, Jessica, was at home for the holiday allowed by the Maryland boarding school where she was being "finished," and even the two orphan children of the now lamented Claude were permitted to come as privileged country cousins.

For ten years every Christmas had

been regarded as the probable last one for the general, but now he was failing fast, the pale light in the old eyes flickering and dying down.

The patriarch seemed disposed to make his adieus and put his house in order for the end. Early in the fall he had asked Colonel Robert to summon home the wandering Noel Peyton, and a letter went across wide seas to the last known address of the general's eldest son.

No word had come from Noel for some twenty years, and it was recalled with vague regret that the general expressed no desire to hear from him when they parted with anger on the one side and calm defiance on the other. Robert never regarded Noel with approval, and made no effort to keep track of the wanderer and his Italian wife.

Noel's paintings, however, gave evidence from time to time that he existed and prospered after a fashion. They were reproduced in art journals, and seemed to have been done in strange islands of the South Seas. Some critics remarked that they were suggestive of the bizarre products of that other wanderer, Paul Gauguin, though more restrained and conventional in line and color.

Robert felt little expectation of a response to his far-flung message, but, as mysteriously as many things come out of the East, a letter was delivered at Airlie on Christmas Eve, when all were gathered about the log fire in the drawing room, and Judge Wallace Enderby and his pretty daughter Louise had dropped in for an hour of sociability.

"This," announced the colonel, in solemn gravity, "is from Batavia, in Java. It may be from Noel."

"How very interesting!" exclaimed Susan, his wife.

"From Noel!" exclaimed the old general, seated close to the hearth, and began to fidget, his thin blue lips quivering as he muttered to himself.

"I'm glad if there's one artistic and interesting person in the family still alive!" young Jessica whispered to her friend Louise.

"I'm sorry to announce," sighed the colonel, scanning the opened letter, "that my brother is no longer living."

"Indeed! How very sad!" murmured his wife, rigidly conventional even in the home circle.

All eyes turned upon the general, but he scarcely moved. He was a veteran stoic, and Robert knew, in breaking the bad news, that he would not give way to weak emotion.

"Well, well, Noel was a good fellow!" Judge Enderby remarked, and fixed his placid, genial countenance in an expression of appropriate gravity. "I never will forget his wife—the Signora; she was a case!"

"Rather prominent socially in her own country, I believe," said Mrs. Peyton, coldly polite. "I never had the pleasure of meeting her, but many aristocratic Italians come to Richmond and I have found them most charming."

"THIS letter," announced the colonel, "is apparently from Noel's son."

"Noel's son!" cried the general, in his thin, piping voice. "When did Noel have a son, pray? Why wasn't I told he had a son?"

"You must remember, father, that we haven't heard from Noel in over twenty years. This letter is from one John Peyton. Please note the baptismal name, sir. It is well written; it's the letter of a gentleman."

"The Peytons have generally written like gentlemen, haven't they?" challenged the old man. "Is the letter of so private a nature that it may not be read to us? The time to discuss a letter, it seems to me, is when it's been read and considered."

"I was about to read it, father. I believe we're all sincerely interested. I took the liberty, sir, of preparing you

for the unexpected news. It says: 'My dear Colonel Peyton: I beg that you will attribute the formality with which I address you to the reticence and restraint which I believe are characteristic of all the men of my father's family. As you are my father's brother, and my uncle, I would tender you my most dutiful respects, but as you have never been informed of my existence I naturally shrink from introducing myself too abruptly, or with too much assurance.'

"In answer to your letter to my father, lately received by me, I have to give you the melancholy news that he died on July the twenty-ninth of this year. He had been very active for some ten years in commercial enterprises here in Java, though he never relaxed in his earnest enthusiasm for artistic pursuits, and it is my belief that he died from a gradual exhaustion of his not too abundant vitality. The immediate cause of his death, however, was a tropical fever to which he succumbed after three days' illness."

"It's certainly a formal letter!" exclaimed Jessica. "It sounds like one of those most-obedient-humble-servant epistles of George Washington's days."

"That bird writes like a perfect lady, if you ask me!" muttered young Jeb contemptuously.

"No one did ask you!" thundered the colonel. "Be good enough to reserve your opinions until they are requested, sir."

"Go on with the letter, Robert," ordered the general, in tremulous agitation, and his thin, waxlike fingers kept up an incessant tattoo on the arms of his chair. "If these young folks have any respect for their elders and their betters, they'll hold their tongues."

"I will go on, sir. And I shall appreciate freedom from interruption."

"My nephew continues:

"My dear mother, to whom you so courteously refer, died four years ago, and the bereavement told heavily

on my father. I have neither brother nor sister, and my sense of loneliness is acute, but it is comforting to know that I have kinsmen, even though they dwell on the other side of the globe.

"Pardon me if I assume that it may interest you to learn that I was born in nineteen hundred and one, in the hill town of Bandung where my father and mother had their villa. My early education was received from private tutors, both English and Dutch, and later I took degrees in the university and the technical college at Sydney, New South Wales."

"The fellow's nobody's fool, at any rate," remarked Judge Enderby.

The colonel scowled slightly, but acknowledged the tribute with a nod, as he continued reading:

"At the present time I am engaged in carrying on, to the best of my ability, the trade and export business that my father established and made moderately successful, and it is my intention to remain in Java, this beautiful land to which my father was so devoted.

"My most important message for you, sir, is that my father never ceased to speak of you and my venerated grandfather with deep and sincere respect and affection while he lived. How much he deplored his separation from you, and a certain estrangement, perhaps I alone am capable of estimating. His profound love for his family and for his native State of Virginia colored even his happy family life with a gentle melancholy, and inspired me with a wholesome awe of that ancestral home which is scarcely more tangible to me than a beautiful tradition. He spoke often of his desire to see you and his father once again, and he drew comfort from the thought that his father still lived—an inference sustained by the protracted dearth of news from home. So hopefully did he cherish the idea of ultimately paying you a visit, that he selected and put aside certain souvenirs of his life in Java, together with a small collection

of his own paintings of our mountain scenery. These things I have made into a packet, and it will go forward to you by the next steamer.

"With profound respect I venture to tender my greetings and best wishes for happiness to my grandfather and to you, and I am, my dear sir, yours very dutifully, John Peyton."

"WHAT a perfectly ripping letter!" cried Louise Enderby, with the fervor that one who looked into her brown eyes never doubted.

"A spiffy letter!" seconded Jessica Peyton. "I'm right proud of Cousin John—even if I never did hear of him before."

"Have you no sense of delicacy, Jessica?" reproved her mother. "It is indeed an admirable letter, but it brings us, as it were, into the very presence of death and sorrow."

"It is fitting," rumbled the colonel, "that my father should be the first to offer an opinion."

The general's poor old hands now rested quiet on the arms of his chair, but his head was bowed and tears crept down the deep furrows in his cheeks.

"Po' lil ol' Noel!" he mumbled brokenly, his Southern accent particularly marked under the stress of emotion. "Noel was the oldest, but seems like he was always the baby—an' now—he's gone—po' lil feller. But his boy is a true Peyton!" he declared, rousing himself. "I'm right proud o' that boy! That letter—that letter, suh, might have been written by my grandfather himself—General Sylvester Peyton. That boy—he must come right home! Home to Airlie. But—Java. Java, is it? That's a right smart ways off, an' I—"

"I shall write him at once, father," said the colonel briskly. "We shall get him here if it's possible, you may be sure. He's evidently quite satisfied with his remote island, and it appears he's occupied with business, but—"

"Business?" queried the general testily. "I don't reckon it's exactly business, Robert. Trade and expo't, he says. I reckon it's mo' like—like a plantation, suh."

"We shall do our best to fetch him, sir," said the colonel.

"Send that no-count fella a ticket, an' watch 'im hot-foot it to get here!" exploded Jeb Peyton. "I seen the kind o' cake-eaters that writes them mushy letters; I know 'em!"

"Silence, you insufferable whelp! roared the colonel, his plethoric face going purple.

"Please don't mind him, Uncle Robert!" pleaded Jeb's sister, the delicate, white-faced Julia, darting to the colonel's side and placing her thin hands timidly on his arm. "He doesn't realize how rude he is. He's never had a chance. We're nothing but mountain folks, Jeb and I."

"Speak for yo'self, sis!" growled her brother. "I may be what they call a guest o' this house, but I reckon I got the rights of a he-man to speak up fo' myself. I'm right sick o' hearin' nothin' but what a wonderful fam'ly this yere is—all 'cept'n' us from the mount'ns. I'm right proud I ain't no dude nor no cake-eater."

"Help me—help me to my room, Arthur!" gasped the general, struggling to rise. "Is it—is it possible this is Airlie? Can such scenes be enacted in my house? It's time—time indeed, suh, that I was goin'."

Mrs. Peyton, shocked beyond words, glided to the door, beckoning to her son.

The gentle, well-bred Arthur supported the old man tenderly and led him from the room, and as the door closed behind them the colonel turned upon his nephew in righteous fury.

"It's night, suh," he fumed, "but the laws of hospitality do not apply to low-down brutes. Yo' are no longer welcome in my house, suh!"

"Don' yo' worry about me, colonel," Jeb sneered. "I'm goin' fast enough.

I don't set so much store by this yere Airlie. My daddy wa'n't welcome yere, an' I don't reckon I want'er be neither. Yo' an' yore hospertality! That fer 'em!"

He snapped his fingers offensively close to the colonel's nose, and the master of Airlie breathed gustily until his impressive form seemed inflated.

Young Arthur returned in time to see his sire raise a mighty arm above the head of the offender, and he darted across the room in quick anxiety.

"Get out, Jeb!" he said practically, without anger. "Haven't you any sense? Get out—now, Jeb."

"Huh! Loo-tenant Peyton!" grunted the mountaineer. "The loo-tenant reckons he can give orders to the buck private. I wa'n't no off'cer, an' I never did want'er be; but th' war's done been fought an' finished—all 'cept'n' this yere war!"

He made a pass at Arthur, and the latter stepped back and put up his hands. It was what Jeb wanted, and he swung on his cousin and planted a crushing blow on the point of his chin.

Arthur staggered back, crumpled, and lurched forward to the floor. Jeb leaped blithely over a chair, darted through the door, and ran from the house, uttering peals of raucous laughter.

"**H**E'S no kin o' me or mine!" roared the colonel. "I'll shoot that low-down houn' dog if ever he crosses my path again."

Julia collapsed, sobbing hysterically, and the other girls flew to comfort her.

"Don't take on so, honey!" pleaded Jessica. "I jus' wish I'd had a whip to put on that brother o' yours—but you're a dear, sweet thing, Julia, an' we love you just the same."

"Buck up, old girl!" urged Louise Enderby. "It's always the men folks; they make all the trouble, and I just don't bother with 'em. Come, Julia, you'll just ruin your poor eyes, and they're too nice for that."

The door of the outer room opened and shut, and young Roderick Marbury stumbled into the circle, groaning and holding his hands to his face. He was the beau and dandy of Peytonville, and it amazed the company to see his cravat awry and his hair rumpled.

"Roddy, child! Whatever's wrong with you?" cried Louise, with maternal solicitude, though she was his junior by three years.

"That—that beast of a Jeb Peyton!" he answered in desperate rage and anguish. "I—I met him right out here—and I asked him why he was bowling along at such a rate—and he hit me! Right in the face! I'll have him arrested. I'll sue him for assault, too. I don't care if he is a Peyton! I'll—I won't—"

"Yo' poor lamb!" crooned Louise. "Was um out all alone in the dark without um's mammy? Did the bad big man hit um's nose and make it all bloody?"

"Oh, I say now," protested Roderick, "you needn't make such a joke of it, Lou. I was taken unawares. I'd have given the brute what was comin' to him if he hadn't been so quick."

The colonel and Judge Enderby lifted Arthur gently and placed him in a chair, and as the young man's senses returned he vaguely comprehended something of Roderick's plight.

"You, too, Rod?" he murmured, with a feeble smile. "Great Scott, we're a precious pair to be flung about and mauled by that cousin of mine."

Judge Enderby chuckled politely, but rolled his eyes toward the colonel.

"If I remember rightly, Bob," he said, "you and I were a little quicker on the trigger in our day than these youngsters are."

"I vow I can find no humor in it, Wallace!" Robert replied sharply. "This is Airlie! No one shall say that my son isn't a fine fellow, but—the old blood! The old fire! Where are they? Forgive me, Arthur, but I wonder if the only true Peyton of your genera-

tion is that son of Noel and his signora—John Peyton! A Peyton not of Airlie, but of Java, in the antipodes!"

CHAPTER II.

HEAD OF THE HOUSE.

A STOUT chest of teakwood came to Airlie, crammed with strange gifts from Java, that extraordinary island with its mixtures of barbaric Malay and effete European culture. There were batik prints for decoration and costume, murderous crises of steel inlaid with silver and copper, and some examples of the bizarre pottery of the natives. The personal note was emphasized by a half dozen paintings of small size, each bearing the signature of Noel Peyton.

The artist's style had matured in his years of exile and there were suggestions of the delicate coloring and line of the Chinese painters. Mrs. Peyton scrutinized the picture labeled "The Falls of Chi Tarum," with the aid of her lorgnette, and remarked that it might have been done by the Japanese master, Hiroshige, but for a certain Caucasian fidelity to the facts of nature.

She decided at once that the public should share her pleasure by means of an exhibition to be given in one of the galleries of Richmond, and wrote to a connoisseur of her acquaintance that the last Noel Peyton was beyond doubt the James McNeil Whistler of the twentieth century.

"I don't know much about real art," said Judge Wallace Enderby, "but I do know that Rosa Bonheur's 'Horse Fair' is right and correct, and Harrison Weir could sure paint dogs for me. Well, I reckon poor old Noel was all right: the colors look kind of pale, but I've seen waterfalls that looked a whole lot like that one."

Most of the treasures were placed temporarily in the general's upstairs sitting room, and the old man gloated

over them, refusing to leave them when he was urged to sit in the sunshine on the terrace. He recalled now a thousand and one engaging traits of the Noel of early years, and at his command the letter from Noel's son was read again, not once, but a dozen times.

Arthur Peyton had returned to his work in New York, and Jessica was back at school, but the general seemed scarcely to miss them, though they were his pets. He dwelt continually, in talk and dreams, upon the John Peyton of the letter, and the faithful Colonel Robert responded kindly to his moods and betrayed no paternal jealousy.

The general conceived the idea of obtaining a disinterested person's report on John Peyton, and the colonel squandered money on a cablegram to a United States consul at Singapore, who was known to be a Virginian.

In time the consul cabled the results of his investigation: in effect, John Peyton was of good report in commercial circles; no man was his superior in integrity and excellence of character.

The general was in an ecstasy of pride and enthusiasm, and he talked much of himself after that, and poured confidence into the ear of Judge Enderby.

When the magnolia blossoms and the bluebirds and cardinals came in the spring to Airlie, vitality glowed once more in the shrunken frame, and the patriarch declared that John Peyton must be brought across the seas for the next Christmas.

"We must see the boy, Robert. You're the best son a man could have, Bob, and Arthur is a good lad, but you know the Peyton tradition, my son. The Peytons and Airlie! Your brother Claude disgraced us, and that brat of his is a reproach to the name. Arthur's a good lad, I say, but he let that black-guard strike him, and didn't shoot him as the dog deserved."

"Spare me that, sir," sighed the colonel, meek as a boy in his father's

presence. "I have that cross to bear. Arthur's a New Yorker now, and might as well be a damned Yankee, born and bred. I felt it would be that way; he's after money—willing to mix with the rag, tag, and bobtail of the city, for the sake of material gain. The spirit is gone when the cavalier mixes with the rabble."

So they talked and speculated brightly or dismally upon the future, and in June the general waxed stronger in body and mind, till he walked alone in the garden on fair days. But black Samson, the Airlie butler, called him for breakfast one morning and received no response; and when the colonel came running to Samson's call, they found that the warrior had departed in the night to join his comrades of the braver days—perhaps to make a journey to Java and see with new eyes the son of Noel Peyton.

WALLACE ENDERBY paid a formal call to Airlie after the funeral, with his jovial countenance disciplined to a painful solemnity. Arthur and Jessica had come home, and the family gathered in the drawing-room, for it would have been unseemly, even in the summer heat, to hold conference on the terrace.

"I'll proceed to read yo'-all the last will and testament of the late General John Peyton," the judge said gently, "but I might as well tell you first off, Robert, that the general left Airlie to Noel's son John."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Mrs. Peyton, and put up her lorgnette to make certain that the speaker was indeed Judge Enderby, and not an impostor.

"I'm flabbergasted, that's all!" cried the impulsive Jessica.

The colonel rose from his chair, breathing deeply.

"Not a word! Not another word, if you please. Whatever will my father made—is the *will* of my father, General Peyton, and there's no more to be

said. He was a wise and just man, a man of transcendent nobility, and I stand ready to meet any person who would question his judgment."

"All right, father," said Jessica. "It must be all right, if you say so. But I hope you and mother won't be simply outraged if I want to earn my own living, like Northern girls."

"Don't be ridiculous, dear!" groaned the mother. "We have been happy at Airlie, but this is no terrible catastrophe; we have the house in Richmond, thanks to my dear mother, and your father and I have often thought of living there in winter. Without any disrespect to Airlie, I dare say we shall be more comfortable in Richmond."

"Pardon me, my dear," said her husband gravely, "but is this to be a discussion of our personal comfort? I had thought it an occasion for more solemn business."

"We've heard all there is to it, haven't we?" queried the irrepressible Jessica. "Poor grandfather didn't have many millions to distribute."

"The poor old general was proud to be able to leave you and Arthur five hundred dollars apiece, Jessie," the judge announced softly. "There isn't much money, of course, but that's the case with all of us 'round here nowadays. There's three hundred for poor little Julia, too—but nothing for her wretched brother, of course. I tried my best to dissuade the general," he went on uncomfortably, "but he would leave three hundred dollars to my daughter, Louise, for—for a wedding present—with the hope, to use the general's own words, that she'd marry Mr. John Peyton and become the mistress of Airlie. This embarrasses me, my friends, but I feel the honor profoundly."

"As you well may, Wallace!" murmured the colonel reverently.

"That's too utterly absurd!" cried Jessica. "Lou was engaged to Arthur when she was ten years old, so that's that!"

"Jessica!" cried the colonel and his wife in unison.

"Well, well, we shall see what we shall see," the judge said patiently. "If it's your pleasure, I will read the document. There are some minor bequests, and—"

"I haven't heard any major bequests yet," blurted the indignant Jessica.

"Leave the room!" ordered her father, and she departed with her head tilted at a defiant angle.

The will was duly read, while the colonel and his wife sat with folded hands and listened gravely, and young Arthur lounged by the fireplace and mused whimsically upon what he heard. Then, the reading over, the colonel and the judge drove to Peytonville and prepared a cable message for John Peyton in Java, informing him that he was heir to the priceless domain of Airlie, without money or appreciable resources, but with more honor than is commonly accorded a single mortal.

"If there should be difficulties—complications!" sighed the judge, as the two composed the message. "Suppose the young man should find it inexpedient to leave Java and come to Airlie?"

"I cannot understand that thought, Wallace. He's a Peyton, I believe, and I never heard of a Peyton shirking his sacred duty."

"I beg yore pardon, Robert," said the judge contritely, and looked helplessly foolish.

So the cablegram was sent, and the submarine wires duly returned an acknowledgment: John Peyton, crown prince of Airlie, gave evidence that he was properly appreciative, and promised a letter with the full details of his immediate plans.

The letter came, and the colonel was proud and gratified. Again the son of Noel Peyton expressed himself elegantly and with appropriate dignity. He was adjusting his business affairs in Java and leaving them in trustworthy hands, he said, and would sail for

Virginia—it was noteworthy that he did not say America—by way of Sydney, Samoa, and the Panama Canal late in the fall. Thus he would spend Christmas at Airlie, even as the general had planned, and Robert sighed over the letter in solemn contentment.

THE family spent the summer at Airlie, for the warm weather was more endurable there than in Richmond, and the colonel insisted on making numerous minor repairs to the buildings. To a stranger, appraising the estate from a practical viewpoint, Airlie would have seemed valueless save for the twelve hundred acres of land; but to those that loved it, a little paint, some patches applied to roofs and walls, a new fence rail here and there, made it again “one of the show places of the Old South.”

Arthur was working in a broker's office in New York at fifty dollars a week, and Jessica was threatening to abandon respectable idleness and become a modern woman. In this menacing discontent Mrs. Peyton saw the degeneration of aristocracy and the fall of social institutions, and her apprehensions forced her to give a somewhat grudging support to her husband's quixotic devotion to the feudal tradition.

No one doubted that Robert would leave Airlie and Peytonville with tragical regret, but he was a Spartan—though a rather indolent and luxurious Spartan—and pride held him to an assumption of enthusiasm in his surrender of the manor to the new head of the clan. He could see in dreams, as his father had seen, a new life for Airlie with the introduction of new blood, and a possible regeneration of the faltering family.

“I have scarcely entertained the thought,” his wife said to him very privately, “but if this John Peyton proves to be really a person of distinction, and all that we hope he may be, it's possible that we might look higher

for him in the matter of marriage. Louise is a lovely, sweet girl, but the Enderby's have not—er—progressed, socially or in any other way, and there might be—”

“We shall present John to our Richmond friends this winter, of course,” said the colonel.

“Of course; but that was not what—not exactly my thought, Robert. The Peytons are naturally a sturdy race, and this young man brings in new blood; foreign blood, to be sure; but apparently good blood. If it should happen—”

“I see!” the colonel exclaimed, a little startled. “You mean Jessica. First cousins! We have never tolerated that sort of thing, but—yes, that very fact makes it a possibility, perhaps.”

“Your brother Noel went far afield for a wife, and it would bring back that branch of the family to the Peyton tradition, as it were, if such a match should be found desirable in every way.”

“We'll say no more about it,” the colonel decided, “but I shall think over it. I fancy Wallace is rather pleased with father's proposal, but such matters are really on the laps of the gods. I would do nothing to defeat that arrangement, for it was father's wish, but youngsters are peculiarly independent and headstrong these days.”

Autumn found the colonel strenuously occupied in setting the plantation in order. There was harvesting of grain and fruit and vegetables, pressing of cider, butchering of swine, gathering of winter firewood. Mrs. Peyton caused the family's personal property and effects to be made ready for shipment to Richmond, but was prepared to remain at Airlie indefinitely if developments should warrant such a course.

A cablegram announced the probable arrival of the new master early in December. His ship passed through the Panama Canal, and presently a telegram gave the approximate hour of

his coming. Arthur obtained a week's leave of absence from his employer, and Jessica hastened home; the welcome was to be a royal one.

The day dawned fair and mild; even the weather had regard for the occasions of the Peytons. Arthur was appointed to drive to the station in the antique family chariot and escort the personage to the house. The colonel debated the matter of going himself, but the scene that he pictured had him as the center of a group on the lawn, and the charming episode would be marred if he had to make a preliminary speech at the station and then repeat himself at the principal ceremony.

"You are a strangely independent young person, Jessica," the mother said good-humoredly, as they waited on the veranda, "but I hope that you will be—oh, very gracious to your Cousin John. First impressions, you know! He is, rather exceptionally, a stranger in a strange land, and we should make the reception a very hearty one."

"Don't be too clever with me, mother. Some of your diplomacy is a bit thin, you know. I've known for a month that you're all ready to marry me to this chap, and I declare I can't see anything in it. I haven't dedicated my life to Airlie, and my name is Peyton only until I see some advantage in changing it to Smith or Jones. It's all right to be a Peyton and ride around in a broken-down victoria, if you happen to think that way, but I'm willing to be vulgar and have a Rolls-Royce; I might even consider a good flivver as better than nothing."

Mrs. Peyton kept herself in control.

"You're too young, Jessica, for all this flippancy, and you're positively impudent and disrespectful. You may have an undutiful and incomprehensible attitude toward Airlie, and you may crave motor cars and other ostentatious things, but all that does not explain your skylarking about with that Marbury fellow. Roderick hasn't a

penny, and never will have, and he's a milksop."

"I didn't know I'd been skylarking with poor Roddy. The poor lamb is quite harmless. He happens to be the only passably polite and well dressed young man around here now."

"Hark! I hear the carriage," said Mrs. Peyton, rising and picking out the folds of her gown nervously.

"**S**USAN! Jessie! They're coming!" cried the colonel hoarsely, as he jerked at his cravat and stroked his fine mustache.

"Strike up the band!" jeered the young girl. "'Go, bid the soldiers shoot!'"

"Be still!" commanded her father. "Is nothing solemn to you? If you have any respect for me—"

"Dear old daddy! You know I adore and idolize you. But you're wasted on the desert air here; you should have been an English earl or a Russian grand duke."

"Don't be ridiculous!" he protested, scarcely knowing whether to be flattered or affronted.

And then he saw Wallace Enderby and Louise hurrying across the lawn, and he smiled happily and waved his hand to them; he had feared that they might be late or absent, and his heart was set on an audience for the approaching ceremony.

"Roddy ran over and told us the carriage was coming up the hill," said Louise. "He's coming, too, but he stopped in our house to slick his hair and brush his shoes. Pop and I thought we had loads of time, but the train must have been earlier than usual—couldn't have been more than a half hour late to-day."

"When the heir returneth,
Shall clang the bell.
Ding-a-ding-a-ding-dong, ding-a-dong-a-dey."

Jessica sang the lines from the "Chimes of Normandy," and grinned at Louise.

"You folks all make me a little weary. I'll be disgusted if the crown prince doesn't have a crown and a little ermine on him. No one knows what he looks like. Elegant diction and exquisite penmanship! I'll bet you two bits he's a little shrimp with near-sighted eyes and a cracked voice!"

"Watch out, Jess," Louise warned her. "We might all be in love with him an hour from now."

The heads of the two venerable coach horses bobbed into view over the edge of the little plateau on which the manor house stood, and the victoria followed, creaking and swaying with the inequalities of the sandy driveway.

Black Jason sat on the box with a little more than his customary dignity, and with nothing of his characteristic cheerfulness. There was something ominous in his hard solemnity.

The eager watchers saw Arthur seated on the near side, his hands folded and his face as immobile as Jason's, and with him was a young man of impressive stature and impressive mien. He was dressed quietly, but with the elegance of the European of distinction, in a dark traveling coat with a Homburg hat, and there was a walking stick between his knees.

Colonel Robert stepped out of the group that had gathered in compact formation on the lawn. He advanced with long, slow strides like a classic actor of the old school. He clicked his heels together with military smartness and doffed his wide-brimmed planter's hat with a graceful flourish.

"John Peyton!" he called out, in the rich voice of a commander of men. "You are welcome, sir, to the house of your fathers!"

The carriage stopped and Arthur got down and waited for the guest to alight. And still Arthur neither smiled nor spoke.

John Peyton had swept off his hat in quick acknowledgment of the colonel's hail, and now he stepped down upon the hallowed soil of Airrie.

Robert Peyton was advancing again, his left hand holding his hat, his right ready for an expansive gesture. He coughed and cleared his throat nervously, preparing for the opening words of an address that was to linger in the minds of the auditors.

But suddenly he was tongue-tied. He stared at his nephew. His lips parted, but no sound came forth.

The stranger, at the end of his journey from the other side of the world, paused and fell back a pace. For a man still in early youth he seemed uncommonly well-poised; there was no embarrassment in his manner, but he waited, turning to Arthur for guidance.

Arthur, however, gave him no help. His face was frozen and his limbs were paralyzed.

THE guest smiled slightly, doing his best to meet a tense moment in an awkward situation.

"You are surprised, sir?" he said to the colonel in a low voice, and his English was carefully enunciated, close-clipped, like that of one who has lived where many tongues are spoken.

The host passed his tongue over his dry lips.

"You must pardon me," he said thickly, and his stately dignity disappeared. "I am—yes, I am surprised, sir. I was not prepared—I can scarcely express myself. You—you do not look as I expected my brother's son to look."

"I must admit," said John Peyton gravely, "that I scarcely realized the impression I might create. One is accustomed to one's own appearance. My pride in my mother's race has made me glad that my color and features show so much of the Malay."

"*The Malay!*"

The colonel's exclamation was a cry, and the cry was echoed in lesser volume among the persons on the lawn.

"Malay!" Robert gasped again. "What do you mean by that, sir? In God's name, what do you mean?"

Arthur appeared to plead with his father by means of eloquent glances. His hands were clenched. He had dreaded the scene all through the drive from the station.

John Peyton, the youth with the golden-yellow skin, raven-black hair, and slightly slanting Oriental eyes, was the only self-possessed person at Airlie for the moment.

"I'm sorry, Colonel Peyton. I knew that my father did not write to you for many years, but I did not know that you were not informed of my breeding. My mother was a princess of Java—a native."

"Java! A native!" breathed the colonel, and his red face darkened toward purple. "But—my brother's wife was Italian. God! This is too much! What a damnable mess! Did my brother turn Mohammedan? Did he keep a harem?"

The smile faded from the stranger's face.

"My father was a Christian. My mother's people were Brahmins. They were of one of the ancient royal houses. But my mother was born a Christian. My father met her in the best European society of Batavia."

"You've explained nothing!" declared Robert sternly. "I tell you my brother's wife was Italian. She came here and lived among us. She was a civilized human being—not a heathen!"

A light flush passed over the yellow face and was gone.

"My father's first wife was an Italian, but she died. They were in Burmah. There was an epidemic of cholera, and she died. My father loved her; he mourned bitterly. He was a lonely man. He needed companionship. He met my mother in Batavia, and they loved each other. They were married at the palace of the governor general in Buitenzorg."

The colonel's fury was unabated.

"What a career!" he cried. "What a life for a Peyton! Tramping—paint-

ing pictures—hobnobbing with foreigners and cranks—and—and then marrying a yellow heathen!"

Mrs. Peyton stepped forward and spoke quietly, tremulously.

"This is all so public, Robert! The—this person must be tired after his journey. Shouldn't we ask him to step into the house?"

A sound of choking, gurgling, hysterical laughter burst from Jessica, and she started running away.

"And they were going to marry me to him!" she cried shrilly, as she ran and disappeared within the portico.

"I have never invited any person other than a white man into my house as a guest," the colonel said slowly. "I shall permit this man to use our carriage again. Jason will drive him to Peytonville, to the station or the hotel. They may be willing to give him shelter at the hotel."

"'Scuse me, Cun'l Robert," mumbled the black coachman from the box of the victoria, "but Ah jes' don' reckon Ah can do no such thing. No, suh! Ah never did have no truck with yaller folks 'thout they conjured me right out o' luck. Mah firs' wife was a yaller gal an' so was mah fo'th. Ah'm th'oo with 'em all! Ah'm a black man an' Ah serves white folks. Ah'm not mix-in' with no mo' yaller folks no mo', no, suh!"

THE colonel reached the carriage in three strides, snatched the coach whip from its socket, and raised it over the head of the terrified servant.

"Yo' damned, ornery black hound!" he yelled. "I'll teach you!"

"Don' yo' whup me, Cun'l Robert!" gasped Jason, slipping nimbly to the ground on the other side and cowering behind the carriage in terror. "Yo' jes' misun'erstood me, boss. Ah'm fixin' ter drive the gen'l'man jes' like yo' said. Ah nev' will open mah mouf agin lon's Ah live, Cun'l Robert. No, suh, boss."

Robert put the whip back in the socket, panting and mumbling in his excitement and confusion.

"Even the servants no longer respect the name of Peyton!" he groaned.

The young man from Java maintained a cold and solemn dignity. He was not perceptibly agitated, but his dark eyes flashed over the scene, glowing with ominous fire.

"I shall go to the hotel," he said. "You will not invite me into your house, yet the house belongs to me. I respect the brother of my father, but you have shown me neither courtesy nor decent consideration. I shall insist on my rights. I shall take possession of the property."

"It's an outrage!" cried the colonel, turning to Judge Enderby. "Can't you do something about it, Wallace? The fellow's a half-breed, a mongrel. He can't take Airlie."

Enderby stepped forward with a judicial air, regarding the stranger curiously.

"I'm not much on geography," he said, with the calm and tolerant manner of a trial lawyer. "I can't—somehow—figure you out, sir. All I know about Java, it's where the coffee comes from. I reckon you must be some kind of a Chinese, and ordinarily we haven't much use for 'em round here."

"Java has nothing to do with China," answered the visitor, taking the question quite seriously. "Our island has a population of over thirty millions, and many races are represented. The people of the highest civilization and culture, among the natives, are Malays, with a strain of the Hindu. Our language has in it much of the original Sanskrit, and our features show some Aryan characteristics."

The judge's eyes grew wide and interested.

"Um—I see, I see," he murmured. "Well, now, I knew all about that when I was in college, of course, but—"

"Let's have no nonsense," protested the colonel. "This fellow's father had a way of arguing all round about a matter until you were worn out with his chatter. I want the man off my place, and I don't want him to come back."

"But I shall come back," said John Peyton simply. "I am a subject of the Queen of the Netherlands, and I may consult her representative at Washington. I shall learn what procedure it is proper for me to take."

"We'd better go slow, Robert," counseled Enderby. "No need to get excited. I've got to look up some things about— Well, this is getting to be sort of an international affair, I reckon."

"The problem may best be left to properly qualified counsel, sir," remarked the visitor.

Suddenly the colonel swayed giddily, staggered, and leaned for support on the side of the carriage. He glared fiercely at the stoical young man from Java, clenched his fists, then relaxed weakly and began to groan and breathe stertorously.

"He's ill!" cried Enderby, and sprang forward just as Arthur leaped to catch his father in his arms.

Mrs. Peyton hurried to her husband's side, moaning and wringing her hands. "You see what you've done!" she said fiercely to John Peyton as she brushed past him.

CHAPTER III.

IMPENDING CONFLICT.

JOHN PEYTON walked from Airlie to the village. The coachman helped Arthur and Judge Enderby to carry the colonel into the house, and the unwelcome guest did not wait.

In the Peytonville streets it seemed that the people knew already of the sensational affair at the plantation. Some mysterious channels of communication had carried the exciting news.

The white people stood about the street corners in groups and nudged one another as John approached, and the negroes rolled their eyes and grinned broadly.

"That's the guy!" chirped a small boy.

"He's a yaller boy, like the Chink laundryman," observed another.

The little sharp-eyed man behind the desk at the hotel was far from inhospitable.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Peyton, we have a room for you. Glad to make your acquaintance, sir. Your baggage out at Airlie? Oh, the depot! I'll send a wagon round for it right off. I can just remember your father, Mr. Peyton.

"He sure was one fine gentleman. Perfect gentleman, yes, indeed! Reckon they're a little crowded out to Airlie, with the young folks home, but we sure will do our best to make you comfortable here, sir. Nice front room, second floor. And if you want a little privacy, Mr. Peyton, I'll arrange to have your meals sent up to you."

"You're very kind," said John Peyton, neither warming to the man's cordiality nor rebuking him. "It won't be necessary to have my meals served in my room; I shall be satisfied with the regular service."

The hotel was old and rather shabby, but repairs and improvements had been made from time to time.

The furniture of the various rooms was not uncomfortable, lavatories had taken the place of wash bowls and ewers, and there were extension telephones in the rooms, and electric lights.

John waited patiently for his trunks to be brought, sitting by the window and looking out on the village scene with casual interest. A man without Oriental blood might have withdrawn to deeper seclusion or even fled the country precipitately, but Javanese youths of his mother's caste were stu-

dents of the Orient's most profound books of philosophy, the "Bhagavad-gita" of the Hindus, the "Analects" of China's great teacher, Confucius, and the sacred writings of the Moslem prophets; and the half-Caucasian, half-Japanese son of Noel Peyton felt the slings and arrows of the human herd about him little more than he reacted normally to the buffets of wind and rain.

The December afternoon was mild and sunny, and when he received his luggage he put on a lounge suit of homespun, took a cap and a rough ash walking stick, and walked out into the village to breathe the air of the South's fragrant autumn.

Now, along the streets, there was a buzzing of subdued gossip and comment: the negro servants and laborers, news-gatherers by nature, grinned furtively as the stranger passed, and gazed after him with shining eyes, knowing him to be something vaguely mysterious and therefore a person to be watched and perhaps feared.

John's quiet, onyx-black eyes took in a wide range of vision, and at a distance of a town block he saw a man and a girl approaching, and recognized two of the members of the party on the lawn at Airlie.

The man was young, good-looking, and conspicuously dapper; the girl was a dark, bright-eyed little beauty with an engaging smile and an air of natural friendliness.

As they drew nearer, John's eyes had finished their appraisal and were employed with more distant objects, and he was about to meet and pass the couple, but the girl paused, crossed in front of her escort, and astonished the stranger by offering him her hand.

"I'M Louise Enderby, Mr. Peyton," she said, and won his devotion instantly with the magic of her smile. "We had no chance to meet you at Airlie this afternoon, but I don't want you to think that we are

all strange and inhospitable here. My father's Judge Enderby, whom you met. He played with your father when they were boys, and they were great friends."

John's training failed him in that moment.

He saw honest, friendly eyes meeting his without horror or disfavor and a small hand extended to him without reserve, and he drew back a pace and hesitated in something like bewilderment.

Surely there was no mockery in the eyes, no trick in the reassuring smile. Here, it appeared, was one of God's own children who are naturally kind, whether one meets them at the equator or at the pole.

He raised his hand slowly, timidly, and took the only hand of welcome that had been offered him in his father's country.

"You're very kind, Miss Enderby," he said, bowing low.

"And this is Mr. Marbury, one of our neighbors," the girl went on simply; but Roddy had withdrawn skittishly to a safe distance, and his manicured white hands were clasped behind him as he nodded his head with an awkward little jerk.

"How d' do—how d' do," he said, in a feeble attempt at lofty condescension.

"You must come to see us, Mr. Peyton," said Louise. "We live in the old house just across the little ravine from Airlie."

"You really wish me to come, Miss Enderby?" John queried.

"I'm a very honest person; I'm inviting you because I really wish you to come."

"Then I shall," said John, and bowed solemnly as the girl and the skittish young man passed on their way.

"I do declare, you're a queer one, Lou!" Roddy said indignantly as they got out of earshot. "I wouldn't tolerate it from any one else—I swear I

wouldn't! You, shaking hands with that—that yellow boy! He'd be an out-cast in any society in the world—just a half-breed. And you asked him to your house. Ugh! I simply can't understand it!"

"You little beast, I'm not asking you to understand it!" said Louise crossly, much as she would speak to a schoolboy. "You don't think I'd offer you an explanation, do you? I might tell my dog about it if he were along. He'd understand perfectly—but dogs are intelligent."

"I say, that's pretty rough, Lou!" Roddy protested. "It's a wonder—what fellows have to put up with from girls! Suppose a man said anything like that to me?"

"Hear the little man!" cried Lou delightedly. "He's getting a big boy now! What would little Roddy do to the great big man—jus' supposing he were Jeb Peyton, for instance?"

Young Mr. Marbury flushed painfully and seemed to feel again the awful crushing impact of big Jeb's horny fist.

"I never did know you so rude before, Lou!" he complained pathetically. "I won't go another step with you. I'm going to stay down town, and you can walk by yourself."

"That's awful cruel of you, Roddy," chuckled Louise, and walked away with maddening indifference as he was setting himself for a possible argument.

"Damn!" he said explosively, under his breath. "Damn it! Damn it all, anyhow!"

HE was unhappy now, and felt the agony of helplessness and utter futility. There were but two girls in the county that he considered eligible for the position of "Mrs. Marbury," and they were Lou Enderby and Jessica Peyton.

Jessica was usually kind to him, in a playmate sort of a way, but she could browbeat him fearfully when she was

in one of the Peyton tempers. Lou was more of the good-fellow sort, always ready for sport and merry larks; but he feared her cruel humor when she was in a hostile mood. It was all very bewildering for a young man who wanted the world to move smoothly and easily.

And he had been a little more than commonly decent to Louise for the past month. There were vague rumors that Judge Enderby had discovered an ancient and long-lost uncle somewhere in the West who was wealthy and alone and might make Louise his heir.

Roddy had carried flowers and a box of candy to Lou the very evening that the gossip reached his ears, and since then had divided his time with studied impartiality between his two charmers.

The Peyton name was something to be considered, but Mrs. Robert Peyton had squandered a large part of her personal fortune on Airlie, and in educating Arthur and Jessica, and it was certain that her Richmond house would go to Arthur. Arthur was a cold stick, too! Suppose Arthur should carry out childhood vows and marry Lou, and get a possible Enderby fortune and a house in Richmond?

But infinitely more hideous and torturing thought, what if Lou Enderby were losing her mind and really taking a fancy for this coffee-colored heathen from the Cannibal Islands? Roddy had read in some book too deep for him that intellectual and high-strung women sometimes yielded their affections to uncouth men of exotic, Oriental races. He shivered and grew faint.

"Damn!" he said again. "What's a man to do, anyhow? What's this world coming to, I'd like to know!"

And, as he stood there in the depths of bitterness and perplexity, inspiration came to him—a daring thought, a shrewd and reckless project.

He went over to the old livery stable and hired a saddle horse, for he did not care to borrow from the Peyton or En-

derby stables on this occasion. Riding without appropriate costume was distasteful to him, but he covered his trousers with a pair of old Newmarket gaiters provided by the liveryman, mounted in eager haste, and went cantering out of the village.

In half an hour he was trotting along a rocky trail, with the few houses that made up the village of Bluespring already in view. Bluespring was little more than three miles from Peytonville geographically, but in the matter of human progress it might have been a thousand miles away. There was the same impassable social barrier which separates the highlanders and lowlanders of Scotland, of the Balkans, and of China, and a solitary horseman from the valley had a right to feel daring, if not a little fearful.

A mountaineer, slouching by the side of the trail, in rough clothes and a great flapping hat, greeted Roddy with an evil leer and spat contemptuously.

Another figure came from the door of a shack and stumbled down the rocky path to the road, and Roddy discovered with a definite thrill that it was the terrible Jeb Peyton himself.

The young cavalier pulled the horse to a walk and tried to arrange his features in an expression of dignity and nonchalance.

"Hello, kid!" Jeb grunted rather savagely, and Roddy winced.

"Hello, Jeb."

"What yo' want up yere? Yo' hain't took to white-mule 'stead o' weak tea, have yer?"

"I'm just riding," said Roddy faintly. "Wonder if—if you've heard the news, Jeb? Your Uncle Noel's son came home to Airlie to-day—that is, he came to Airlie."

"I heard about it," muttered Jeb crossly. "I ain't wanted round Airlie since I mashed up lil Arthur's face. I ain't interested nohow."

"Your kinfolks were interested all right, when they saw the fellow," Roddy announced, suddenly glowing with

the zeal of a bearer of delectable gossip. "His name's John Peyton—he was named after your grandfather—but it's turned out he's a half-breed, and he's as yellow and slant-eyed as the Chink laundryman at Peytonville."

"Your uncle married some kind of a Chinese woman somewhere and no one ever suspected it. Colonel Peyton threw a regular fit when he saw the yellow boy. There was a grand row there at Airlie. The half-breed is staying at the hotel now, and he's going to claim the property, he says, and stay right here as the head of the house."

"Dog-gone! Yo' don' say!" muttered Jeb, with a calm gravity which impressed even one with Roddy's limited perspicacity.

"**I**T'S an awful mess for the Peytons to get into, isn't it? You know your grandfather was hoping, when he died, that Noel's unknown son would turn out to be something wonderful, and come home to Airlie, and marry Louise Enderby. And between you and me, Jeb, that Lou Enderby seems kind o' set up about this Chinese fellow. You never can tell what a woman will do. She's round shaking hands with him in public, and inviting him to call at her house. He isn't bad-looking for a Chink; he's a big, tall chap, and talks like a college professor. I can't figure it out at all."

"Yo' stick around while I put a saddle on the mare," said Jeb, with a noble, primitive dignity which sent little chills up and down Roddy's spine. "I reckon I'll jes' ride along into town an' look over this Chink fo' myself. My daddy was a Peyton, an' I got some respect fo' his mem'ry."

He stalked grimly up the rugged path that led around the shack, leaving Roddy a prey to mingled terrors and thrilling speculations, and presently returned, leading a scrawny old mare with an antique McClellan saddle creaking on the bony ridge of her back.

Julia Peyton appeared at the door of the cottage and called to him anxiously and with some authority.

"Where you going, Jeb?"

"Nowhere special, sis. Young Roddy yere, he's aimin' to introduce me to a friend o' his over to town. I'll be back after a little bit; yo' don' need to go worryin'."

"You mind what I've said to you, Jeb," warned the girl, with an assured air of guardianship.

Roddy noted with surprise that she was a vastly different person away from Airlie and her cousins. She had taken a course in nursing at a hospital in, Richmond, and was no longer the wan, white, listless mountain girl of former days. The training, the city associations, a new interest in life, had matured her and given her something of a presence.

Now she was virtually the doctor and nurse of the scattered hill settlement, acting as an assistant to the district visiting nurse, and she wore a sort of uniform of blue serge and looked official and important.

"Yo' needn't worry 'bout me, sis," repeated the brother, and shut one eye with an ominous leer at Roddy, as he mounted the mare and set her in motion with a kick in the ribs. "Come on!" he whispered savagely, as he rode down to Roddy's side, "befo' she fixes ter make any mo' row."

The uneasy Roddy had the grace to take off his hat to Julia as they departed, and then he found himself wishing that they might ride slowly. Apparently, his mission had been highly successful, but he was beginning to be scared.

CHAPTER IV.

JEB PEYTON GOES BERSERK.

THE mere exchange of greetings with Louise Enderby had brightened the waning afternoon for John Peyton. The descending sun glowed more genially and the old vil-

lage street appeared less drab and dusty and squalid.

He walked briskly through the town and on into the open country, and there he found the landscape agreeable to the eye even with the denuded trees of December, the dry and frost-bleached grass, and the occasional cabins of the humble folk.

He sat down to rest on the parapet of an old stone bridge over a creek. It was interesting to reflect how strangely Virginia resembled the island whence he had come. Brooks babbled in the same language, people came and went about their business over the dusty roads in much the same manner. There was little that seemed new in the American rural picture: the trees looked like those of the hill country in Java, and with the introduction of a few familiar palms he could easily have fancied the governor-general's palace at Buitenzord lying just beyond a line of trees a mile distant.

A keen-eyed young man stopped a motor car near the bridge and got down to speak to the dreamer.

"Your name's John Peyton, isn't it? I represent a city newspaper syndicate. I cover all the towns round here. I heard about you in the village, Mr. Peyton, and I want to get your own story. You got a pretty snappy reception over to Airlie, from all I hear—not strictly according to the rules of Southern hospitality. How about it?"

"I'm not familiar with American customs," John responded, "and I must ask you if you are acting in any sort of an official capacity—if you are connected with the police service in any way."

"Nothing like that—just newspaper stuff. I want a story, and you ought to be the man to fix me up."

"Then I'm free to decline to give you any information, I suppose?"

"Don't take it too seriously, Mr. Peyton. We'll just have a little talk. All I know about you is your name.

They say your mother—Mrs. Noel Peyton—was a—"

"You are a stranger to me, sir," interrupted John. "If you know my name, that is more than I know about you."

"I'm not interested in your newspapers, and certainly I don't care to have them interested in me. That's really all I have to say to you."

"Oh, all right!" exclaimed the young man gustily. "If that's the tack you're taking, let it go at that. Only don't blame me if you don't like the story in the papers."

He hopped back into his car, turned about, and went speeding noisily toward the village.

John was relieved and a little amused. The young man was evidently a provincial journalist, and lacked the stubborn persistency of the news-gatherers of great cities.

The red sun heralded the approach of evening, and he walked slowly back to the town. There were more persons in the streets now than he had seen before. At the post office it seemed that half the population had turned out for the distribution of the mail. Men and boys stood about the entrance, and as he approached they lowered their voices and turned to stare at him. Some darted to the post office door and called to others inside, and the crowd increased rapidly.

An urchin with freckles, pug nose, and impudent eyes, skipped in front of the stranger and cut a caper for the entertainment of the public.

"He ain't a Chink!" he called out shrilly. "I tol' yer he was from Java, didn't I? Folks live on coffee beans there—this guy got his color thet-away."

"Hey, yaller boy!" shouted a shambling youth in overalls, "if yo' name's Peyton, how come yo' ain't stoppin' up to Airlie with yo' kinfolks?"

A burst of ribald laughter came from a considerable chorus around the post office, but John kept on his course, ap-

parently unmoved, never quickening his pace.

A HORSEMAN rode to the side of the street and slipped out of his saddle. He was a stalwart young man, and when he stepped in front of John Peyton and blocked his way, there was nothing for the latter to do but halt.

"My name's Jeb Peyton," the horse-man announced, "an' I reckon yo're the feller I'm a-lookin' for."

"How do you do," said John quietly. "I've heard of you: you're the son of my father's brother Claude, I believe."

"Never mind that!" Jeb grunted fiercely. "Jes' remember this: yo' ain't no kin o' mine! Round yere, we drowns mongrel pups. They's a train leavin' yere round eight o'clock, an' I aim ter see yo' get on that train. If yo' ain't clear o' this town by that time, I'm a goin' ter treat yo' jes' like I would a mongrel dawg—a low-down, ornery yaller dawg. Yo' git me?"

"I expect to be here for some time," answered John quietly. "That's all I have to say to you."

"Purty high an' mighty fo' a yaller skunk, ain't yo'?" Jeb snarled. "Aw right, then, mister, I'm a-goin' ter settle things right off now! Lif' yo' feet, suh, an' show this yere town how fas' yo' can run. Make some speed, boy! My ol' gun shoots right smart when I git 'er goin'."

Jeb had a certain furtive respect for the local forces of law and order, and instinctively he glanced up and down the street for the familiar form of the sheriff.

He saw nothing that suggested restraint, and the laughter and cat-calls of the gathering mob were encouraging, so he drew his old six-shooter from his pocket.

Long wiry fingers suddenly closed about his wrist like a bracelet, gave it a sharp jerk, and the revolver went flying from his hand.

Jeb was speechless with consternation. The thing happened so unexpectedly that he had little comprehension of the method employed. The long fingers still clutched his wrist, and he stared down at them, then allowed his eyes to follow a course from the fingers to the arm above them, and to the piercing black eyes of the man with the yellow skin.

Jeb exploded with a howl of rage and savage hate.

He lashed out wickedly at the calm, immobile face of the enemy with his left arm, but, in a flash, that arm was caught by more steel fingers, and for an instant he was helpless, almost stunned with surprise.

His mouth spat oaths and epithets that startled or charmed the populace, and as his brain began to function normally again he summoned to his aid all the desperate, ignoble tricks of the mountain ruffians who were his tutors.

His boots were heavy, and he managed to thrust himself forward and drive them against his opponent's shins. He found a slender foot held beneath his bulky one, and he sagged his whole weight upon that foot, striving to grind it into the ground.

John Peyton's face betrayed nothing of the physical anguish he felt. He was concentrating attention and muscular force on the task of his slender, sinewy fingers. He knew that the mountain man would employ any treacherous trick that might be known to him, so there must be trick for trick.

He suddenly let go the left hand and thrust his arm swiftly under Jeb's and across his chest, to serve as a fulcrum over which he quickly bent the right arm, extended and forced backward and down, almost to the breaking point. It was an old trick, known the world over to policemen and thugs, but there was not always the opportunity to use it.

Jeb groaned and cursed between

gasps, but his attempts to kick and maim his antagonist grew weaker, for at every struggle his captor applied more pressure to the tortured arm.

"Give up?" inquired John in a low voice.

"Never in this worl'!" wheezed Jeb, and heaved his big body in a vain attempt to shift his position.

The peculiar fight was now carried on in a small circle of men and boys, who pressed ever closer, yelling and cheering. The cheers were intended to encourage Jeb, and there was nothing but derision for his enemy, yet there was a spirit of rough sportsmanship in the mob and not a hand was raised to help the local hero in his distress.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The Most Remarkable Wood in the World

IN savage Borneo there is a sacred forest that covers an area of more than three hundred square miles, and it is estimated that in this forest are some seven million feet of what is thought to be the world's most remarkable wood—Red Billian.

Thirty-five years ago a railroad in Java was successful in obtaining enough trees from the sacred forest to cut into cross ties. A close check has been made on these few ties, and while the life of an ordinary tie is only a year and a half, the Red Billian wood has withstood the elements since it was laid.

Another test was made in water, the trees being used for piling. After many years they were taken up and it was found that, although a five-inch crust of submarine growth had formed, the wood was in as good condition as when first driven in. By experiment engineers have been convinced that the wood does not rot under any conditions; is not subject to bugbore; will not burn except under tremendous heat pressure; is comparatively soft when first cut, but gets so hard within nine months that it is virtually impossible to drive a nail into it; is absolutely waterproof and paintproof, but takes an excellent polish.

The wood is dark with unusual red and black markings. When rubbed with a cloth it will glisten like marble.

For hundreds of years the natives have guarded this virgin timber. Many times civilized man has attempted to commercialize this possession, with the result that the whites have lost their heads or have found that the savage religious or superstitious fervor was too much of an obstacle to surmount.

The Dyaks themselves never attempted to reduce the forest except for one purpose: war. From this strong and hard wood they made their huge canoes. There are now in use several canoes which are known to be not less than five hundred years old with a capacity of two hundred warriors. These are made from tree trunks which range in size from three to ten feet in diameter at the base and are one hundred to one hundred and seventy-five feet in height. From the branches they fashion implements of war, such as spears, blow guns, arrows and other weapons which served their purpose well.

Lately a company has been formed to cut this forest. It is estimated that one hundred years will be required to cut out the forest, and when it is accomplished there will be no more Red Billian, for it is impossible to plant Billian trees and make them grow, and there is no other such forest in the world.

Oscar B. Aldrich.

The Impulsive Mr. Morrison

By **FRED MacISAAC**

Author of "The Spectral Passenger," "The Press Agent," etc.

Central Americans are temperamental and quick to act—but none of them was as wildly impulsive as young Jim Morrison during that whirlwind intrigue in Banana Land

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSUL'S DAUGHTER.

FROM the window of his chamber in the Hotel Trinidad, James Vincent Morrison looked upon the city of Rosa Blanca and cursed it for a hot, festering, vile-smelling tropic hole. Although he was clad only in B. V. D.'s, these were wringing wet, and perspiration was still oozing from his pores and irritating him as it trickled down his body. It was the hottest part of the day, 2 P. M., and everybody else was indulging in a siesta. Jim's body was too uncomfortable, and he had too much on his mind.

The window looked upon the Plaza of Rosa Blanca, capital city of the Central American republic of Santa Rosa. A hundred yards across the park he could see the palace of the president, a long, low plaster building set back in a garden and protected by a high brick and plaster wall, against which two sentries were leaning, probably asleep on their feet.

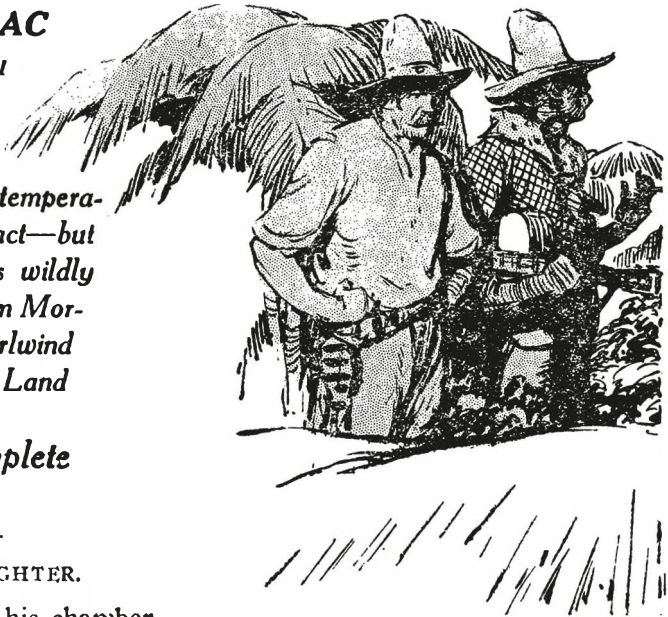
The Plaza was the business center of Rosa Blanca, but with the exception of colored folks sleeping on the benches of the park, no human being was in

sight. There were a lot of mangy dogs wandering about, and a black and white goat.

So bright was the sun, reflected as it was by the white walls of the buildings, that it hurt Jim's eyes to look out, and the air was permeated by a subtle but unpleasant perfume which offended his nostrils.

Just the nasty capital of a rotten little banana republic, he reflected, and any white man who didn't leave by the first boat was a fool. He was a fool. He could have sailed on the fruit steamer this morning, and if it wasn't for Ellen he certainly would have done so.

For a week he had been lingering in Rosa Blanca—"White Rose," a lovely name for this pest hole—because Ellen Goring was here. Although she had indicated emphatically that she didn't want to marry him, he would hang around until she changed her mind; it might be for years and it might be forever.





In a loud and unmusical voice Jim began his serenade

Only seven days ago Jim Morrison had come down from the chief Morrison banana plantation to take the ship for New York. Although it had not been frightfully hot in the hills, it had been gosh-darned lonesome, for the manager and his wife, even if they were efficient banana raisers, were social duds; didn't even play bridge.

Coming down to Santa Rosa had been his father's idea; just a scheme to get him away from Gladys Glower of the Follies, with whom he hadn't been in love at all. Tom Morrison had told Jim it was time he got acquainted with the source of the family income, and had practically shipped him out of New York. Having been marooned among the banana trees for a month, he had driven down to Rosa Blanca a week ago and arrived at cocktail time. The next morning he was to start home.

Holding forth at the bar of the Hotel Trinidad was a fat man in

whites; a soft, paunchy, loose-mouthed, blear-eyed old nuisance who was discussing American politics, expressing the dreariest blather in an unpleasant voice.

As Morrison was a newcomer the man had fixed on him, practically buttonholed him. After listening with growing impatience to his drool for a quarter of an hour, Jim lost his temper, something he lost easily, and expressed his opinion of bores so pungently and objectionably that the old man got furious and called him an ignorant young whippersnapper.

"I'd rather be that than a chattering superannuated ape," Jim retorted, and if the two or three Americans present hadn't held the paunchy person by the arms there would have been a real fight.

LEAVING the bar in disgust, Morrison went into the dingy dining room and was led to a seat and a menu thrust into his hand by a black waiter. He did not consult it, however. Facing him, and only a few tables distant, was the most exquisite, most delectable, most glorious and most desirable girl in the world. With her was an elderly woman, drab, stern-visaged, starched and argus-eyed, whom he put down as a missionary.

The girl had dark hair parted in the middle and caught in a knob at the back of her neck; long hair, mind you; and she had the largest brown eyes that ever adorned a female face. Her nose was small and saucily tilted, her mouth small, whimsical and expressive, her chin determined—and it had a dimple in it.

The woman with her said something and she smiled, which exhibited two rows of sublime teeth, and disclosed another dimple in the center of her right cheek. Her complexion was blond, despite her dark hair, a rare combination, and, in Jim's opinion, an adorable one.

That part of the figure visible above the table was alluring, and he knew without seeing them that her legs would be marvelous. It turned out that they were. When she observed his stare she looked demurely down and veiled her eyes with criminally long black lashes, while a bright blush illuminated her milky cheeks.

Jim Morrison knew by the astonishing behavior of his heart that he had met the girl of all girls, and the next thing was to find out who she was. He left his table abruptly and sought the hotel clerk.

"You mean the Señorita Goring," smiled the young Spaniard. "She is—ah—superb! Her father is the American consul."

"What luck," thought Jim. "I'll make his acquaintance, marry her and go north with her on next week's boat. Tum, tum, te, tum te tum tum."

It was the Mendelssohn wedding march he was humming. He rapidly wrote a note to the steamship company canceling his passage on the morrow and returned to the dining room. Sitting with the future Mrs. Morrison was the very same old dodderer who had wanted to beat him up in the bar-room!

So it was the American consul with whom he had picked a fight. Holy mackerel, what a boner he had pulled! At the moment Mr. Goring looked up and saw Jim, and scowled fiercely, and then he said something to his daughter, who proceeded to gaze at Morrison with scorn and loathing.

"Torpedoed," Jim muttered. "James, my boy, you're sunk without a trace unless you do something, and do it quick. Now or never!"

He rose and walked toward the trio at the consul's table, who gazed at him in angry astonishment.

"Sir," Jim said, "I don't know who you are, but I wish to tell you that I am very much ashamed of my exhibition of a few moments ago. I think it must have been the heat. That drink I had disturbed me. I just want to say that you were entirely right and I was wrong. There is no question that the Republican party is the party of Lincoln and Roosevelt and the only party worthy of ruling the United States of America. If you made any other statements that I contradicted, due to my abnormal condition, I wish to tell you that you were correct, and I am a whippersnapper, just as you said."

Mr. Goring's rather fishy blue eyes regarded him without change of expression, his cheeks grew even more purple than they had been. They were almost as purple now as his nose, and his pendulous underlip quivered menacingly. He leaned back in his chair and folded his hands insolently upon his paunch.

"Young man," he said, "your conversion is too sudden to be convincing. I quarrel with no man about his opinions. I am glad you are aware that you are a whippersnapper, but I still regard you as a most objectionable person. And you called me a superannuated ape."

"What?" exclaimed the young woman. "He called you that, father?"

"I was only prevented from chastising him by the interference of others."

"I withdraw that statement, too, sir. I withdraw everything. I regret I so far forgot myself as to insult a worthy gentleman. I think it must have been the heat."

"I cannot accept your apology. Kindly leave us, sir."

"My name is James V. Morrison," he persisted with desperation. "I am the son of Thomas Morrison of New York."

"I wouldn't care if you were the son of the President of the United States, sir," said the unmollified old gentleman. "I want nothing to do with you."

"May I suggest," said the elderly lady, in tones compared to which vinegar would be sweet, "that you withdraw, young man. You are grossly intoxicated."

Jim looked imploringly at the girl, whose face was without expression, then he bowed and slowly left the dining room. He had tried a bold stroke and lost. However, the girl knew exactly why he had humiliated himself. It was for her. Perhaps he had piqued her interest.

What an ass he had been. Of course he was irritable because of his long ride in the appalling heat, but he didn't have to get into a controversy with the old imbecile. He might have walked out of the barroom. And it had to be the father of the one girl!

"I'll get her yet," he assured himself, "but it's going to be tough."

CHAPTER II.

THROWN FOR A LOSS.

MORRISON was strolling aimlessly around town next morning when he saw Miss Goring come out of a shop. Opportunity knocks but once. He bore down rapidly, braked abruptly in front of her, lifted his panama with a graceful gesture and addressed her.

"Miss Goring," he said rapidly, "I cannot tell you how badly I feel about last night. It must have been the heat."

The girl bit her ripe underlip and eyed him icily. "So you explained last night."

"It's doubly unfortunate, because I fell in love with you the instant I saw you. I am anxious to make friends with your father. Won't you help me?"

Her eyes widened and her cheeks flamed, but she retained her composure.

"Are you still intoxicated?" she demanded.

"Sober as a judge. It's this way. I want to make the next boat for New York. I'd like to be married and—"

"You are quite mad," she exclaimed. "Step aside, please—or must I call a policeman?"

He stepped aside and she brushed by. He called after her:

"No man ever loved a girl as I love you."

She affected not to hear him, and hurried on.

"Well," observed Morrison to the ambient atmosphere, "she knows it now. She knows I love her, and my intentions are honorable. I will proceed to buy out some florist and send the contents of his shop to the consulate."

Ellen Goring, smiling in spite of herself at the encounter, walked briskly back to the consulate. She had observed this young man in the fly-specked dining room of the Hotel Trinidad last evening, noted that he was big and blond and clean-cut and wholesome. It is probable that he would have attracted her attention even if she had seen him in a big American city, but down here, in this exotic spot, whose inhabitants were mostly black and tan and whose resident Americans were few and mostly unappetizing, she had inspected him with interest. Even if a girl is perfectly satisfied to be unmarried, there is no reason why she should not look over the members of the male sex.

And then her father had come in and explained that the fellow was a quarrelsome, boisterous and insulting young brute. It was hard to believe that, but Mr. Goring was still hot from a quarrel with him. While Ellen loved her father she was not blind to his faults, and she thought he probably exaggerated a trifle, but she glanced at the

culprit and saw that he was staring at her, and he had bold eyes. Then he had the effrontery to come to their table and admit to her father, in her hearing, that he had insulted him, had called him a superannuated ape.

His apology was an even greater insult. She knew why he made it. He wanted to get acquainted with her. This young man was much too brash and his impudence was egregious. She thought about him a lot that night, wondering how she could put him in his place, provided she had an opportunity to take him in hand.

And now the man was insane enough to accost her on the street, tell her he loved her and propose marriage on the spot. He had not even been introduced to her. She had charged him with intoxication, but she knew he was sober; she had declared he was mad, but she didn't believe it. She was thrilled, and it made her angry to be thrilled. What kind of girl did the fellow think she was? She would show him!

She would tell her father on him. Perhaps the consul could have him deported.

The American consulate was a small house on a side street half a block from the Plaza, a Spanish dwelling with a patio. It was rather a shabby patio and a shabbier house, but the consul's salary was small, and it was the best he could afford. There was a room on the ground floor which Mr. Goring had fitted up as an office, and the family lived in four rooms on the second floor. None of the other ground floor rooms were habitable. Over the entrance was a small flagstaff upon which hung the American flag, when their one servant remembered to hang it out.

MR. GORING was sitting in the patio when she entered, clad in a soiled white suit, and minus collar and necktie. He had also omitted to shave, but he had his morning drink upon the little table beside the big wicker armchair in which he was

stretched. Her father was degenerating rapidly in the tropics, she thought. Too much to drink, nothing much to do, and this withering, melting heat. If only he would give it up and go home!

The Honorable Elias Goring had no intention of going home. He liked his title, he liked the easy life, and he liked cheap drinks and plenty of them. He had been a State Senator in Illinois and had been defeated for reelection after sixteen years in office. He had felt he was too old to set up in business again in Springton, their home, so he had grasped eagerly at the offer of the consulate in Rosa Blanca. While he had been somewhat disappointed when he first saw the place, three months ago, he had decided it would do.

Ellen, who had old-fashioned ideas about the love and respect due a parent, was finding it daily more difficult to respect her father, and his present appearance repelled her. Nevertheless, she was so angry she had to erupt, and she duly erupted.

"Father," she began, "that man who insulted you last night had the impudence to speak to me upon the street just now. He was abominable. He tried to make love to me."

"What's that? Why, the miserable young pup! I'll; I'll—" He stopped short.

"Well, what will you do about it?" she demanded. "Can you have him deported?"

Mr. Goring rubbed his unshaved jaw with his big right hand.

"It's like this, Ellen," he deprecated. "I was talking with our minister last night at the hotel. It seems the fellow's the son of Thomas Morrison, who is the Morrison Fruit Company. Well, Morrison owns this spiggoty republic. He put the present administration in power, and keeps it there. I reckon Morrison is powerful enough to yank me out of here if I assert myself in this matter the way I ought to."

"He told you who he was last night. You were bold enough then."

"Well, the fact is, I was excited, and I didn't connect the name at the moment."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the furious girl. "I can be insulted by a man on the street and my father is afraid to protect me."

The consul got up from his chair and struck a statesmanlike attitude. His watery blue eyes tried to glower at her. "Don't you say that; don't you dare say I can't protect my daughter! I'll see this young man and give him a piece of my mind; but I can't deport him. The administration here wouldn't do it if I asked them to."

"Very well. Oh, very well! I'm sorry I told you about it. I can look after myself." She tapped the flagstone with an angry toe.

"I'll attend to this," said the father, striding up and down and fanning his own wrath to make it warm. "In just what way did he insult you?"

"He asked me to marry him and go North on the next boat."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Goring. "Upon my word! But, after all, Ellen, is a proposal of marriage from a rich young man an insult?"

She half smiled and suppressed the smile. "Considering that he had never met me and was practically picking me up, I think it is. Maybe not an insult, but very impudent. Don't bother, father—though, if you were removed from this dreadful place, it might be a good thing for all of us."

"I have a right to protect my daughter, and I shall. I'll speak to this young man!"

"Then here is your opportunity," she exclaimed. "I'm going to run for it."

She had observed, coming through the entrance, none other than Jim Morrison, staggering under so many tropic blooms that he really should have conveyed them in a cart. Ellen whisked up the stairs to the second

floor and then went into a room directly over her father's chair, so she should not miss the conversation which was going to ensue.

"GOOD morning, Mr. Goring," said Jim cheerfully. "I came to pay my respects to our country's representative, and to leave a few simple flowers for the wife and daughter of the consul."

Mr. Goring resumed his chair and curled his lip at the visitor.

"You've got a gall coming here after last night," he said.

"I hoped you would remember that I apologized most humbly for what happened in the bar. It was the heat. I was not myself."

"We'll let that pass," said the consul angrily. "You have committed a new offense. You insulted my daughter upon a public thoroughfare, and I ought to horsewhip you for it."

"I insulted your daughter? Mr. Goring, I paid her the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman. I asked her to marry me."

"She took it as an insult. Now, young man, I don't care if you are your father's son and if you've got influence enough to have me pulled off this job, I don't like you. My daughter doesn't like you. We can't run you out of Rosa Blanca, but we can prevent you from coming into this house. Have you got any official business with the consul?"

"No-o," said Jim, then, brightly, "but no doubt I can think up some."

He thought he heard a titter somewhere above him, and looked up, but he could see nobody.

"The trouble with you young bloods from New York is you suppose you can commit all the crimes on the calendar and get away with it," proclaimed Mr. Goring. "Now, I'm a plain citizen from a country town in Illinois, but I don't kowtow to any New York millionaire or his brash son. My daughter is just as good as you are—"

"Say, she's a million times better," declared the object of the reproof. "She's the most beautiful girl I ever saw and I think she's the finest. When she gets to know me, maybe she'll find out I'm not so bad either."

He spoke loudly, for he suspected that Ellen was listening from above. He was sure about that titter.

"Well, I forbid you to make her acquaintance. I forbid you this house. If you accost her on the street again, I'll cable your father, appealing to him as one father to another."

"You're going to make it tough for a couple of nice young people," protested Morrison.

"Confound your impudence! My daughter don't want anything to do with you. She came in here, almost crying, and do you know what she asked me to do? Have you deported! Now, young man, you better go."

Jim Morrison's brisk cheerfulness faded and his face lengthened.

"Say, did she actually feel like that? I'm darn sorry. Will you ask her to accept these flowers as a token of my remorse?"

"Pick up your flowers and carry them off or I'll have the servants throw them out," said the consul roughly. "Are you going to leave or must I have you put out?"

"Oh, I'll go," he said dismally. Ellen leaned out the window and read his distress in the manner in which his big shoulders drooped. She ran downstairs again.

"Were you listening?" demanded Mr. Goring. She nodded.

"You can't complain of your old father now. I told him plainly where I stood and let him know that his wealth didn't impress me. Are you satisfied?"

"You needn't have told him I wanted him deported," she said crossly. "And you were much too harsh with the poor boy."

The consul's mouth dropped open in astonishment. "If you don't beat all!"

he exclaimed. "You demand that I protect you and I risk my post to do it and this is the thanks I get."

Ellen rushed to him, wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek. "You are a dear," she said, "and I am very ungrateful. And I don't think you discouraged that young man much."

CHAPTER III.

JIM TRIES STRATEGY.

JIM MORRISON was not discouraged, but for the moment he was nonplused. As the reader must have discovered, he was a very impulsive young man. As they used to say in the dime novels, "To think was to act with Jack Dalton"; and because Jim acted instantly upon his impulses he had got into hot water more than once.

A very rich young man cannot violently rush theatrical ladies in the city of New York without waking up married in New Jersey or Connecticut sooner or later, and if such a fate had not befallen Jim, it was more through good luck than good judgment.

On several occasions a pair of fine eyes had bowled him over, but he had recovered when he knew the lady better; in the case of Ellen Goring he was certain he would never recover. The effect that girl had upon him when he set eyes on her in the hotel dining room was as different from the feeling with which Gladys Gower had inspired in him as sunlight is from moonlight. Ordinarily he didn't make such an idiot of himself as he had done upon the two occasions he had encountered Ellen: he had acted like a drunken man, but he was drunk, not on liquor as she had charged, but upon a pair of amazing brown eyes.

He had blurted out that insane proposal to a girl to whom he hadn't been introduced because he could not help himself; and he had been in a fever when he bought a load of flow-

ers and followed her to the consulate. The mouthings of that small-town politician, her father, had not bothered him in the slightest until the old man had stated that Ellen wanted him deported from Rosa Blanca. That was like emptying a pail of ice water upon his devoted head.

So far, in his twenty-five years, he had always got what he wanted from everybody, and when he paid court to young women he had found them responsive. Was it possible that this girl, the only one he could ever love, was not going to love him in return? Had he made such a sad impression on her that she disliked him? If she wanted him deported she couldn't like him very much. He shook his head.

"Wrong tactics," he muttered. "Can't rush a swell girl like that off her feet."

It's possible he might have been completely discouraged had it not been for the titter which he had heard from above while arguing with the old gentleman. It was exceedingly unlikely that Ellen's mother would giggle; the servants probably did not understand English; and that left only the young lady to be considered as the author of the mirthful sound.

Deport him? He would show her. But he had to find some way to meet her if he couldn't call at the consulate or speak to her in the street. Get somebody to invite her to dinner and seat him beside her and then she would have to talk.

Upon his arrival in Rosa Blanca *en route* for the plantation he had stopped in the sweltering seaport only long enough to procure an automobile to take him into the hills, but Morrison's had a manager in the city and that gentleman would have to be nice to the son of Tom Morrison. From him he could find out a lot about the Gorings, and if the manager had a wife he might confide in her and persuade her to square him with Ellen.

This manager was a sun-browned,

hard-drinking individual of middle age named Jefferson Tillman, who had met Jim at the boat and capered about in his anxiety to be of service. Look him up.

Cramming his straw hat upon his blond head, Jim left the hotel and walked three blocks to the office of the Morrison Company, a gloomy looking interior, darkened in a vain effort to keep it cool. There he found Mr. Tillman in a small room at the rear with his feet upon a desk reading a New York newspaper a fortnight old. Mr. Tillman leaped to his feet and came forward with both hands extended in welcome.

"I've been to your hotel twice this morning, Mr. Morrison," he exclaimed. "I only heard late last night you had got in. How did you find things at the plantations?"

"Nothing there but a lot of bananas," he retorted as he threw himself into a swivel chair and put his own feet on the desk. "Say, this is probably the hottest and dirtiest town in all Central America. I'll go further and say in the world."

"You're lucky you don't have to live here," replied Tillman as he seated himself again. "I heard you canceled your passage on to-day's boat. Why?"

"I'm detained here on business," replied the heir of the Morrison banana business. "I have to wait till I persuade a girl to marry me, and it's going to take time by the looks of it. Years, maybe, the way she feels about me now."

"Not a Spanish girl? Not somebody you met in the hills?"

"The future Mrs. Morrison is known at present as Ellen Goring, and her old man is our consul in this interesting city. I am afraid he doesn't like me very much."

"ELLEN GORING!" cried Mr. Tillman. "By Jove, you've picked a corker! That's one of the finest girls I've ever known, and

my wife says so, too. So you're going to marry Ellen? I'm tickled to death. You work fast, young fellow. I suppose, though, you met her in America."

"It's like this, Tillman," he said, shamefacedly. "Miss Goring hasn't exactly agreed yet. She isn't taking the situation in the right spirit. In fact, she wants her father to have me deported."

"What? By the way you talked I thought it was almost settled," gasped the properly astonished agent.

"It's settled in my mind, but not in hers. You see, she's prejudiced against me by the fact that I had an argument with her father before I knew who he was. I called him a superannuated ape."

"And so he is," declared Tillman with a laugh, "only that wasn't very tactful of you."

"Well I had to overcome that and I tried plunging tactics. I stopped her on the street this morning and told her I wanted to marry her. So she wants me deported," he said ruefully.

"They couldn't deport you from this country, my boy. The Morrison Fruit Company is practically the government. But it's too bad you were so precipitate."

"I don't think she really meant it, but her father thinks she did. Anyway, I'm forbidden the consulate, and she'll probably call a cop if I speak to her again on the street, so I wondered if you and your wife couldn't throw a party and sort of give me a chance to have a talk with her. Give me five minutes alone with that girl—" His spirits soared at the idea.

The agent reached for his hand and shook it heartily. "You bet we shall," he exclaimed. "I'll talk it over with Mary at lunch. Suppose you come home with me and have lunch with us. Mary is crazy about Ellen and she was saying only last night it would be terrible if that girl threw herself away upon Carlo Lopez."

"What's that? Who?"

"Carlo Lopez, the minister of war. He is very rich and he has been paying her attentions. I think her father favors him."

"Say," shouted Morrison. "Do you mean to say that old catawampus would let his daughter marry one of these 'high-yallars' down here?"

"Lopez is as white as you or I. He is a Castilian, young, handsome and rich, as I have said. Ellen seems to like him."

"Yeah? Well, we'll soon change all that. The minister of war. Eight generals and two privates, that's his army, I suppose."

"No, no," protested Tillman. "They have a pretty good little army here. About five thousand well trained, well armed men. Morrison money armed and equipped them when President Garcia was a revolutionist and overthrew the government of President Moreno. I don't suppose I should tell you this, though."

"I wish I had called that old man something worse than an ape. He's an unnatural father. He's a scoundrel!"

"No. Just a loud-mouthed old jack-ass. He's flattered by the attentions of Lopez, but he couldn't make Ellen do something she didn't want to. She has a will of her own, that girl."

"Come on. We'll go see your wife," Jim commanded. "Good Lord, we've got to get things started right away. I never dreamed I was up against any competition. I've got to get going."

CHAPTER IV.

REVOLUTIONARY UNDERCURRENTS.

WHEN Mr. Tillman informed Jim Morrison that the minister of war, General Carlo Lopez, was young and handsome, he did not exaggerate, for Lopez was a remarkable looking young man. There is a popular impression in the United States that the peoples of Central America are of mixed blood and they are referred to

by the impolite as "spigs" and "greasers"—in return for which the Central Americans refer to us, when they think it safe, as "Yankee pigs."

It is perfectly true that there are millions of Indians and negroes in the hot countries and millions more who are half and three-quarter breeds, due to the fact that the early Spanish explorers and conquerors came away from home without their wives and—well, explain the mulattoes in America. However, the early settlement of Panama and adjacent countries enabled many aristocratic and cultured Spanish families to come across the ocean, and most of these were very careful to keep their blood pure.

Carlo Lopez could trace his ancestry back three hundred years and demonstrate that none of his progenitors had married outside the white race while it was obvious by looking at him that no red Indian or black African blood flowed in his veins. He was about five feet eight inches in height with straight, delicate features, extraordinarily fine black eyes, a narrow but determined chin, and a clear olive complexion.

He was as handsome as some of those old grandees of Spain whom Velasquez painted, and every time Ellen Goring looked at him she got a queer tingling feeling which might be love for all she knew. She had told Mrs. Tillman that it was unfair to womankind that a man should be permitted to be so beautiful.

The Lopez family had lived luxuriously upon the earnings of silver mines in the hills of Santa Rosa for three hundred years, except during such periods as when enemies were in control of the government and tried to confiscate the mines; then the male Lopezes took the field and stayed there until their friends had acquired the government of the republic.

Carlo Lopez had attended Harvard for two years, until the faculty decided that he was too sporting for a student and expelled him; but in this he had

nothing on Jim Morrison, who was expelled from Princeton at the end of his junior year for undue boisterousness.

Lopez had returned to Santa Rosa five years ago to join the Liberal party, whose active members were hiding in the jungle with the Conservatives taking pot shots at them whenever one of them showed above the tall grass. The Lopez mines were occupied by the Moreno forces, a Moreno general was living in the Lopez country house, and things were in very bad shape from a Lopez standpoint.

However, the agents of the Morrison Fruit Company had discovered that General Moreno proposed to make an exclusive banana arrangement with the Blue Star Fruit Company, so they shipped down several carloads of machine guns, rifles and ammunition, landed about a hundred American adventurers who had seen service in the World War, drilled and equipped the Garcia patriots for a few months, extracted an exclusive banana contract from General Garcia, and enabled the cause of liberty to triumph.

WHILE Jim Morrison was having lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Tillman, Carlo Lopez, minister of war, General Garcia, president of the republic, and General Arnaldo Volpe, commander-in-chief of the army, were lunching in the palace with a lantern-jawed, angular American who represented the Blue Star Fruit Company.

It was Jefferson Tillman's business to know about this luncheon, but he was busily occupied in trying to make good with the son of his boss.

"It's this way, your excellency," John Laird, the American, was saying. "You've been on the level with Morrison for five years and what's it got you? Just a measly twenty-five thousand a year. You've kept us out of this country, you've made yourselves dependent on Morrison, enabled him to make many millions, and all for what?"

A few cargoes of arms and ammunition."

"Morrison enabled us to overthrow the tyrant Moreno," stated Carlo Lopez. "It is due to his aid that Liberty reigns in Santa Rosa."

"Well, that's all right. He's had his five years. That's probably longer than he has expected. You got a right to make a change unless you want to admit you're Tom Morrison's hired man."

"Take care," warned President Garcia. He was a fat, black-whiskered, saturnine individual, and, if Carlo Lopez was a hundred per cent Caucasian, President Garcia probably would not have assayed sixty per cent.

"You have no opposition now," Laird went on. "The Conservatives are shot to pieces. You have the country's revenues, a neat little army of five thousand men, a couple of batteries of field artillery, a hundred machine guns or so, and you don't have to take off your hats to anybody. Morrison couldn't do anything to you now. Moreno is dead, there's no revolutionary leader. And, general, I'll tell you something else. The day is past when American business men can foment revolution in Central America for their own purposes. You can appeal for protection to the Administration at Washington against interference in your government by the Morrison Fruit Company, and you'll get it."

"What is your proposition, Mr. Laird?" asked President Garcia.

"I want your Congress to open up the country. Some patriot can introduce a bill repealing the exclusive agreement with the Morrison Fruit Company and steamship company. A fair field and no favor, that ought to be the motto of Santa Rosa. That's going to sound all right in the United States. And, between ourselves, the Blue Star has a much bigger pull in Washington than Tom Morrison. He's in bad with the Administration."

Garcia looked at the minister of war.

"Are we in a position to take such a stand?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied Carlo Lopez. "Pizzo, the bandit in the hills, has only a couple of hundred men. My spies report order everywhere, no plotting to amount to anything. The army is loyal, is it not, General Volpe?"

The commander in chief of the army, a very small blue-eyed Spaniard with red hair, nodded affirmatively. "They are being paid regularly, they have decent quarters, and there is nobody to tamper with their loyalty."

"In return for the privilege of trading here, what sort of proposition do you make to us?" asked the president.

"A quarter of a million in American money, delivered to you to be divided any way you wish. Fifty thousand a year instead of the Morrison contribution of half that."

"In which case Morrison sends arms and ammunition to Pizzo in the hills, slips in a foreign legion like that which fought with us, and we have a real revolution on our hands," said Garcia shrewdly.

"At the first sign of that you can throw the Morrison interests out," Laird declared eagerly, "and lodge a protest in Washington. You can depend upon the Blue Star to back you up."

Garcia looked at Lopez.

"Strange as it may appear to you, Mr. Laird," Lopez replied, "we of Santa Rosa are not for sale to the highest bidder. We love our little country. We took up arms against a tyrant and accepted American aid, even as the United States accepted aid from the King of France in your revolution. We have had five years of profound peace, we are prosperous and contented, and we have money in our treasury. We gave our word to Morrison and we shall keep it. The Blue Star was supporting the tyrant Moreno, if my memory is correct."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the president. "The minister of war expresses my

sentiments, Señor Laird. Not if the Blue Star offered very much more American gold would we betray our country and break our treaty with our friend, the Morrison Company."

"Furthermore," Lopez said sternly, "I am fully informed of everything which goes on in Santa Rosa, and any attempt of your people to encourage the bandit Pizzo will be thwarted, Señor Laird."

"WELL," said Laird, "I see I'll have to get in touch with my principals. I may get a better offer."

The president rose from his chair with great dignity, having had his coffee anyway. "Señor Laird," he declared, "this meeting is at an end. Your remark is offensive."

The American agent hastened to apologize, and polite relations were restored, but a few moments later the party broke up.

So far as Carlo Lopez, a Castilian gentleman of Santa Rosa, was concerned, the government's statement to Laird was made in the best of faith. That was true also as far as the president was concerned—at least until he got a better offer.

The minister of war, of course, was fully aware that the son of the mighty Tom Morrison was in the city, but he was not yet aware that Jim Morrison was endeavoring to pay court to Ellen Goring.

Having stood up stoutly for the right of the Morrison Fruit Company at the conference with the agent of the Blue Star Line, it seemed to General Lopez, as he sat at his desk in the war office in the Administration Building, that it would do no harm to let the son of Tom Morrison know who was a true friend in Rosa Blanca, and how crafty were the machinations of the Blue Star miscreants. Accordingly, he wrote a polite note to Jim Morrison in which he asked him to be his guest at the Exposition Restaurant that eve-

ning, and dispatched it immediately to the Hotel Trinidad.

When Jim returned from a very satisfactory meeting with Mrs. Tillman he found the note. Mrs. Tillman was a woman of thirty-five who had been blond and beautiful. She had lived three years in Rosa Blanca and her ambition was to get back to New York.

She had learned that the climate of Central America is horribly bad for blond ladies of thirty-five, for it shrivels them, withers them, ages them before their time. A young American girl will lose her color and dry up if she lives very long on the Central American coast, but she can come back when she gets into a decent climate; for a blond woman of thirty-five whose complexion is on the wane anyway, there is no coming back.

To win the friendship of Jim Morrison by helping him get the girl of his choice was an opportunity she was eager to grasp, because it was an important step to landing Jefferson Tillman some important job in New York. She had agreed to invite Ellen to dinner the following night and to seat her alongside of Jim Morrison. If Ellen proved obdurate she would sing the praises of the young man until the girl relented.

If Jim had not known that Carlo Lopez was paying court to Ellen he would have passed up his dinner invitation because it might be tiresome; but, supplied with this information, he was appalled by the fellow's impudence. Very curtly he wrote that a previous engagement would deprive him of the pleasure of meeting the minister of war. He spent the afternoon in his room in a state of undress, with a tall glass filled with ice and yellow liquid beside him and a book which bored him.

At dinner time he was early in the hotel dining room and remained late, but the Gorings did not dine at the hotel that night. He found two or three young Englishmen and Ameri-

cans in the bar afterward and listened to their jabber for an hour or so, and then strolled out into the streets.

NIGHT in Rosa Blanca was not so bad, as a balmy breeze blew in from the Caribbean, and the stars were like lamps in the heavens and the crescent moon was indescribably beautiful. The street sights were interesting, and the peculiar aroma of the city was less flagrant by night, or so it seemed to him. There was a principal avenue, wide and well paved; two or three business streets upon which only the *cantinas* were open; and then a maze of narrow thoroughfares not much wider than alleys, which were the residential quarters of the natives of Rosa Blanca.

The houses were usually one or two stories in height, built in solid blocks. Because of the heat, doors and windows were open and uncurtained, so that a saunterer upon any of those streets might look in and see the black and brown and yellow and near-white inhabitants enjoying their home life. Jim thought the said home life was rather disgusting.

There were many people on these narrow streets walking aimlessly, and many more sitting on doorsteps. He seemed to attract no attention as he moved among them, and when he came to a group which crowded the sidewalk they made way for him with a courtesy he wouldn't meet in New York.

He heard the bell on the cathedral striking the hour of nine, as he turned into a wider and more prosperous street where the houses were all of two stories. Upon the balconies of these houses he observed many women sitting and peering into the thoroughfare below, commenting upon the passers-by, giggling and apparently being well amused.

This street was less crowded than the alley-like *calle*s through which he had passed, and as he came to its end it was almost deserted. From a side

street he heard the tinkling of guitars and then a tenor voice lifted in a seductive Spanish song.

He turned the corner, and a few rods distant stood three men on the curb with upturned faces; two of them playing guitars while the third was vocalizing. Upon a balcony stood a yellow girl, dressed all in white, who leaned her elbows upon the rail and smiled down, while, on other balconies, other women were visible, enjoying the show.

"A serenade," he thought. "By Jove, a real Spanish serenade!"

The singer had a good voice, and he sang with so much passion that Jim was convinced that he was the lover. A little crowd gathered which did not perturb any of the actors, but they did not applaud when a song was finished; etiquette demanded that the lovers be not disturbed.

Presently the tenor finished and made a low bow, sweeping the ground with his Yippy Yappy hat, and then the girl unpinned a rose from her breast, held it out and dropped it when he lifted the hat to receive it. The young man picked the flower out of the hat, kissed it, and the girl tittered and disappeared from the balcony. The show was over.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPANISH CAVALIER.

THE three musicians strolled, then, toward the corner where stood Jim Morrison and other spectators and, as they passed, he thrust out his hand and grasped the arm of the tenor.

"Any of you boys speak English?" he demanded.

"*Sí, señor,*" said one of the guitarists, "I spik de Engleesh."

"You want to make ten dollars?"

"*Sí, sí, sí, señor!*"

"Then you come with me to the American consulate."

They had to show him the way, for he was hopelessly lost, but in ten minutes they stood in the deserted street outside the home of Ellen Goring.

"Now do your stuff," commanded Jim. "I'll show that kid a new wrinkle. I bet she's never been serenaded before."

The guitars twanged and the tenor opened his mouth and sang even more passionately than he had for love, a few minutes before. Jim stood beside them in delight. It mattered not to him that one of the guitar players was black as coal and the others were mulattoes.

As the man sang people appeared on balconies up and down the street, but although there were lights in the windows of the consulate, the serenade had no effect. Ellen, apparently, had no notion that she was the object of the musical tribute in the street below. Jim waited with as much patience as he could muster, but after ten minutes he could stand it no longer.

"Hey, gimme that," he commanded and grasped a guitar from a protesting player. He did not know how to play a guitar, but the strings would make a noise if he pulled them. He struck a couple of jangling chords and in a voice which was loud and very unmusical he began:

"The Spanish Cavalier
Paused in his retreat
And on his guitar
Played a tune, dear.
Say, darling, say
When I'm far away,
Remember my, remember—
Tum, tum te tum, te de tum ta."

He had selected that number because they used to sing it in college, and it seemed appropriate, but he didn't remember the words very well and the tune only approximately. However, it had an effect. He heard laughter on the second floor of the consulate and then out on the balcony popped Ellen, in a white evening dress. Behind her were Mrs. Goring, the consul, and a

man in resplendent green and gold uniform, a stunning-looking man, who, he knew, could be none other than the minister of war, his rival. And all four were laughing heartily.

If the ground could have swallowed him up Jim would have been grateful; but there he stood with his mouth open, a guitar in his hands, and three colored men as his companions. Ellen looked down and recognized him, and uttered a wild whoop of mirth.

Mr. Goring peered down and also recognized him.

"Upon my word, Mr. Morrison," he cried angrily, "this is too much. If you must get intoxicated, why come and exhibit yourself under my windows—"

"And whoever told you you could sing?" demanded the heartless Ellen.

"May I ask who is this gentleman, and why he is disturbing the peace?" asked the minister of war, smoothly and maliciously.

"It's that dreadful young man we saw in the hotel," announced Mrs. Goring shrilly.

"Come on, you boys, let's get out of here," muttered Jim, overwhelmed with embarrassment.

"Just a minute, please," called Ellen, who disappeared. She returned in an instant and began to throw down into the street the flowers he had dropped in the patio that morning. It was too much. Jim led the retreat at a run, mocking laughter ringing in his ears. And such was the sad fate of a great idea.

As he fled he was pursued by his hirelings demanding their pay, and he tossed three ten-dollar bills at them without pausing in his gallop. Ellen, far from appreciating the thoughtfulness of his attention, had laughed louder than anybody and had added insult to injury by hurling his own flowers at him.

And that popinjay of a war minister had wanted to know who was disturbing the peace. For that Jim vowed he

would punch him in the nose. The brute had invited him to dinner and, when Jim had refused, he had gone to call on the Gorings and was welcomed by the whole family, while he, Jim Morrison, who truly loved the girl and wanted to make her his bride, was compelled to caterwaul outside the window and then get insulted for his pains.

Well, he would go back to the hotel and drink and drink until he had drowned the recollection of his humiliation.

AN hour later, having consumed half a dozen fiery concoctions without effacing the recollection of what had happened, he went up to his room and had begun to prepare for bed when his telephone rang. He regarded it dubiously. He was in no mood to talk to any one, and it was probably the obsequious Tillman. It rang again, and he took the receiver from the hook.

"Hello."

"Mr. Morrison?" said a sweet and thrilling soprano voice. He grasped at a chair to steady himself.

"Yes," he succeeded in replying.

"It's Miss Goring. I—I want to apologize for being so rude to you. I was very cruel. I know your attention was well meant, but you were so"—her voice broke with laughter—"so funny."

"You're an angel. I was a fool, but I hadn't had a drink, Miss Goring. I'm not a drunkard, honestly."

"I was afraid you felt terribly hurt and I wanted to apologize."

"Sure," he exclaimed joyously.

"Can I see you in the morning?"

"Certainly not," she cried angrily. "I might have known you would misunderstand me!"

"No, no, I don't—" But she had rung off. Why did he always put his foot in it with her? He had offended her again, and she was so sweet and kind.

Jim went to bed, but he lay awake some time considering things. Ellen

had proved herself to be the kind of girl he thought she was by phoning him to apologize for her mockery of his pitiful serenade; she had proved that she was everything desirable, and he loved her more than ever, but did he stand any chance with her?

He had glimpsed his rival on the balcony, and the fellow was fiendishly handsome. The mirror had informed Jim frequently that he belonged to the rugged school of pulchritude. He was rough and ready, and there was something about that girl which caused him to behave like an idiot.

Why an American girl should prefer a foreigner to one of her own kind was something he could not understand, but American girls were always marrying Frenchmen and Italians and Spaniards, and a girl he knew in New York had told him that they knew how to pay court to a lady; that their manners were perfect, they were adepts in doing the things that pleased a woman.

So far all Jim had done was to infuriate Ellen. Even when she had apologized on the phone he had been so light-headed as to act as though she were seeking an excuse to make an engagement with him. She had a right to be angry. Well, to-morrow night, when he met her at dinner, he would be on his best behavior and would make her see that he wasn't the buffoon she must consider him. Full of good resolutions he fell asleep and he woke up in the morning in the best of spirits and buoyed up by the importance of this day.

It happened to be one of the hottest days that Rosa Blanca had ever known, and even the natives complained of the temperature, but Jim's sufferings were tempered by the knowledge that he would meet Ellen at dinner in the house of people who were bound to his interest and who would give him his opportunity.

Dinner was at seven, but Morrison reported at six. He had hoped for a

party of four, but Mrs. Tillman informed him that she could not invite Ellen without asking her parents, and there would be six at table.

"Whatever did you do last night?" she demanded. "Mrs. Goring is furious with you, and she called up this morning to break the engagement on behalf of the family. I had to plead with her not to get my husband into trouble by preventing us from doing for you the only thing you had asked us to do, and I guaranteed your good behavior. Mrs. Goring thinks you have horns and a tail."

"I swear to you," he declared earnestly, "that I'll be a lamb to-night. I thought it would be a good idea to serenade Miss Goring, but it didn't turn out to be such a good idea."

"I didn't know what you had done. Mrs. Goring was simply incoherent," replied the hostess. "However, the Gorings know how powerful your father is in this country, and I don't believe they would dare to refuse to come, actually."

"How powerful is my father?" he demanded. "I've heard that from several sources, but he never tipped me off. He just sent me down to see his principal plantation in order to get me out of New York."

"He financed and armed the last revolution and he is keeping President Garcia in power," she said.

"You don't say! I'll try to get him to fire the minister of war. I don't like that guy."

She laughed, tapped him playfully on the arm with her fan and went off to look after dinner arrangements. Tillman took up the story and before the other guests arrived Jim had learned a lot about the methods of the fruit company in which, some day, he would be the principal stockholder.

THE Gorings arrived at seven o'clock, Mr. Goring looking uncomfortable in evening clothes, Mrs. Goring starchy and repressing her

rancor with difficulty, and Ellen gorgeous in a frilly, fluffy pink gown with bare arms and shoulders. There was a look in her brown eyes which made him uneasy. Mrs. Tillman went through the introductions as though they had never met before, and Jim thought apologies were in order.

"I'm terribly sorry about that serenade," he said to Mrs. Goring. "It was just an idea I had, but it wasn't so good." Ellen choked back a laugh, but he caught her eye, and the hostile look was gone.

"Just a quiet little dinner," cooed Mrs. Tillman. "I wanted you all to meet Mr. Morrison and he was so distressed about your unfortunate misunderstanding at your other meeting that he was eager to set himself right in your eyes."

She gave her arm to Mr. Goring, Tillman took in Mrs. Goring and Jim had the privilege of leading Ellen, who took his arm demurely.

"Will you forgive me for the exhibition I have been making of myself?" he demanded.

"Provided you don't give way to any more ideas like the serenade," she smiled. "You know, Mr. Morrison, I have been thinking you were quite mad."

"I am—mad about you," he whispered.

They were at table and took the seats indicated by Mrs. Tillman.

The Tillmans did their part by engaging Mr. and Mrs. Goring in sprightly conversation, and this gave Jim a chance to talk to Ellen.

"Will you give me a chance to see something of you and make you realize that I'm not the idiot you think?" he asked.

"It depends on how you behave. Do you usually tell a girl you love her before you have been introduced?"

"I've never been in love before," he assured her. "That's why I don't know how to behave."

"But you can't want to marry a girl

you have only seen once or twice," she protested.

"I knew I was a goner when I first set eyes on you in the hotel dining room. Imagine my embarrassment when I learned that your father was the old gentleman with whom I had just had an argument."

"I think you are just a spoiled rich man's son," she said severely. "You have always got exactly what you wanted and you suppose any girl you deigned to notice would be flattered."

"If I did, I'm all over that," he said ruefully. "Did you really want me deported?"

She smiled. "I thought the heat had affected you and a cool climate might cure you."

"You listened yesterday morning when I called on your father?" he accused.

"I didn't."

"I heard you laugh. You know you were listening."

"Well, I thought your conversation might be amusing. I wanted to see if father had courage enough to bawl out the son of Tom Morrison."

"He did—and how!" They both laughed.

"Whatever made you think of that preposterous serenade?" she asked in a more friendly tone than any she had yet used.

Jim told her how he had run across the serenaders. "I only grabbed the guitar when it looked as if you would never come out on the balcony."

She giggled at the recollection. "Consider my surprise when I heard the 'Spanish Cavalier' being murdered in English." It was delightfully funny now and their new understanding emboldened Jim to put his foot in it again.

"What made me mad was to see that greaser on the balcony. What on earth do you let one of those spigs come into your house for?" he asked earnestly.

Ellen stiffened and her reply was muffled fury. "Señor Lopez is as

white as you are and much more of a gentleman. He is a friend of mine and I resent your statement, Mr. Morrison."

"I beg your pardon," he said contritely, but she punished him by turning to Mr. Tillman and forcing him to talk to her for the rest of the dinner.

For representing Morrison's in hot, unhealthy Rosa Blanca, Tillman received a salary which enabled him to rent a far more comfortable and attractive residence than the house of the American consul, and the party left the spacious dining room to take coffee in the large and blooming patio where a gently splashing fountain seemed to temper the warmth of the evening and where a faint breeze stirred the leaves of the little trees and bushes.

In the patio, conversation perforce was general, and after three-quarters of an hour, on a strong hint from Ellen, the consul, who was very comfortable, sighed, and said they would have to be going.

"Please, may I come and see you?" whispered Jim. "I'm dreadfully sorry I offended you again."

"You are the largest child that ever wandered around without a guardian," she said, showing her dimples. "Yes, only you are on probation."

His delight was so evident that she softened still more. "You would really be nice," she informed him, "if you didn't have such preposterous ideas. Good night, Mr. Morrison. Mary, the dinner was a joy. Good night, Mr. Tillman."

"I'll never cease to be grateful to you good people," declared Jim when the guests had gone.

"Did you square yourself?" Tillman asked. "Mrs. Goring was telling me about your drunken serenade."

"I was absolutely sober, I swear it," he protested, "but I don't suppose I'll ever make that woman think so. I must love the girl when I'm willing to take on that pair as in-laws."

Mary laughed deprecatingly. "Mrs.

Goring is really a dear," she said, "only her disposition has been soured by living so many years with Mr. Goring, who has always been a hard drinker. I think she fancies Carlo Lopez because he is a teetotaler. He doesn't even drink wine."

"The more I hear about that Spig the less I like him."

"In your own interests, Morrison, and those of your father, soft-pedal remarks about Spigs in this country," advised Tillman. "Things have been known to happen to reckless Yankees. Lopez is a pure Castilian."

"Huh, you can't prove by me that Castilians are pure. Thought you said Lopez got expelled from Harvard for raising Cain?"

"He's reformed," grinned the agent.

CHAPTER VI.

GENERAL LOPEZ INTERRUPTS.

THE inhabitants of Castile, according to all accounts, are proud, haughty, honorable, and easily offended, and Carlo Lopez came of Castilians who had lived for three hundred years in Central America, where the climate has a degenerating effect upon the fine qualities of any white race.

He had made overtures to James Morrison in perfectly good faith, assuming that Jim was representing his father in Rosa Blanca and was fully informed regarding the situation of the fruit company in the republic of Santa Rosa, and he had been grievously offended by the curt note in which Morrison refused to dine with him without even bothering to explain his refusal. This was not only a slight to the ministry of war, but was particularly insulting to the very proud incumbent of the office.

Later in the evening, while paying his respects to Miss Goring in the presence of her parents, his ears had been assailed by ribald singing and he was

informed that it was Jim Morrison in person who was making the night hideous under the window of Ellen Goring.

Lopez had long since made up his mind that Ellen would make a perfect Señora Lopez and his discovery that the son of Tom Morrison was interested in the young woman would have alarmed him if he had not been reassured by the behavior of Miss Goring upon that occasion.

But, as he kept informed of everything that happened in the city, he learned next night that the Gorings were dining with the Tillmans and that the only other guest was James Morrison, and he remembered an old Spanish proverb that one could not tell how a woman felt by what she said or did.

Ellen, he knew, did not like living in Santa Rosa and if she accepted the minister of war, she would have to reside here most of the time. Morrison was richer than Lopez and he could settle his wife in New York. It might be Morrison's winning argument.

Next afternoon, about four o'clock, General Carlo Lopez, wearing a striking service uniform of his own design—green coat, with heavy gold frogs, white riding breeches and high boots, and a gold and red fatigue cap—passed through the archway of the consulate and came into the patio, where he found Ellen Goring in the arms of Jim Morrison who was kissing her on the lips. True, she broke away immediately, her eyes blazing, her little fists clenched. She faced Jim like a young fury.

"I ask your pardon. I have intruded," softly said Carlo Lopez, whose black eyes were also blazing.

Ellen's composure returned. "Come right in, general," she said. "Mr. Morrison is just going. Oh yes, you are, and you're never coming back!"

"Is there any little thing I can do, Miss Goring?" asked Lopez softly but significantly.

"I am quite capable of managing my affairs, thank you," she retorted. "Good afternoon, Mr. Morrison."

Jim looked imploringly at the girl, threw Lopez a glance full of resentment for his intrusion and indeed for his very existence, then picked up his hat and went away. Lopez seated himself and, with exquisite tact, began to discuss a German opera company which the president of the republic had invited to Rosa Blanca.

Jim had behaved shamefully as he admitted to himself. Once again the brown eyes of that girl had intoxicated him and the kindness with which she had received him had affected his brain.

He had just come into the patio and Ellen, who was sitting under the colonnade, had risen and come forward with outstretched hand and a smile on her lovely face. All was well; she was no longer hostile and it only needed good judgment and a little patience; but what did he do?

Imbecile, he had flamed at the touch of her hand, exploded at the benevolence in her eyes and he had dragged her roughly into his embrace and rained kisses upon her sweet unprotected little face. She had struggled fiercely and then seemed to yield; he wouldn't swear to it, but it seemed as though she were beginning to return the pressure of his lips when that gold and green and white Adonis, Carlo Lopez, appeared on the scene. Ellen had thrust him violently from her and pronounced sentence of exile. It was all Lopez's fault. Now what was he going to do?

FROM his hotel he sent by messenger a letter full of extravagant protests of repentance, which was returned unopened. He tried the telephone and got Mrs. Goring, who told him Ellen did not wish to speak to him. He planted himself for two days outside the consulate and, on the second day, she emerged looking as cool and fresh in the melting afternoon as though she had come out of a refrigerator. She saw him, hesitated, and continued toward him.

"Please forgive me, Miss Goring," he said humbly.

"Don't you ever dare to speak to me again," she said as sharply as a lovely girl could say anything, and then she passed on her way.

General Carlo Lopez had a pleasant visit with Ellen after the departure of Jim Morrison and found her kinder toward him than usual, but her manner did not entirely satisfy him. He had seen her repulse and banish the mad American, and she certainly seemed to resent the man's familiarity with the utmost bitterness—but would she have done so had the minister of war not appeared unexpectedly upon the scene?

Being totally unacquainted with the impulsive nature of Jim Morrison, Lopez could not conceive that the fellow might have embraced and kissed Ellen without some encouragement. The Latin race has always overstressed the importance of a kiss. Lopez recalled the old Spanish proverb: "A woman kissed is two-thirds won." He was already furiously jealous of the young American, yet, such was his breeding, he had asked Ellen no questions regarding the situation he had blundered upon.

Back in his office in the Administration Building, however, General Carlo Lopez had a secretary telephone to John Laird, who was at the Hotel Trinidad, and Laird arrived shortly before six o'clock.

"Mr. Laird," he said crisply. "at our conference I told you that we should keep our agreement with the Morrison Company. That goes. If it should happen, however, that the Morrison Company should make an unjust demand upon this government, or reflect in any way upon our ability to govern our country, I should feel that we were absolved from our obligation and I am sure President Garcia would feel the same way."

"Yes? Is there any—er—prospect of such a thing coming to pass?"

Lopez smiled. "I think there is such

a possibility. Therefore, if your principals can make us a better offer—"

"I'll undertake to arrange that," said the Blue Star agent eagerly.

When he had gone, Carlo Lopez wrote a letter, called in a spruce young officer and studied him for a moment.

"I want this letter placed in the hands of Pizzo the bandit," he said slowly. "Do you think you can find his camp and deliver it?"

"*Sí, Señor General*, I shall do my best."

"Go in civilian clothes and be silent about this mission. If you succeed you will not be a lieutenant any longer, you will be a captain."

CHAPTER VII.

A DARING RAID.

A WEEK had passed since Jim Morrison rode down from the hills to take the steamer from New York. Now he sat in his room in his B. V. D.'s and wondered how you married a girl who hated you.

His temperament was mercurial; he was either in the clouds or at the bottom of an abyss. That he had made an impression on Ellen he was sure, for she had kissed back; but what good did that do when she wouldn't let him see her any more? Here he was, stewing in this hole for her sake, and he couldn't think of any way to make her see him, while in the offing was that handsome peacock, Lopez, who knew all about making love to women.

His watch on the bureau said two thirty; the whole darn town, resident Americans as well as natives, would sleep until three. Nobody to talk to, nowhere to go, and drinks didn't help much.

Tap, tap—a knock on the door.

"Come in, whoever you are," he called wearily. The door opened and a very curious-looking man appeared on the threshold.

"*Perdóna me, señor*," he said, re-

moving his hat, a very dirty Panama, and bowing very low. He was small, half Indian by the look of him. He wore a heavy black mustache, possessed only a few front teeth, and needed a bath very badly. He was dressed in what had once been a khaki uniform and around his waist was an ammunition belt from which was suspended a heavy revolver in a leather holster, and a hunting knife. On his feet were canvas shoes.

"What the deuce do you want?" demanded the American.

"You are Señor Morrison, *sí*?"

"Well, yes. What of it?"

"I introduce myself. I am General Esteban Pizzo." A second low bow.

Jim opened his eyes. "Not Pizzo, the bandit?"

"Pizzo, the patriot, *señor*."

"You got a nerve coming to town. Have a drink?"

"A thousand regrets, *señor*. There is not time. You will dress and come with me."

"You go to the dickens," Jim retorted. "Clear out! Scat!"

General Pizzo drew from his holster his very large revolver. "My men, they surround the hotel. You come or I kill."

"I'll come," Jim agreed quickly. He was unarmed and the fellow looked villainous. "But why? What for?"

"I think the Señor Morrison pay very large ransom for his son. That is why."

"Yes? Maybe he'll be glad to get rid of me. Can I put my clothes on?"

"*Porqué no?*"

Taking this for assent, Jim dressed leisurely, wondering how it was possible for the bandit and his men to enter Rosa Blanca in the face of the government army, walk into the leading hotel, and carry off one of its most prominent guests.

"We go now," Pizzo declared, and Jim walked in front of him with the uneasy feeling that a gun was pointed at the small of his back. They walked

along the corridor and descended the staircase one flight to the ground floor. There were four bandits in the office. No guests were visible or servants. The bandits fell in behind their leader and the party moved to the door, which was suddenly blocked by Ellen Goring, who frowned at the sight of Jim, and then took in his escort with astonishment.

"What's this?" she exclaimed. "Another of your wonderful ideas?"

"Beat it, Ellen," he cried. "It's Pizzo, the bandit. I'm pinched."

"Are you crazy?" she demanded. "What—why—oh?"

For General Pizzo had come out from behind the broad form of Morrison and covered Ellen with his big revolver.

"I regret," he said in his weird English. "*La señorita* is beautiful, but she make mistake to be here. Now she come with us. We take two prisoners."

The whole affair had struck Jim Morrison as being comic opera, but the statement of the bandit made it look very different. The brute was pointing a gun at Ellen and talking about taking her into the hills.

With his usual precipitancy he let fly his right fist at the chin of General Esteban Pizzo, caught him on the side of the jaw because he happened to move, and sent him down like a log, the revolver clattering on the floor. Jim forgot there were four more bandits behind him, and before he remembered he was struck on the back of the head with the butt of a long blue-barreled Colt and joined the general on the dirty stone floor.

A rush of bandits captured Ellen before she could utter a cry, and a dirty hairy hand covered her pretty mouth. General Pizzo got up from the floor with a snarl of rage, kicked Jim Morrison heavily in the ribs with one of his big boots, and then recovered his *sang-froid*.

"*Pronto!*" he exclaimed. "Throw

the man and woman in the bottom of the car and let us depart."

THERE was nobody in the Plaza when Jim and Ellen were placed in the tonneau of a big though ancient touring car, and nobody to interfere when the five bandits climbed in after them and drove away. The machine rattled along through empty streets to the west side of the city and came to the barrier which was guarded.

Half a dozen soldiers and a sergeant piled out of a stone hut and the bandit who was driving stopped the car. The sergeant approached and demanded the password, whereupon Pizzo leaned out and said in a low tone:

"*El Presidente.*"

"Pass," commanded the non-commissioned officer, and that was all there was to it.

Jim had received a savage blow and had been unconscious during the ten minutes required to get out of the city, but he recovered as the machine began to bump over the rough country road, and he opened his eyes to find Ellen's face within six inches of his own and her eyes filled with anxiety. He realized that his head was pillowed on her knees, and they were both in the bottom of an automobile. He recalled everything.

"My dear," he said, "I'm so frightfully sorry."

"Hush," she said softly. "You were wonderful. It wasn't your fault."

The machine was climbing now in second gear, for the foothills of the Sierras are close to the shore in Santa Rosa. The two bandits in the back seat were watching them closely with their weapons drawn and ready. He and Ellen were headed for hardships and dangers he could only suspect, but Jim was happier than he had been for a week, because his head was on Ellen's knees and she had said he was wonderful.

The machine was halted suddenly

when several government cavalry men blocked the road. Again the password was efficacious, the horsemen drew to one side, and even the sight of two people in the bottom of the car did not seem to disturb them.

"Does your head hurt terribly?" she whispered.

He grinned at her. "It would if I moved. I'm terribly sorry about you, Ellen. They captured me to hold me for ransom, and no doubt they'll do the same for you. I'll see that they get whatever they ask."

"I'm not afraid. It was very brave of you to attack them when you saw that I was in danger." Her eyes were moist.

"Don't you know that I'd lay down my life for you?" he said softly. "Only, as usual, everything I do is wrong. They might have let you go if I had not hit Pizzo."

"No, no, they wouldn't," she protested. "They knew I would alarm the city. They had to take me."

Pizzo, in the front seat, turned his head.

"Silence back there," he commanded harshly.

Something made Jim chuckle. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Motor bandits in this God-forsaken country. Jesse James had a horse."

It was getting cooler as they climbed, and the car rattled and shook and bumped over a road which was more and more rocky and filled with holes. At the end of an hour it turned off the apology for a road and stopped a few rods within the jungle.

Pizzo got out first and approached the tonneau.

"Does the *señorita* speak Spanish?" he asked.

Ellen nodded.

"It is my great regret that it has been necessary to take you with us," he said, his black eyes devouring her loveliness. "You shall see that General Pizzo is a *caballero* who knows how to

treat beautiful ladies. This man is rich. We hold him for ransom, but we hold you to delight the eyes of my brave patriots who one day will rule Santa Rosa."

"What's he saying?" demanded Jim, whose Spanish was hopeless.

Ellen had turned pale at what his remarks implied, but she feared to tell the headstrong youth. Jim was likely to get himself killed out of hand.

"Just fulsome compliments," she said.

"And now we must mount our horses," continued Pizzo. "If Señor Morrison cannot ride we shall tie him on a horse."

Jim most reluctantly lifted himself from his pillow. "I can ride," he said curtly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLEVER GAME.

THE clerk at the Hotel Trinidad had been bound and gagged and laid down behind his counter, where he was found an hour later by other employees of the hotel who came on duty. He reported that bandits had carried off Mr. James Morrison and a lady who had entered the hotel as they were departing, and the police immediately notified the government, so that General Carlo Lopez was in receipt of the information a few minutes later; but he was not surprised by it.

He had written to the bandit Pizzo that he could probably win a fortune by capturing Morrison and, as he had personal reasons for wishing the fellow out of the way, he would arrange that Pizzo and a few picked men might enter and leave the city unmolested. There was a chance that the minister of war was only laying a trap for the bandit, but Pizzo did not think so, because he was aware that the existence of a small band of robbers was the government's excuse for taxing the

people to support an army which was overlarge for the population of the republic. There was no special enmity between him and Lopez, and the government had made no serious effort to molest him for a couple of years.

So General Pizzo had risked himself and a few followers in the city and escaped, not with one prisoner but with two; but Lopez did not learn the identity of the second captive until Consul Goring telephoned him in great distress that Ellen had gone out shortly after two o'clock and had not returned to dinner.

Although Lopez had been informed that the hotel clerk had reported that a lady had been carried off with Morrison, it had not occurred to him for a second that the woman might be Ellen Goring. Having a low opinion of male morality he had supposed that Pizzo had found the American with some plaything and had obliged him by taking her along.

A search of the city which occupied the entire police force for hours revealed no trace of Ellen, and the minister of war was forced to conclude that the woman he hoped to marry had been taken in the trap he had arranged for his rival. If Ellen had seen Lopez in his rage, the fact that it was due to concern for her would not have prevented her from being terrified.

His plan had been to send an expedition after Pizzo, with secret instructions not to find him, after being officially informed that Morrison had been carried off by the bandit. Tom Morrison in New York would rage and storm against the government of Santa Rosa, and undoubtedly would make threats that no self-respecting administration need tolerate. In retaliation, President Garcia would break the exclusive trade arrangement with the Morrison Fruit Company, and the Blue Star would enter the republic in triumph.

Morrison, of course, would agree to pay the ransom when it was evident

that the Santa Rosa government was incapable of rescuing his son, but this would be a matter of weeks, possibly months, and in the meantime Lopez expected to persuade Ellen Goring to marry him.

This imbecile of a Pizzo had complicated a very sweet little plot by carrying off the very girl Lopez wanted to keep away from Morrison, and he made the air blue with curses upon the devoted head of the bandit.

Then he cooled down and considered the situation more calmly. Apparently the girl had either been calling on Morrison in his chambers, something which his esteem for Ellen made it impossible to believe, or she had entered the hotel by accident at the moment of the raid and had been carried off by Pizzo lest she give the alarm. In any case, she was of no value to Pizzo, and when the bandit learned that she was dear to the minister of war he would release her quickly.

Lopez sent for the young officer who had delivered his first message to the bandit and, while awaiting him, indited a letter which would put fear into Pizzo's soul if he had one. It was a peremptory demand for the immediate release of Miss Goring, daughter of the American consul. If she were not back in Rosa Blanca in twenty-four hours the entire army of the republic would take the field against him and exterminate his band.

The messenger started in a speedy motor car some seven hours after the car containing the captives and their captors had passed out of the city. Lopez ordered two regiments to be prepared to march into the hills at six o'clock the following morning, and then he called on the president to explain how the failure to rescue Jim Morrison would result to the advantage of the administration.

It was necessary to make a gesture against the bandits, of course, but Morrison would only be satisfied with success, and a break between him and

President Garcia was certain. Garcia saw the light quickly.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE LAIR OF THE BANDIT.

THERE was a big lump on Jim Morrison's head, but no abrasions. He could not account for the pain in his side until Ellen told him that Pizzo had kicked him while he lay unconscious.

"I'll get even with him for that," Jim muttered as they walked to the horses. "But, first, I've got to get you out of this."

"I'm not afraid—that is, not very much," she said rather dolefully. "But these men are rather awful."

They followed a winding path through a fernlike growth and came unexpectedly into a clearing where a dozen saddled horses were waiting, in charge of two black men armed with rifles and wearing very few clothes. Pizzo approached and pointed to a sorry horse which he ordered Morrison to mount, then smirked at Ellen and started to lead her forward to a small but efficient-looking mountain pony.

"I deeply regret," he explained in Spanish, "I have no side saddle, for I did not expect the good fortune of the *señorita's* company."

"I can't ride astride in these clothes," she replied, "but if you go slowly I can sit sidewise in the saddle."

"We shall accommodate our pace to your needs, *señorita*," he assured her, "and I shall ride beside you to assist you in necessity."

She looked at him contemptuously. "I shall not need your help."

He bowed again, a very gallant bandit. "Nevertheless, I shall be beside you."

He bent his back for her to step upon to mount and she leaped lightly from it into the saddle. Morrison was already mounted and watched this courtesy with well founded uneasiness.

If the yellow brute was going to be smitten with Ellen, it would make their situation much more serious than he had considered it up to the present.

Pizzo led the way up the mountain trail, and the cavalcade strung out behind him. Jim glowered as he rode along and vainly sought a practical plan of extricating them from their peril.

There were two blacks behind him with rifles; three bandits, armed with revolvers, rode ahead, between him and Pizzo, who rode beside Ellen. If Jim had been alone he would have risked throwing himself off his horse and plunging into the dense jungle through which they were threading their way, but he had to submit to this humiliating progress because of Ellen. If only he were beside her to cheer and encourage her! But Pizzo had made sure that they were separated.

If Esteban Pizzo had seen Ellen in Rosa Blanca he would not have dared lift his eyes to her, but he was general of a small and well armed band, and she was his captive. He rode a foot behind her so he could study her, and the more he studied her exquisite profile, the graceful poise of her fine little head, the perfection of her figure as she jogged along, the greater grew his admiration.

This was the loveliest creature who had ever ridden into the mountains of Santa Rosa, and she was his prize of war. He congratulated himself that he had dared enter the city in response to the invitation of Carlo Lopez, for not only would he get an enormous ransom for the son of Thomas Morrison, but he had secured a lovely mistress, perhaps a wife. Why not? He was a bachelor.

The sun set, and still they rode slowly through the hills. The character of the vegetation changed, the temperature lowered very pleasantly, and then it was dark, and Pizzo sent a man ahead with a lantern to light the way, while one of the blacks fastened Mor-

risson's hands behind him and roped his feet under the belly of his horse.

Ellen was an experienced horse-woman, but she was half dead with fatigue and almost hysterical from terror and apprehension, for she had not missed the attraction she seemed to possess for the bandit leader. But at last they passed through a narrow rocky defile and came suddenly in sight of the lights of a settlement in a valley a few hundred feet below.

"It is my camp," said Pizzo proudly. "In fifteen minutes we shall be there, *señorita*. I promise you a welcome."

Morrison also saw the lights and knew that the end of the journey was in sight. He also was very tired, his head hurt, and he thought he had a broken rib, but he was glad, more for Ellen's sake than his own, that they would have a chance to rest.

IN a quarter of an hour they debouched into a village street, passing between rows of wooden huts thatched with palm leaves. They were cheered by several hundred men and women who rushed out of the houses.

Before the largest of the huts they dismounted, and Ellen would have fallen had not Pizzo grasped her and passed his arm about her waist. Her strength returned magically, and she tore away from him.

"Don't you dare to touch me!" she exclaimed.

The bandit turned his palms out in deprecation. "You were about to fall, *señorita*."

"I don't care. Don't touch me."

"Be pleased to enter my poor dwelling. You and the Señor Morrison will dine with me to-night." He ordered Morrison released from his bonds and ushered the two prisoners into a large room in which a table was set, bare of linen, but upon which reposed a cold ham and a huge round loaf of bread which both Ellen and Jim eyed wolfishly.

"*Señor, señorita*," announced Pizzo. "I go to give some orders, but I return *pronto* and then we shall dine."

"Ellen, darling," Jim said when they were alone, "it breaks my heart that you should be in this predicament."

"It's not your fault," she said crossly, "and don't use endearing terms to me."

"It's the way I think of you," he muttered. "What brought you to the hotel at that moment?"

"I wanted some stationery and the shops were closed. Does it matter?" She dropped exhausted upon a chair.

"My father will arrange ransom for us both, but it's dreadful you should be held in a place like this even for a minute."

She smiled. "I suppose this is what is known as adventure. I don't like it. That Pizzo is appalling. However, General Carlo Lopez will have us out of here in a day or two. The whole army may be on the march at this minute."

"He might do it for you," said Jim, "but I don't think he would bother his head about me, and I'd rather be ransomed than be beholden to him."

"Upon my word," exclaimed the girl, "when I begin to like you you make the thing impossible. Carlo Lopez is my friend. I admire him."

"Well, he doesn't admire me. Say, wasn't it very queer these bandits were able to come into the heart of the city? And they knew the passwords. Who gave them to them? I wouldn't be surprised if your friend Lopez—"

"Jim Morrison—" she began angrily and then blushed violently.

"That's the first time you have called me Jim," he declared.

"And it will be the last. A slip of the tongue."

"Please don't let's quarrel," he pleaded. "I don't know why I always get your goat. You're not really interested in Lopez, are you?"

"It's none of your business," she retorted.

"It is too. I love you and want to marry you. He knows it, and I wouldn't be surprised if he got me kidnaped."

She sprang to her feet and glared at him. "And had me kidnaped too, I suppose!"

"No-o. I expect that was Pizzo's private enterprise. Ellen, is there anything I can do to make us friends?"

She was still angry. "You might try keeping quiet."

He sat down and felt of his head.

"Does it hurt very much?" she asked quickly.

Jim nodded. He felt of his ribs.

"Do you think they are broken?" she asked, still more gently. "It was the most brutal thing I ever saw."

He sighed heavily.

"You poor boy," she cooed. And then General Pizzo had to enter.

"*Señor, señorita*, at table," he commanded. "I am of a great hunger myself."

Nothing loath, they seated themselves, and, despite the atrocious table manners of the bandit, they ate heartily of ham and bread, but neither could drink the goat's milk, which Pizzo observed, and ordered a ragged servant to bring in a bottle of wine.

The bandit was in superb spirits and evidently wished to make an impression on the girl by his gallantry. Fortunately Jim did not understand most of his remarks or he might have met a violent end, but Ellen's cheeks were red and she answered in monosyllables.

"**H**OW much ransom are you going to ask for me?" asked Morrison when the general sank back in his chair surfeited with food.

"Two hundred fifty thousand dollars," replied Pizzo, his eyes agleam at the thought of so much American money.

"Double it," said Jim. "That includes also the young lady."

"Ah, you have interest in the young lady?"

"She is my fiancée—" He glanced at Ellen, read danger signals, and added hastily, "almost."

"*Sí, sí*. I do not know that. I think that over. I ask perhaps five hundred thousand dollars for you, maybe with, maybe without *la señorita*."

"The minister of war, Carlo Lopez," said Ellen in Spanish, "is a very great friend of—my father. If you do not release me without ransom, you will have the whole army of the republic to fight."

Pizzo shrugged his shoulder. "I do not care for the army of the republic. In the mountains I am king. But I would do very much for the beautiful *señorita*."

"Then let me go," she pleaded.

He smirked at her. "I consider that. Maybe you will like it here. It is very nice here. Cool. Not hot like Rosa Blanca."

"What's he talking about?" demanded Morrison for Ellen had shuddered.

"Nothing," she lied. "Don't anger him."

Pizzo understood and laid down his knife; he had not used a fork. "Señor Morrison, you are worth much money to me. I treat you well, but if you anger me, look out. I shoot quick and I shoot to kill."

"You're a regular hot tamale," sneered Jim. "If you injure a hair of this lady's head—well, you see what will happen." His finish was lame.

Pizzo rose, went to the door and shouted and in a few seconds three or four savages with rifles entered the room with much stamping.

"Take the *señor* to the empty *casa* opposite and lock him up for the night. Put a double watch around the house. *Buenas noches*, Señor Morrison," he said mockingly.

Jim jumped up and clenched his fists. "Be careful," warned Ellen. "You must do as he tells you."

"But I won't leave you alone with this—this—"

"Don't say it. I am sure General

Pizzo knows how to respect a *señorita*."

"No man in Santa Rosa is a greater *caballero*," declared Pizzo. "Take him away."

Jim obeyed the prayer in her eyes and went silently. At the door he looked back, his face working with emotion.

"Good night, Jim," she called to him. "Don't worry. I shall be all right."

When she was alone with the bandit he faced him fearlessly.

"I am tired. I wish to sleep, general," she said coolly.

Pizzo opened a door to an inner room and showed her a bed.

"It is my chamber, *señorita*. None shall disturb your slumbers. I shall have a bed made up in this room."

Ellen managed a smile. "General, I think you are a true *caballero*," she said gratefully.

The little man swelled at her words. "You shall see," he declared.

CHAPTER X.

PIZZO SHOTS TO KILL.

HOWEVER, as soon as Ellen was in the chamber, which was reasonably clean, by the way, she placed two chairs, one on top of the other, against the door so that an attempt to open it would cause the top chair to fall with a crash. She lay down upon the bed, fully dressed. Her intention was to fight off sleep, but she was dead with fatigue and in ten minutes she was unconscious.

Many hours later she was awakened by voices in the next room and she saw that the sun had been up at least an hour. Pizzo was talking to some one and she could hear every word.

"I do not fear General Lopez, or President Garcia," he boasted. "I do not care if she is the wife of Carlo Lopez. He cannot command me. She is my prisoner. I think I marry her myself."

"General Lopez says he will take the field himself at the head of the whole army of the nation," said the stranger boldly. "Beware, General Pizzo. You cannot fight the whole republic."

Pizzo laughed scornfully. "This Lopez! I do him a service. I carry off this Morrison. I will pay him a commission on the ransom. Tell him that. It is not my fault this beautiful *señorita* encounters me just as I am leaving the city. I take her with me so she cannot bring down the police upon us and get this Lopez into trouble with me. Now, I love her. I am as good a *caballero* as Lopez. I think she likes me better already. I do not give her up."

"Then you and your whole band, men, women and children, will be exterminated!" declared the messenger. "Our airplanes will drop bombs on this village as soon as I return."

"If you return," retorted the bandit significantly. "My friend, I know a pass through the mountains into Nicaragua. Once there, I am safe; the army of Santa Rosa is powerless. A few more bandits in Nicaragua mean nothing whatever to Nicaragua. From any part of these mountains I can collect the ransom from Señor Tomaso Morrison. Lopez may find another American *señorita*. This one belongs to me."

"Shall I take back that message?" asked the man.

"A moment. You have twice been in this valley. You know where are my outposts. Another shall take back my defiance. You remain."

"I came here under a flag of truce," cried the other. "You wouldn't dare detain me."

Pizzo laughed. "I dare anything."

"Then I proclaim you nothing but a treacherous brigand," cried the brave man who confronted him.

Crash! It was a pistol shot. She heard a groan and a heavy body fall and she tore open the door and stood in the doorway. Pizzo was returning a

smoking pistol to his holster. A man in the uniform of a Santa Rosa army officer lay bleeding on the floor. Ellen uttered a shriek and crumpled down into a still white heap.

Pizzo looked at his victim, then at the girl lying on the floor. Shrugging his shoulders, he picked Ellen up with difficulty, for she weighed a hundred and eighteen pounds, and he was a small man, carried her back into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. For a moment he looked down on her. Was she worth the decision he had made to defy the whole military force of the republic? Well, anyway, he had done it, and she would pay for it. He left the hut and shouted for his lieutenants.

"Break camp, burn the houses, pack everything we can carry," he commanded. "We're going across the frontier into Nicaragua."

There were protests. This valley was the only home these outlaws possessed; but Pizzo knew how to explain the situation. Lopez had permitted him to carry off Morrison for ransom, but now Lopez had changed his mind and demanded that they give up their captive. The ransom of Morrison would make them all rich. It would be a million American dollars.

In Nicaragua's mountains they were safe from the army of Santa Rosa, and the revolution in that country would prevent its government from bothering about alien bandits in the remote recesses of the hills. The girl? Oh, she was nobody; it was on account of Morrison that they were taking to flight.

LOOKING through a window in the hut in which he had spent the night, Jim Morrison saw the outlaws assemble. There were about a hundred men, he thought, thirty-five or forty women, and a score or more of children of all ages. In the entire outfit there were not a dozen men who could be called white, the rest were Indians, negroes and breeds of the three races.

He watched them bustle about with lack-luster eyes. What had happened to Ellen during the night? Who had fired the shot just now, which came apparently from Pizzo's headquarters? The last question was soon answered for he saw four men carrying out a body dressed in the uniform of an officer of Santa Rosa cavalry. An envoy, perhaps, from the government, and this brigand had killed him!

Until he set eyes upon that dead body, Jim Morrison had not been fully alive to the desperate character of his captors. Pizzo was a slimy little rat, a menace to an unprotected young woman, but Jim couldn't accept him as a full-fledged bandit. He hadn't believed in bandits. The whole thing had seemed absurd. But Ellen's situation was not absurd, and ransom or no ransom, neither of them was safe in such a mob.

His door was unbolted and a soldier beckoned to him. He followed him into Pizzo's hut where the general was sitting at table.

Pizzo motioned to a seat.

"The young lady?" Jim demanded.

"She have refuse to come," said the chieftain. "I have to kill a man and she unfortunately see him. It's a pity."

"Where is she?" he cried. Pizzo nodded toward the inner room. Jim rushed to the door and knocked. "Ellen, it's Jim. Will you come out to breakfast?"

"I will not eat with a murderer," she answered hysterically. Pizzo laughed.

"I have finished. I go. Make her eat."

He left the room and Ellen emerged upon being informed of the fact. She was very pale and her eyes were red.

Jim grew pale as he looked at her. "Did that wretch—did he—"

"No, no," she denied. "He was decent to me, but, oh, Jim, he shot an officer who came from Lopez, murdered him in cold blood."

"Yes. I saw the body carried out,

You poor kid, it must have been dreadful! Sit down here. There's nothing but bread and milk, but you need your strength."

He seated her and took his place opposite. Ellen was silent for a long moment, her head bent, but she was watching him through her long lashes. "Jim," she said shyly, "I have been very unjust to you, and I was horrid last night."

He laughed delightedly. "Anything you ever said to me, I deserved. I had it coming to me."

"No, you didn't. The officer was a messenger from Lopez and I overheard his conversation with Pizzo. Jim, Lopez was responsible for your capture. He contrived it with Pizzo."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," Jim replied calmly.

"The officer was sent to demand my release, not yours."

"Well, that would help a lot."

"And Pizzo killed him so he couldn't return and inform Lopez the location of this camp." Her voice began to shake. "He—he isn't going to let me go."

"Oh, yes, he will," Jim assured her.

She stretched appealing hands across the table. "Jim, I have been frightful to you and I don't deserve anything from you, but will you save me from this man? He says he's going to m-m-marry me." Her sobs overcame her. With two strides Jim was around the table and had her in his arms and this time she didn't repulse him.

"Don't you worry, darling," he declared as he stroked her glossy hair. "Nobody's going to marry you but me. I was afraid of Lopez, but you're onto him now, and you bet this funny bandit won't get you."

She looked up and smiled pitifully. "You'll think it's just because I'm in peril that I turn to you."

He laughed loudly to conceal his emotion. "I should worry why you turn to me, so long as you do. It's a question of money with these beggars

and father has plenty for both of us."

She released herself and smoothed her hair. "No, Jim," she said.

"Pizzo thinks he's in love with me and he expects to get all the money he wants for you. I heard him say he was going to cross the frontier to Nicaragua and escape the Santa Rosa troops. If you can't save me, I won't be saved, that's all."

"Then it's up to us to get away. Just be ready to do whatever I say. Something will break for us."

CHAPTER XI.

JIM OBEYS AN IMPULSE.

OUTSIDE was much shouting and shrilling and Pizzo was heard giving sharp commands; there was the stamping of horses and mules and burros. Pizzo had no fear that the troops would penetrate into his fastness for days and he knew that Lopez expected his messenger to return accompanied by the young woman, so he need expect no overt action from the war minister until the messenger became overdue.

If Pizzo regretted that he had permitted his affections to jeopardize the existence of his band it was too late, now, to change things. The frontier of Nicaragua was forty miles away over high mountains, two days distant for an outfit which was loading most of the animals with its possessions and would have to proceed on foot.

He wanted to be on the march as soon as possible lest Lopez send airplanes on his trail when twenty-four hours had passed without the return of the unfortunate officer. Pizzo thought he could conceal his forces from the eye of an observer in a plane, but it would be safer to be across the frontier before the aircraft were sent out.

Ellen and Jim had half an hour together before the busy leader returned to their headquarters, and it was their

first wholly amicable interview. The treachery of Lopez had shocked Ellen inexpressibly, even though it was displayed against Jim and not herself. She could not help contrasting favorably the big, blond, honest, humorous youth who sat opposite her with the slender, suave, handsome, but crafty Central American.

She was petrified with terror of Pizzo, and though she had turned to Jim and let her head rest on his breast just because he was her only hope, she had liked the feel of it there. She liked his protestations of love because now she believed he meant them, and she remembered that she had begun to like his kisses back home in the patio. Perhaps, after all, he was her man.

Jim was silent during most of their *tête-à-tête* because his mind was furiously working. It was up to him. Ellen depended on him. He was alone against a hundred armed and savage men, yet somehow he had to save her.

He shuddered at the thought of the girl in Pizzo's power for a second night. The man's passion must be tremendous if he had chosen to hold her against the whole force of the republic of Santa Rosa, and it was not to be trusted. The thought of Ellen in the arms of the half-breed caused his brain to reel. Ellen watched him as she nibbled at the dry bread and knew pretty well what was passing through his head. She wasn't afraid now, for somehow this ridiculous youth, whom she had mocked in Rosa Blanca, inspired confidence.

"Have—have you a plan?" she hazarded finally.

"No," he said dolefully. "We'll just have to watch our chance. It's bad enough now, but if he gets us away up in the interior, even if we escaped we'd perish before we ever reached a settlement. Hush, he's coming."

Pizzo entered. He had strapped a sword around his waist, had two revolvers in his belt now, and wore a flapping felt hat with a red feather in

it. His black eyes gleamed as he looked at Ellen. Morrison he ignored.

"You feel better, *señorita*?" he demanded in Spanish. "My heart is sick that you saw an execution. You must understand I am a soldier and I killed an enemy."

"I don't care to talk to you, murderer," she said coldly.

His smirk vanished and he drew himself up. "*Señorita*," he said. "I love you. Because I love you I have refused a demand that I send you back to Rosa Blanca and now the whole army is marching against me. That is love, is it not?"

For answer she rose from the table and moved toward the inner room.

"You cannot take refuge there," he said, following her. "For your sake I abandon this camp where I have lived for three years and cross the frontier with my soldiers. This house and all the others I am about to burn."

Jim had risen and was listening with anxiety to the tirade, for the bandit's voice was rising. Pizzo whirled on him.

"I attend to you," he snarled. He darted to the door and shouted and, in a moment, two soldiers, a negro and an Indian, entered, closing the door behind them.

"Take this man outside and guard him," he commanded.

PIZZO turned his back to Jim and followed Ellen into the bedroom.

This was too much for the hot-tempered American. The riflemen had stepped up to him and separated, one of them indicating that he was to step between them. With every ounce of strength he possessed, Jim brought his right fist up and crashed it against the point of the Indian's jaw. As the fellow dropped, Jim grasped the rifle and drove the butt of it squarely against the forehead of the negro who was trying to lift his gun to his shoulder. The second man collapsed and fell upon the body of the first, and Morrison swung

about with the rifle and covered Pizzo who had turned and was standing in the doorway of the bedroom in the act of drawing his revolver from its holster.

"Drop that gun," Jim commanded harshly.

The revolver fell from the fingers of the bandit.

"For this I will kill," Pizzo snarled, his upper lip drawing back and showing yellow fangs and cavities.

"I'm doing the killing," declared Morrison. "Ellen, pick up that revolver and take the other one away from him."

"Quick!" he cried as she appeared, hesitating, behind the bandit.

Ellen fumbled at the holster on the left side of Pizzo's belt and drew out the weapon, then picked up the revolver from the floor, holding each timorously by the muzzle instead of the butt.

"Now tell him that if he calls for help I'm going to shoot. He may not understand my English."

"I understand," said Pizzo. "You are imbecile. No ransom now. I kill you."

"Bring me those guns," Jim commanded; and Ellen glided to his side and handed him the weapons while Jim instantly covered Pizzo with one of them, having dropped the rifle to the floor. Both fallen soldiers were moving, and one sat up and blinked stupidly. "Tell them to be silent, Pizzo," he commanded. "If they yell, I'll shoot you."

Pizzo gave the order.

"Pull out his sword, and then stack these two rifles on the other side of the room," Jim said to Ellen. The girl returned timidly to Pizzo and shuddered at the glare he gave her, but she drew out the long blade from the scabbard. And then came a thump on the door.

"Ask them what they want, and tell them not to enter," snapped the American.

Pizzo lifted his voice and complied. "What did they say?" he demanded of Ellen.

"They say all is ready for the word to march, and six men remain behind to fire the houses."

"Pizzo," he said softly, "tell them all to march, and not to fire the houses. You will follow with these men and the prisoners."

Pizzo was shaking with indecision.

Jim looked him squarely in the eye. "I'm going to fire," he exclaimed. "Listen, Ellen. If he says anything else, tell me, and I'll empty this gun into him."

There was a tense second. The bandit chief understood what it meant to be abandoned by his men, but he saw that Morrison was desperate enough to shoot. In fact, he had no choice. He snapped out the order to march.

The lieutenant who stood outside the door shrugged his shoulders and shouted: "*Si, si, mi général!*" To him it was plain what was happening inside. The general was with a beautiful woman and wished to remain with her for awhile. He had two men to guard the male prisoner and saddled horses waiting with which to overtake the band which was moving forward on foot.

"Pizzo, go stand against the opposite wall with the others," instructed Jim, and the little bandit, head drooping but eyes watchful as those of a ferret, obeyed. Jim was perspiring from excitement as though he were in a steam bath. Ellen was almost fainting from nerves. They waited in silence.

Outside was much shouting, tramping, rattling of accouterments, and the buzzing of two ancient Ford cars that were going to be used on the mountain paths as far as they could be driven. Presently it was evident that the movement had commenced. Jim thanked the gods that there were no windows on the front of the hut, just the door.

There was a window at one side, but it was covered with a dirty curtain. Daylight streamed in from a bedroom window at the rear. No eyes outside could witness the drama of the interior.

Presently Pizzo spoke. He addressed Ellen in Spanish.

"He says," she translated, "that, even now, he will spare your life and overlook this incident, and he will release me with you when the ransom is paid."

"Tell him to go to the devil."

Pizzo understood that and tried English.

"My men will return and kill you, *señor*," he threatened.

"They'll find you dead, in that case," Jim said grimly. There was a silence lasting ten minutes. "Look outside, Ellen," Jim commanded. "See if the column is in sight."

The girl opened the door and stepped outside. She returned with a very white face.

"They are out of sight," she said, "but there are two armed men about a hundred feet away guarding six horses."

"Stick your head out, Pizzo," Jim ordered. "Tell those fellows to mount two horses and report you will be along in half an hour. Or how would you like a bullet in your back?"

Shaking with hatred and fury, Pizzo opened the door and yelled to the men. Ellen nodded that he had said what he was told to say.

"Back up, Pizzo—back up!" warned Jim.

The general returned to his post by the wall. A moment later they heard two horses galloping past.

"Now," said Morrison, "this is what is going to happen. Pizzo, you and I and the lady are going to take the other horses and ride to Rosa Blanca. You are going to show us the way. If you try any tricks, you get filled full of lead. If you are a good boy, I won't turn you over to the

Santa Rosa troops. Translate that, Ellen darling; he can only understand about six words of English at a time."

Ellen translated, and Pizzo looked sullen, but said nothing.

"Darned if I know what to do with the other two," Jim muttered. "March them ahead of us, I guess, for a few miles, and turn them loose. Ellen dear, can you carry those rifles as far as the horses? I'll have my hands full. Come on, Pizzo, you lead the way and tell the others to follow. I've got a lot of bullets here for you, remember that."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL.

APPARENTLY there was no fight in Pizzo, for he did what he was told. Jim made the trio go in single file and followed with his revolvers while Ellen staggered under the weight of the heavy rifles. Jim mounted first and took the two rifles from the girl, which he laid across his pommel, intending to throw them into the first chasm they came to. He made Pizzo aid the girl into her saddle.

"I'm going to ride astride," she declared. "Don't look at me, Jim. We've got to make good time, and I can't ride fast while sitting sidewise."

The two disarmed bandits were a problem, for if left behind they would bring the band quickly on the heels of the fugitives. He decided to force them to run ahead of the horses. He made Pizzo lead the fourth horse and ride ahead; he followed, and Ellen brought up the rear.

At a hundred yards he was able to dispose of the rifles by dropping them into a small stream, and then, keeping a sharp eye upon the men ahead, he ordered them to move faster. He remembered the rocky defile through which they had entered the valley, but from that point he was at Pizzo's mercy, for they had traveled in darkness the night before.

At a distance of two miles he dismissed the disarmed soldiers. He calculated that the main force of the bandits must be two miles from camp in the opposite direction, and it would take the pair an hour and a half to reach them.

There was more danger that a force might be sent back to camp to see what detained the general, but this possibility had to be chanced.

For an hour they climbed a narrow defile, and then they began to descend. They were making much better time than upon the previous night, due to Ellen's ability to travel faster, and Jim was hardly able to credit that things were going to work out so easily.

Pizzo rode with shoulders hunched and head bowed, probably boiling with fury and humiliation and plotting as hard as he was able. Occasionally Jim threw a word back to Ellen, but he dared not look around. She always answered cheerfully.

Two hours passed, and they were still traveling through mountainous and bewildering country. Suspecting that Pizzo might be leading them by a circuitous route toward his toiling followers, Jim shouted to him to slow up, and rode closer to him so he could threaten him frequently and at ease.

They were descending now, and the vegetation was changing from more temperate growths to ferns and occasional banana and bamboo thickets, a sign they were approaching the coast country. A third hour. Ellen rode up beside Jim, for the path had widened.

"I think we are pursued," she said. "Away up on that other mountain I can see a long row of horsemen."

"How far back? I can't take my eyes off Pizzo."

"I think it's where we were about an hour ago."

"Faster!" he said tersely.

The bandits had grown suspicious, and sent a force back to the camp. Finding it deserted, they had continued on until they met the two men he

had turned loose, and now—trouble. He figured they had ridden for five hours the night before, from the point they left the automobile, and it was still two hours off. If the pursuers were an hour behind and the machine was still there, he and Ellen had a chance.

Pizzo was looking back. "You surrender now," he suggested. "My men soon catch us."

"If they do, you won't be alive to see it. Ride faster!" he commanded.

He had to threaten Pizzo a dozen times, for the bandit was trying to delay them, but they made better time. Another hour passed, and they could not see the pursuers, who might be just around a bend or five or ten miles back.

It was growing very hot, for the sun was directly overhead. However, the traveling was easier now, the trail less difficult.

JIM was watchful lest the bandit lead them out of the only road to safety, though there seemed to be no forks in the trail; but ten minutes later they came to a side path, down which Pizzo turned his horse's head.

"Wait a minute!" shouted Jim. "Halt!" He looked at the side path and at the trail upon which they were. This trail was well marked and the other very faint, yet still it might be the right one. However, Pizzo would not take the proper road if he could help it, and he had turned to the left.

"Back," Jim commanded. "Try that again, and I'll shoot you and risk finding my way."

The look on Pizzo's face told him he had guessed correctly.

"Jim," called Ellen softly, "I saw the men behind just now. I don't think they are two miles back. I saw them only for a moment, but there are a lot of them."

"Gallop, you yellow dog, gallop!" Jim commanded fiercely; and Pizzo galloped.

The trail was downhill and winding, but they followed it as fast as the horses could be persuaded to go. Jim was in an agony. It couldn't be possible they would be recaptured now, after coming so far.

Suddenly two men with straw hats and ragged whites, holding rifles, appeared before them in the road a hundred feet ahead. With a shout, Pizzo drove his horse to the right into the jungle through which they were passing.

Jim fired at him and missed, and their guide was gone.

The riflemen were taking aim, but Jim's horse was plunging down on them. Two shots rang out, and two more, and then Jim was upon them, gun smoking. One of them fell—Jim couldn't miss at twenty feet—the other ran into the bush.

Jim and Ellen galloped on, and now they heard firing behind them. He looked back and saw several men on horseback on an elevation a quarter of a mile back, who were firing as they rode. Too great a range now, but the pursuers would soon be upon them. On, on, and they rode into a clearing which Jim remembered. Upon the farther side of it was the automobile. If it had gas—if it wasn't locked—

"Hurray, Ellen!" he shouted. "We are saved!"

He rode up to the car and jumped off his horse. Ellen almost fell off. They climbed in. The bandit picket, who had taken to the jungle, appeared on the opposite side of the clearing and leveled his rifle.

"Duck," Jim commanded. The bullet struck the steel side of the car with a vicious *ping*, and so did half a dozen other bullets. But Jim had the car started. The engine was roaring. He heard a great shouting up the trail, which meant that Pizzo had rejoined his men; but now the car was jolting along through the rough, camouflaged way to the highroad. He dared not go

fast—he had to be careful not to break a spring—and the enemy was close behind.

There were many shots now. Ellen was crouching in the bottom of the car, and he was bending as low as he dared. Suddenly the vegetation blocked his path. He drove through it because he could do nothing else, and it proved to be only a screen of loose branches of trees to conceal the path from the highroad.

Out on the road at last. Bad as it was, he was traveling twenty-five miles an hour, bumping and bouncing dangerously. For five minutes he drove with set teeth, then he drew a long breath and looked down.

"Sit up, Ellen," he said. "It's all over. We're safe."

Ellen, however, had fainted, and he dared not stop until he had put five or six miles between him and the pursuers.

By that time Ellen had recovered, and he lent her his right arm to help her into the seat.

"Are we actually safe?" she murmured.

"We are, unless they have another car, and I doubt it very much. But what the deuce is that?"

They had rounded a bend, and the road ahead was blocked with men on horseback.

"Soldiers!" he exclaimed. "Ellen, here comes your boy friend Lopez and his army."

"Lopez!" she said scornfully. "Don't speak of him."

"Well, we're safe, anyway."

"Thanks to you, and nobody else," she declared, gazing at him mistily.

Jim chuckled. "Ellen darling, this is Friday. There's a boat for New York Monday. Think you can make it?"

She caught his big right arm in her two little hands and squeezed it.

"I wouldn't be surprised, dearest," she said.

THE END.



A strange picture the long boat presented

Captain Nemesis

Trapped in the lazaret of a sinking convict ship, Nathan Andrews and his fellows battle desperately for freedom—and for the chance of revenge on their British oppressors

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "The Sword of Vengeance," "Useless," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LIEUTENANT NATHAN ANDREWS, Carolina colonist and descendant of a long line of English naval officers, is convicted of aiding colonial deserters from H. M. S. Avon on a certain night in July, 1772, through the lying testimony of his fop-pish rival, Lieutenant John Sherburne. Andrews was unable to account for his whereabouts because he had been rescuing Molly Lancaster from a madcap escapade in a gambling house.

Cashiered, and sentenced to twenty

years at Botany Bay, Andrews vows enmity to the English flag. He heads a mutiny aboard the convict ship, calling himself Captain Nemesis. But the attempt is frustrated through treachery, and he, a Yankee ship captain named Trumbull, an Irish surgeon, O'Hare, and some twenty other mutineers are confined below.

Smallpox sweeps the ship, killing off the crew and the rest of the convicts; and when the unsteered charnel ship strikes a reef off Africa, the small

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 30.

group of mutineers are trapped in the hold.

CHAPTER VII (*Continued*).

TRAPPED BELOW DECKS.

AND how goes it, Nat, me bhoy?" O'Hare's voice, calm amid the frightened whimperings of the rest, brought new strength to Nathan's failing arms while, sobbing for breath, he wrenched at the last stubborn, unseen bar.

Deep gurgles and shrill whistlings commenced to sound in the Cerberus's hull as intruding water forced the air out of the sinking ship. Their eerie chorus sounded like the death groans of a giant. Just outside the little door there came a steady rattle of gear tumbling down, as the Cerberus, sinking by the head, tilted gradually higher and higher at the stern.

"Hah!" Nathan felt the last bar give suddenly, at the very moment when the swirling water reached his waist, lapping hungrily along his lean ribs like cold, ravenous tongues.

In an instant he thrust his long arm out of the hole and encountered a bolt knob. He slid the strip of iron back with a rasping screech.

"Oh, God, let me reach all the bolts!" he gasped, and fumbled upward.

As his fingers touched the upper knob, the fear-crazed convicts came clawing up to him; the unseen tide was licking at their throats. Fighting them madly off with his left hand, Nathan groped in agony for the third bolt, knowing full well by observation that there were three—too many times had he listened to them clicking home, as some doomed wretch was dragged to die on the yardarm.

"Hell's fury!" he swore, and felt panic's grim fingers squeezing his brain, "where is that third bolt?" To the fullest length of his reach he groped, but still no bolt. An icy pang

shot through him as, at the extreme length of his reach, his clawing fingers scraped nothing but bare wood.

Half consciously he realized that the third and last bolt was out of reach. Utterly spent, he slipped back into the unseen water and drew in his arm again, content to give up the unequal struggle, when, as his fingers passed through the slot, he felt a cold lump just under the edge of the window frame.

"The bolt!" he yelled with insane joy, and in a fraction of a moment pulled it back so that the door jarred loose.

In a dripping, maddened torrent, the prisoners hauled themselves frantically out of the den where the water bubbled angrily, as though furious at being cheated of its prey.

Along the crazily tilted passage they dashed, with Nathan at their head, until a glimmer of light struck their darkness-dazed eyes. As the glare became stronger, the fugitives were quite blinded, tripping heavily over gruesome shapes rendered soft by decomposition, shapes which sprawled in the spar galleries and corridors in horrid profusion.

Battling a deadly nausea from the poisonous fumes which arose from all sides, Nathan ran along, feeling his way by sense of touch, for his eyes, deadened by the endless days of darkness, refused to be of service for several moments.

But when at last the pupils contracted, a fearful sight greeted him. The whole gallery along which he was hastening was carpeted with ghastly bloated corpses—red-coated marines, blue-clad warders, and sailors in nondescript garments piled in a horrible impartial heap, with sunken eye-sockets staring blackly up at those strange shaggy beings who hurried blindly by with a clatter of manacles.

"The air!" cried the Carolinian with a sob of joy, and gazed in wonder at the deep red heavens where the sunset

made a glory of the scattered cloudlets flecking its vast expanse.

ONE quick look assured Nathan that, first, the ship was void of life, but for him and his fellows, and, second, that the Cerberus had sailed on her last voyage. To his amazement, the sunset was quite windless, but great oily rollers, relics of some far-distant storm, rolled the stricken convict ship like a log in the trough of the gleaming sea.

"Can't nowise save her!" shouted Trumbull, as he ran back from an inspection of the damaged bow, where the water had commenced to ripple up over the forward deck planks. "Her whole bow's stove in—boats, my lads," he shouted, "and be brisk about it!"

In the crowded seconds which were left before the pest ship would plunge for the bottom, Nathan was everywhere, a gaunt, half-naked scarecrow with a gleaming cutlass flashing in his unspeakably dirty and bloody hand, as he directed the efforts of the others who knew better than to disobey.

Leaping over the hideous dead that strewed the ship in every direction, the survivors raced to and fro, gathering together such scraps of food and water as they might readily come at. Trumbull darted below, despite the fact that the whole doomed ship trembled like a leaf, and snatched up a sextant and an armful of charts in one hand, and a brace of pistols and a powder horn in the other.

"Haste, my hearties!" roared Nathan, shaking the greasy strands of hair from his eyes. He paused as he staggered across the deck with a scuttle of water, to cast a hasty look into the convict hold.

"Any one living down there?" he shouted and staggered back from the yawning hatch gasping at the vile effluvia which assailed his nostrils. There was no sound from the convict hold.

"Hasten, Nat," roared O'Hare, out

of sight in the long boat under side. "The old hulk 'll be a-diving to hell in a minute more." There was a rattle of oars as the convicts prepared to shove off.

Reeling under the weight of his water cask, the Carolinian hurried on, but, as he reached the bulwarks, stumbled, so that his precious cask slipped from his arms and rolled into the swirling froth which came racing up the deck, lifting the dead into the maelstrom.

With a curse of disappointment, Nathan hurled himself over the side, just as the wooden walls commenced to surge downward.

"Oars all! Heave yo-ho! Heave, for God's sake!" At Trumbull's frantic behest, the men tugged awkwardly at their oars to draw away from the sinking Cerberus.

They barely won clear, and rested trembling on their oars to watch the ship upon which they had passed such tortures as she reared her gaudily painted stern high into the air, showing her keel and rudder green with weeds and barnacles raised clear of the blood-red sea.

As though poised by a titanic hand, the prison ship hesitated, her tapering spars and shivering yellow sails silhouetted sharply against the sunset glare, then, with a hiss as of ten thousand serpents, she slid out of sight in the leaping, boiling water.

The last that Nathan saw of the Cerberus was that limp flag which he had sworn to humble, and his weary, bearded face set itself in a cast of iron as the waves closed over the White Ensign.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLAN OF NEMESIS.

"WE'VE nigh water enough for three days," said Trumbull heavily when the awe-stricken men turned again to their own plight.

"Five days. Maybe, an' we cut it to the lowest possible ration."

O'Hare raised a glum, hairy face from the pile of arms stacked in the bows of the long boat, which coasted easily over the oily rollers with scarcely a feather of spray about her bows.

"Ten muskets, eight cutlasses, ten pikes, a bag of bullets and two horns of powder," he announced. "Poor armament enough for a wild hostile coast where all whites are slavers in the eyes o' the poor black brutes."

"'Tis enough," pronounced Nathan shortly, while his head whirled in reaction from the strain he had put on his undernourished body, "pray, oblige me, Mr. Trumbull, to set a course for the coast o' Guinea. I'll wager with any luck at all we should raise the shore by dawn."

"Aye, sir, with any luck at all," agreed the shipmaster thoughtfully. "But now the lads are too spent to pull—that they are, sir!"

Nathan glanced at the round-shouldered, leaden-faced men who rested on the oars. "Aye, poor devils," he murmured, "we'll have a bite and a nap before we struggle on." He shifted the manacles on his dirty wrists. "A pity, Mr. O'Hare, that we'd no time to strike these off—they're deuced inconvenient jewelry."

It was the Carolinian himself who stood the first watch when, saving O'Hare, all the others, poor rogues, dropped off to sleep without a word. "I'll watch wi' you, me bhoy," stammered the Irishman, whose blue eyes were dull with sleep. "I'll watch wi' you."

"Nay, Jack, 'tis a glorious sunset, I think I'll watch it," replied Nathan with a yawn, "I'm not over-sleepy—do you rest, and I'll call you in due season." But O'Hare was already sleeping heavily, slumped on the bottom of the long boat among the rest of that wild crew, who lay with fierce pallid faces upturned.

Then Nathan Andrews gently drew

a cutlass from the sheaf of arms and, freeing it from its sheath, tucked the twinkling point under his chin, so it would prick him should he nod, and commenced to ponder deeply, while the evening sky paled and the first snowy stars appeared against the deep blue velvet of the tropic heavens.

"Ah, Molly, Molly!" he muttered. "My darling girl, you saved us, if you could only understand! Perhaps—but, no!" He sighed and recalled her letter. Then resolutely he reverted to the present.

"A week we can last—if the plague lets us be—and no more. Wish to God we'd a compass; as it is, we're like to wander over the seas for days. But perhaps we'll raise a sail." His eyes closed and he started back violently as the cutlass point stung his red-bearded chin.

"God help the poor souls on the first ship we meet," he concluded. "This time there's no choice; and with these gallows birds, who knows but they'll turn treacherous dogs at best?"

And even while he pondered sleepily, a certain rakish, black-hulled vessel was creeping furtively out of the steaming marshes at the delta of the Ogowe, her stubby bowsprit pointing, like an extended forefinger, toward that strip of the ocean where the long boat, with her cargo of desperate outcasts, was rising and falling gently beneath the blazing Southern Cross.

SO, for several hours the long boat drifted, while Nathan struggled manfully to keep awake, in order to perfect the plan so painstakingly evolved during the dreadful hours in the convict hold of the Cerberus.

At last he awakened O'Hare, who roused himself by splashing the lukewarm water from the sea over his face and chest.

"By the seven kings of Erin!" yawned that worthy, "but I feel like a new man!" He drew three or four deep breaths of the clean night wind.

"If the pox leaves us be, we'll be the luckiest devils in the world. Have ye noted the paradox, Captain Nat?"

"Eh?" Nathan was numbly folding a square of sailcloth.

"That we—condemned to death and without hope—are the only souls of the whole ship's company to be alive to-night?"

But the Carolinian was already stretched on the long boat's bottom plunged in a profound slumber which much resembled death in the completeness of its relaxation.

"Poor devil," muttered O'Hare, and pulled the sail up over the ex-officer's wasted body. "Sure, the ould philosopher said truth: 'The greater they are, the harder they fall.' Poor devil, 'twas some monstrous shock that'd sprinkle the red hair of him with white and draw those harsh lines in his dashed handsome face."

And O'Hare fell to thinking of that stormy night in far off Kerry, when the minions of Hanoverian George had surrounded his spacious mansion and had taken him red-handed with a desk full of the affairs of the United Irish.

"And lucky I was after all," he reflected with a bitter smile, "to get transportation instead o' the gallows." His eyes fell on the face of the man he knew as Captain Nemesis, noted the high intelligent forehead, the strong, clean-cut jaws, and the generous width of his firm mouth.

"A disgraced officer he is, to be sure," he mused, "our Nat's got the Spithead quarterdeck swing if I ever saw it. I wonder what it was—cards most likely. There's never a trace o' the villain in his whole character."

All night long the boat wandered aimlessly over the bosom of the placid ocean, surrounded by a litter of floating débris from the foundered Cerberus. Now and then a grisly half-seen shape drifted by, with a stiff hand or arm thrust up out of the weed-filled water, as though in mute appeal from the sentence of death.

Toward dawn the doctor obediently aroused Nathan who in turn stirred the other men into activity, regardless of their heartfelt curses and protestations. The ex-buccaneer Feathersoft was especially reluctant.

"Blast your deadlights, let me sleep," he growled. "For why should I stir my stumps? Just because you wants it?" His cavernous bestial face stared truculently up at the Carolinian, just visible in the feeble light of the false dawn. "You ain't been elected capt'ing—you ain't."

Nathan's yet manacled hand shot out and hauled the struggling, furious pirate to his feet. At arm's length he held him with his thumb sunk in the other's windpipe.

"You'll do what I say, sirrah," said the ex-officer, "without question."

"Oh, I will, will I?" snarled the other, nothing daunted by the expression in Nathan's eyes. "That we'll see, my bucko!"

"You will." The Carolinian presented a pistol at Feathersoft's rebellious face. "Is there any doubt, you dog?"

There was something convincing about that menacing dark-mouthed tube which quickly decided the black-browed Feathersoft, and he took his place with the others, who sat sullenly staring at the incident.

"GOOD work, sir, teach 'em respect," said Trumbull, who had smoothed out a map on his dirty bare knees, and sat with the chain which secured his wrists one to the other, lying black across the paper. "He'll work wi' the hands—that he will. And now, by your leave, Cap'n Nat, we'll steer due east. God knows where we are now, but I mind on the day of our trial we could just raise the coast o' Africa. After that we did naught but drift, and, if I recall correctly, the Equatorial current travels strong west-nor'-west hereabouts."

A strange picture the long boat pre-

sented, with her crew of ragged, bearded rogues, whose manacles clinked rhythmically as they toiled ceaselessly at the oars, pulling the little boat onward over the smooth windless sea. Even the rollers which had so tossed the helpless Cerberus had died away to small wavelets which barely tilted the boat. But in the hard faces and furtive eyes a changed expression showed that hope at last had rekindled.

At noon they halted for a double reason: first, because the convicts were too enfeebled by their long confinement and terrible privations to row farther without rest; and, second, because Nathan now felt the time to be ripe to propose his cherished plan—as daring and brilliant a scheme as ever crossed the mind of a desperate out-cast.

“Food and water, my lads!” he called, knowing all too well that many a fine plan has gone to naught because the listeners lacked that full belly which brings easy acquiescence.

“Holy Mary, are you mad?” whispered O’Hare as he saw the ample portions which Nathan drew from the scanty stock of supplies. “We’ll starve in two days at this rate—”

But to his amazement the shaggy, red-haired giant treated him to an elaborate wink, and went on distributing a piece of cheese, three biscuits and a pannikin of brandy and water to every man jack of the twenty ravenous rascals. The Irishman noted curiously that Nathan, when it came his turn, drank very sparingly and ate but a part of one biscuit. The surgeon’s heart glowed with a deep admiration.

“Faith,” he said under his breath, “yonder Carolinian’s a whole man. I wonder what’d be tucked up his sleeve, if he had one?”

At last the men ended their meal and settled back luxuriously, resting their unkempt heads against the thwarts to allow the fresh warm wind to play over their emaciated bodies.

Having finished his scanty mouthful

of food, Nathan proceeded to wash, overside, as best he might, and attempted with his fingers to comb his hair into some semblance of order. He frowned as he noted the black particles of dirt clouding the azure water as he finished his toilet and dried himself on a corner of the sail. This done, and feeling mightily refreshed, he arose to his feet, while Trumbull and O’Hare stared up, sensing that the Carolinian at last was ready to speak.

“And now, my lads, I have a matter which touches us all,” said Nathan slowly. “We are all in the same boat, literally and figuratively. The hand of all mankind is raised against us—in short, our lives are forfeit.”

“Aye, aye,” growled the majority, and frowned as the unpleasant realization was brought home, “a yellow mongrel has more friends than most o’ us.”

They shifted position and readjusted their chafed wrists in the manacles, fixing their wild, deeply-sunk eyes on the face of the tall, bearded man who swayed on the locker in the sternsheets, his chained hands crossed on the hilt of a cutlass.

“What’s the answer?”

In an instant half the boat’s crew had leaped to their feet with a flutter of rags and gave a hoarse eager shout:

“The Jolly Roger! Gentlemen of Fortune!”

NATHAN smiled a wide grin, infectious in its good humor and genuineness. His expressive blue eyes flitted from one hard face to the next.

His next words shocked Trumbull and O’Hare who had imagined that they knew to the bottom the character of their chief.

“Aye, my bully boys, that’s the ticket!”

The jaws of the two worthies just mentioned dropped as though pulled by the same string, and O’Hare rapped out an incredulous oath.

"Why not?" the Carolinian inquired of him, his slender red eyebrows raised in polite interrogation. "What other course have we?"

Honest Jonathan Trumbull flushed scarlet. "'Fore God, Mr. Nemesis, fate has played me many a scurvy trick, but I'll be keel-hauled ere I take to sinking women and children, that I will, sir!"

The shipmaster halted suddenly as Nathan's bright eyes rested inscrutably on his. "And where, good shipmaster, will you find employ? Ship owners are not like to take condemned convicts for master, be they Dutch, Spanish, French, or what will you?"

Poor Jonathan's bald head, already reddened by exposure to the tropical sun, sank upon his soiled blue shirt front.

"Aye! The Red Sea trade!" clamored the men from the rowing seats as, their after-dinner lassitude completely forgotten, they crowded aft, greed gleaming bright in their savage eyes.

The Carolinian looked from face to face, as though seeking to read the thoughts of each. Then he held up a bruised hand for silence, while the sunlight glinted on the worn iron of his handcuffs.

"Silence!" he shouted. "How many here have served under the Skull and Crossbones?"

"I," cried an old, yet vigorous seaman with outlandish tattooings visible all over his hairy, wrinkled body. "I sailed as a boy with Bartholomew Roberts in the Royal Fortune."

"I served as mate along o' Bully Boy Lowther in the Ranger," called a second.

"I!" Master Feathersoft, his grudge momentarily forgotten, held up his fettered hands. "I won fortune with De Cordos! Heigho for the Red Sea, says I! There's fortune there a-plenty for us all!"

Three or four others also claimed to have sailed with buccaneers and pi-

rates of renown, some of whom were even yet terrorizing the rich and narrow seas between Madagascar and Akaba.

O'Hare's keen eyes never shifted from the handsome face of the Carolinian whose lips were curved in a grim smile.

"Good," said Nathan at last, "and now, how many here are from the American colonies?"

To the amazement of both Trumbull and Nathan, no less than fourteen of the men signified their place of birth to be North America. As the shouts died away, O'Hare seemed to note a hint of satisfaction creep into the colonial's expression, whereat that acute Irishman fell to pondering.

"And how many here have served in men-o'-war?"

A showing of hands revealed that ten of the twenty-two odd convicts had at some time sailed under the White Ensign.

Nathan shifted his position and changed his tone as he continued.

"**N**OW, my lads," said he briskly, "I know what you want—and what I want. Obey me and all of us can have our wishes. Is it gold you crave?"

A united, lustful cry of assent arose. "Aye, mate, thick red lousies, moldores, and pieces of eight!"

"You shall have them—all you want! You yearn for brisk actions, successfully fought?"

"Aye! We'll sink and burn!" Their voices, as their passions rose, became strident and thick with emotion. "The world's shown us small mercy and by old Satan's self we'll show it none!"

"Men," Nathan's voice rang out, "that you shall be rich, I promise; that you shall fight your fill, that, too, you shall be assured, but," he drew a deep breath and paused, "by God, you'll do it my way!"

With mouths agape, the fierce fel-

lows stared at him, and O'Hare laughed inwardly, as he saw how successfully the colonial had guided their passions to his will.

"And what's that?" called Feather-soft with an uneasy glitter in his close-set eyes, as he groped behind him toward the pile of weapons.

"By discipline and order!"

"Order be hanged!" roared the ex-buccaneer, "we'll all be equal. 'Twas so on De Cordos' ship! Every blessed rogue o' us had equal voice and share. We'll none o' ye damned precedence, blast my deadlights!"

"No equality," called the rogue who had sailed with Lowther in the Ranger, "we'll be free to do as we list with no damned soul to say us nay!"

The tattooed buccaneer added his shrill old voice to the rest: "Equality we'll have, by God. Everything ship-shape by lot or vote—'twas so wi' Bartolmey Roberts!"

The Carolinian listened to their complaints until, from sheer lack of breath, they fell silent, and saw his lips curl with an infinite scorn.

"Fools, clods, sheep!" he railed, his blue eyes dangerously agleam. "Because this false 'equality,' you speak of, was the rule, means not 'tis for the best. In death, I grant, all men are equal, but not before! Tell me, you—" He fixed his blazing glance on Feather-soft, "what weight of guns carried the ship of De Cordos?"

"Forty-five guns," replied the pirate sullenly, perplexed by Nathan's query.

Nathan turned to the breathless men. "Mark you all that! Now, Master Feathersoft, to what end did the ship come?" His tone was infinitely suave and polite.

"Took by a damn French sloop-o'-war!" grunted the buccaneer and spat noisily.

"Of how many guns?"

"No more than twenty," replied Feathersoft quickly, and seemed not to be struck by the logical inference.

"And you that sailed with Lowther, how came the fifty-gun Ranger to grief?"

"Why, sir," said the other uneasily, "she struck to a British brig, the Eagle it were, sir."

"Of eighteen guns," commented Nathan, "if my memory deceives me not."

"And you, old man," he called to the veteran buccaneer, "how many guns had Roberts when he fought the Swallow?"

Swaying his body to the gentle roll of the long boat, and with the reflected sunlight of the sea flickering on his wrinkled face, the veteran pondered an instant.

"Why, Cap'n Nat," said he at length, "it seems to me it were nigh onto forty guns, I mind the crew were a hundred and forty—no a hundred and fifty-seven souls—"

"And yet she was taken by a ship of less than thirty guns!"

"What of it?" demanded Feather-soft truculently defiant. "What of it, I say?"

"Stupid fool," said Nathan contemptuously, "even your rum-soaked wits should see the lesson—discipline always conquers mere numbers and weight of guns!"

HE looked about the gaping men, a challenge in his eye.

"I defy a man jack of you to tell me of a pirate who's ever yet taken a man-o'-war?" He waited in silence while the men on the rowing benches shifted uneasily and O'Hare chuckled to himself.

"Dolts!" quoth Nathan in fine contempt, "have you forgot how your rascal ships turned tail and ran for dear life at the mention of a man-of-war?"

He laughed long and loud. There was a steel-like quality in his mirth, and his hand was ready on his cutlass belt.

"Who's for discipline?" He turned suddenly and faced the boat crew.

All but two men leaped to their feet shouting wild acclaim, amazed at the clarity of Nathan's simple reasoning.

The two who did not rise—for widely differing reasons—were Trumbull and Feathersoft.

"How now, Master Trumbull," inquired the Carolinian sharply, "are you not with us?"

The little shipmaster shook his bald head firmly. "Nay, I'll not be party to the murder o' innocent human beings." He sat looking defiantly up into Nathan's anxious face, then stared in surprise as the red-headed giant broke into a sudden peal of laughter.

"Upon my word, Master Trumbull," cried Nathan, "you have my respect, sir. But there's no worry on that score—I promise that not an innocent man, woman, or child, will be harmed by us!"

"What?" A ring of savage faces flashed near. "What's this? We'll not be played with!"

Recovering himself with an effort, Nathan held up a hand for silence.

"Here, my hearties, lies the true-cunning of the scheme," he looked O'Hare full in the face with an inexpressible twinkle of humor. "Tell me now, my bully boys, where as a rule sails the greatest treasure?"

"In the Spanish plate fleet?"

"Nay!" snapped Nathan promptly. The men stared.

"In the ships of the Great Mogul?" ventured another.

"Nay!" repeated the Carolinian.

"In the Portuguese ships out o' the Brazils?"

"Nay!"

"Why, man dear," asked the Irishman softly, "where is it then?"

A great silence fell as Nathan replied:

"In the holds of buccaneers, pirates and others who steal from honest men! In their holds you'll find the concentrated wealth of many vessels—one action there will gain us as much as twenty others. A great part o' our

battles will have been already fought for us!"

As the logic of Captain Nemesis's idea sank into the slow minds of the convicts, O'Hare held out his hand. "'Pon my word, captain, you're no small genius."

"And to think, man," there was deep admiration in his voice, as he turned to Trumbull, "not a man-o'-war's like to hinder us when they find the nature of our victims!" He grinned widely as the manifold advantages of Captain Nemesis's plan unfolded themselves. "And besides, an easy thing 'twould be to get pay for convoying ships o' the native princes against the ravages o' the bloody buccaneers!"

The New Englander's face slowly relaxed, then he joined whole-heartedly in the wild enthusiasm which shook the crowded long boat.

"But," continued Nathan, when the commotion had subsided, "you will submit to the rules laid down by the Articles of War! In time, the lowest swab of our crew will be a picked man. Men we'll have who shoot well above the average.

"Able seamen and honest men, who have a wrong to right 'gainst the precious flag of England!"

He looked about the sea a moment, then turned his face inboards. "Fifteen years I spent in learning the art of naval war, and by the Lord Harry, we'll sail and direct our ship like a man-of-war, with gunners, marines and seamen. Every advantage of gear and guns we shall have. Our gun crews will practice till they'll out-shoot the crack ship o' his Britannic majesty's navy—so *if*"—his voice was tense—"when we are ready, we meet such a damned impressing ship, we'll rake her from stem to stern and bring that proud flag smoldering to the deck!"

"Hah!" The astute Irishman hugged himself with glee. "Revenge with a touch o' fortune! Ah, me, for all their dogged courage, what fools the British are to have broke such a

broth of an officer, and some day it 'll cost 'em dear, or I'm an Orangeman!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTACK ON THE BARK.

NIGHT had fallen with all the disconcerting speed of the tropics, and the men in the long boat took turns at oars which thumped hollowly against thole pins as the little craft crept on over the deserted immensity of the ocean. The exhausted men off duty slept uneasily on the bottom, while their fellows, with feeble, monotonous strokes, pulled the heavy oars through the water.

It was about eleven—or so Trumbull judged by the position of the white, blazing stars—that the lookout perched on the bow hailed excitedly, saying that he had seen a light far off the port bow.

"Just a wink, sir," cried the man, "then it were gorn." And Nathan strained his eyes in the darkness with wild hope, for, of the long boat's crew, he and Trumbull alone knew exactly how desperate was their case.

"Now!" cried the lookout again, while the oarsmen craned stiffly about.

At last Nathan saw it, a pin-head of a glowing spark, just visible above the placid horizon. Instantly he threw his weight against the tiller handle, swinging the long boat's bow in a sharp curve, and headed straight for the light, while her crew tugged at the oars in a frenzy of fear that a breeze might spring up and drive the distant ship out of sight.

"One-two, one-two—" chanted Nathan, as he rose from the seat and stood peering ahead, and, in answer, the oars went *click clunk, click clunk*, echoing his cry. Forward he could make out the gleam of O'Hare's naked back, as the doctor saw to the charging and priming of the muskets and pistols, carefully measuring the coarse black powder in the palm of his hand, then

tamping in the bullets with a slender ramrod.

As they neared that glowing gleam of light, the air bore a strange odor, as yet indistinct, but altogether noxious.

"'Tis a vile smell, sir," Trumbull whispered, "to carry so far to leeward, and you may lay to that! How quiet lies the vessel. I wonder what's her rig and from what port she hails."

"God knows," murmured Nathan anxiously, "we'll have to take her, no matter what she is—honest ship or not. Once we have her, I'll never again lay aboard a decent vessel were she laden to the guards with all the rubies of India! No, Master Trumbull, after this, we'll war only on buccaneers, pirates, corsairs—and British ships of war," he added in such a savage tone that the New Englander, though prompted to speak, thought better of it and held his peace.

"You mind, of course," whispered Trumbull, "for all our fine distinctions, we're still pirates before the bar. 'Tis a certain thing we'll stretch hemp on Execution Dock if we're caught—sun-dried we'll be, that we will, sir!"

For answer, Nathan murmured a strain of Feathersoft's pirate ballad:

"—And when we can't longer strike a
blow,
Then fire the powder and up we go."

"God!" muttered the ex-shipmaster with a shudder. "Drop it, man; have you no heart at all?"

Meanwhile the oars of the long boat swept her nearer and nearer to the still distant vessel lying all but invisible. Then O'Hare came creeping back from the bows, his face pale with excitement.

"'Tis a bark, and a big one! The Virgin help us, for I doubt if we can carry her, chained as we are—"

Nathan's teeth clicked audibly. "Mr. O'Hare," said he, "we have no choice, we must carry her by the board or die horribly."

He put out a hand to the Irishman's bare shoulder, which was shivering in the cold night wind. "Arouse her, and she'll blow us to smithereens, or sail away and leave us to die o' hunger and thirst. In a little while we'll muffle the oars and pass around the word that our lives hang on taking yonder bark by surprise. And," he promised grimly, "I'll shoot the first man that makes the slightest noise. Spare nothing to clear her decks, but that done, stop any needless slaughter."

ANOTHER half hour found the long boat two knots distant from the darkly outlined bark, which lay motionless on the placid sea, her three raking masts thrust up like the fingers of a priest pronouncing the benediction.

Suddenly Nathan hissed sharply for attention, and bade the men cease rowing. In the silence that followed, the sound of water drops falling off the oar blades sounded uncannily loud; then very faint noises came stealing over the inky water from the shadowy vessel ahead.

There was a loud cry and the sound of many harsh voices singing out of key and at the top of their lungs; in what language it was yet impossible to tell. But with miraculous clarity the chorus winged its way across the black expanse of the sea toward the long boat, as it drifted, silent and unnoticed, preparing for the attack. Then again came the sound of a deep voice cursing furiously and a shrill, feminine cry of pain.

"Drunk and fighting," whispered O'Hare joyfully. "Faith, and it's good cess we've got!"

Nathan nodded his shaggy head silently, and motioned to the oarsmen to resume their rowing; their canvas-wrapped shackles scraped the shafts of the oars with a gentle whispering sound.

As silently as a phantom, the long boat crept closer and closer, while

every man in her prayed furiously that no wakeful watchman should observe their stealthy advance. That friendly yellow ray which streamed from an open gun port was the only light visible; all the rest of the bark was hidden in a sharply etched black outline. Every passing instant Nathan feared to hear that hoarse cry which would end their hopes forever. It seemed incredible that they had proceeded so far unnoticed.

When the long boat was but a quarter of a mile away, a bitter, acrid stench came floating again over the water. Nathan wrinkled his nostrils and sniffed four or five times, but could not identify that distinctive odor. He turned to Trumbull, crouching at his side, a naked cutlass ready in his hand.

"What's that smell, Jo?"

"God knows," was the shipmaster's answer, "I'll be damned if I do." He sighed and fell again to thinking of his beloved Esther and the child he would never see.

A great, bearded convict, who rowed immediately before the tiller, stretched out his hideous face and whispered one word:

"Slaves!"

"Good," muttered Nathan in vast relief, "then we can attack with clear conscience! Pray God we get aboard unseen."

This miracle seemed about to take place as the boat drew nearer. Drunken shouts and cries became audible, then individual voices rang out clearly.

At last the bark's tapering bowsprit loomed blackly overhead, while the shivering convicts in the bow caught at the bobstays and warded the long boat from the ship's side. As they did so, there came a fearful shriek from above and the sound of light footsteps pattering hurriedly along the deck, followed, almost immediately, by a heavy, lumbering and uncertain tread.

Both persons were advancing along the deck toward the bow, beneath which the long boat with her breathless

crew lay motionless among the shadows, quite hidden, for the moment, under the bulge of the ship's side.

"Ha! Ye sassy minx!" roared a hoarse voice. "Don't ye plague me, and I'll use ye kindly. Come down—" The entreaty ended in a hiccough so realistic that Nathan suddenly found himself struggling to suppress a laugh, for all that he stood every chance in the world of perishing within the next five minutes.

"Ha! Ye would, would ye?" There was the sound of a blow, and a terrified scream that made O'Hare start.

"*Aiee-e-e!*" On the bulwarks appeared a slight figure, which balanced a moment, silhouetted against the luminous, starlit sky. Nathan could see her plainly. A young negress, stark naked, was standing poised on the rail, her eyes dilated with fright.

"Then if ye will!" There was the crashing sound of a pistol shot, then the poor wretch flung up her arms and fell into the sea with a sudden plunge that spattered water over the long boat's bow. The stars' reflections were blotted out by the wavelets her body made, while the Carolinian's heart stood still with apprehension as the ship stirred into an alarmed outcry at the shot. Any instant might bring discovery and death.

FEET thundered up the companion-way overhead and voices, thick with rum, demanded what had chanced.

"'Twas that nigger wench!" hiccoughed the murderer, "That nigger wench—I drilled her!"

"By God, and did ye now?" A furious rasping voice sounded from above. "That's fifty pounds thrown away, you fool! They don't pay for dead blacks in Santiago." Again a pistol barked, and this time a shrill death cry rang up to the ghostly, idle sails above.

"And the same fer any more the likes o' him. Pitch him over!"

The convicts despairingly lay rigid

in the bottom of their boat, expecting every instant to hear some wild voice giving the alarm. Again came the sound of a heavy splash and the murmur of voices directly overhead.

"And that's the end of Pannikin Pete," said the rasping voice. "'E always were a swine. Now, then," this more briskly, "no more rum guzzling—that damned frigate 'll be about when there's a wind."

A sodden black object came drifting along the ship's side as the voices retreated. It was the dead man's cap.

A long fifteen minutes the men from the Cerberus waited with bated breath, fearful to trust their good fortune. Then, while men appointed for that duty held the long boat noiseless and steady by the side, Nathan, a naked cutlass between his teeth, swung himself up the bow with the easy grace of a cat, hooking his bare toes in the elaborate carvings of the figurehead and between the cold links of the fore-chains.

One by one the others followed after Nathan, with a short inspection, had reported the deck unguarded. It was a most difficult task to gain the deck, for hands that are chained eight inches apart do not have much scope, but in the end it was done, and the long boat turned adrift, while the half-naked twenty-two crept noiselessly along the broad deck of the bark.

Acting upon prearranged plan and with almost military precision, the party swiftly divided itself into two groups, one detachment pausing at the fore-castle companion, and the other at the after.

Between the two stood Nathan, as wild-looking a cutthroat as ever trod a deck, with his hanger raised in the air until he saw Trumbull and O'Hare signal that all was in readiness. Then with a sudden gesture, he lowered the dully gleaming steel. At his signal, the men clustered about the opening disappeared, one by one, into the body of the ship, gripping their double-charged

muskets in a clutch that only death would loosen. After the musketeers streamed the rest, with pikes and cutlasses held ready.

Then, as the last man vanished below, the Carolinian wheeled to the deadlights gleaming dully before his eyes, and with a blow of his pistol butt, shattered the glass in a tinkling torrent. He peered through the empty frame and was appalled to see the great number of men visible below—he had quite forgotten that slavers generally carried a much larger crew than those engaged in honest pursuits. With fierce excitement, he filled his lungs and uttered a fearful screaming Indian war cry, learned in boyhood from a captive Creek chieftain.

A breath-taking sight he presented to the startled slavers below, as, with streaming red hair and blazing eyes, he stared down, framed in the darkness of the broken deadlight.

He fired his double-shotted pistols into the thick of the gaping crowd, heard the deep roar of the convicts charging in from either side, then caught up his cutlass and dropped through the deadlight into the wild mêlée below.

OF the struggle which swayed back and forth in the narrow saloon,

Nathan could afterward remember very little. Strange faces, with gaping red mouths and fright-filled eyes, appeared on every side; now and then a pistol crashed like a thunderclap as some fighter, hard pressed, used his last resort. The press of reeling bodies was disconcerting, and a crushing maelstrom of faces formed an ever-changing screen before his eyes.

Quickly regaining his balance after his leap, Nathan parried a shower of blows with powerful full-arm lunges which hurled the slavers back. Time and again, catching pike points just as they neared his body, he swept them aside with a berserk shout of sheer fighting madness.

Undreamed-of strength welled into his arms, giving him power to rush furiously against the press of enemies on all sides. But the hampering shackles aided the slavers not a little, and many a convict fell who would otherwise have won his fight.

The bark's crew, recovering from their surprise, gathered courage and rallied to drive back the savages who had thus mysteriously swooped up from the bare ocean.

"Avast there!" roared an enormous, yellow-faced slaver with a deep gash in his cheek. "'Steady now, together!"

The bark's crew launched themselves in a flying steel-tipped wedge to win the door, which was barred by Nathan and a few others. The slavers' obvious intent was to aid their comrades whom O'Hare and his men were running down and killing piecemeal in different parts of the vessel.

"Hold!" implored Nathan, and with the tail of his eye saw Feathersoft whip up his pike and plant his feet. The tough old pirate's wicked face was set in a maddened snarl as he braced himself, setting example to the others who, seeing him and their captain standing firm, stopped in their tracks and prepared at all costs to halt the rush of the slavers.

"Ah," growled the yellow-faced seaman, "escaped galley slaves, eh?" He stepped forward, brandishing a broad-bladed cutlass with a wide brass guard. Like a great ape, he hurdled a sprawling dead man on the floor and landed squarely in front of the sweat-streaked Carolinian.

As the two leaders stood face to face, the other combatants, by tacit agreement, paused to watch the outcome of this duel. Nathan was the larger, the more powerful and probably the more skilled; while, on the other hand, the yellow-faced slaver was the more nimble and fresher. The Carolinian also labored under the terrific handicap of having his hands fet-

tered together by that relentless chain, hampering his movements and upsetting his sense of balance.

"Now, my fine gallows-bird," rasped the slaver, "have at you!"

He aimed a whistling cut at Nathan's head, which the Carolinian avoided by ducking suddenly, at the same time lashing out with his own weapon to find that the accursed manacles spoiled his aim.

With a savage laugh of triumph and with his high cheek bones shining bronze by the amber lamplight above, the slaver leaped agilely and slashed again, with a movement as quick as the dart of a cat's paw. Hard pressed, Nathan jumped aside, but felt the sting of steel scraping his ribs, followed by the warm trickle of blood. At the sight of his wound, the slavers yelled.

THE colonial knew he was doomed if he depended on sheer swordsmanship alone to win; those ponderous manacles were too great a handicap. In a minute more he would be stretched on the planking beside that slaughtered wretch whose blood had smeared a wide stain across the cabin floor.

With the sight of that crimson rivulet came an idea. Nemesis quartered around as he parried the next rush of his powerful, grinning adversary. Hacking and parrying frantically, with both hands gripping the cutlass, he fought to prolong the battle, while sparks flew like tiny comets as the heavy blades clashed.

"Press him!" Feathersoft's voice grated in Nathan's ear; but the Carolinian was not yet ready; he only side-stepped again, bringing the dead man's blood almost behind the slaver, who danced in and out with taunting jeers at his gasping adversary's awkward efforts.

"Two more cuts I'll allow yer, my bucko!" shrilled the slaver, with a vindictive flash of his teeth. "Then I'll stretch yer—"

But Nathan had at last succeeded in bringing the fight to the territory he designed, and staked his all upon a sudden bold gamble. He drew back suddenly, whipped up the cutlass in both hands, and, uttering a ringing shout, leaped forward. With disdainful deliberation the slaver moved back, putting his left foot squarely into the pool of blood.

His expression changed as he felt his heel slip from under him. Then his arms shot up in a vain effort to regain his balance, but the Carolinian's cutlass had already flashed forward and buried its point in the slaver's throat as he crashed heavily to the floor.

After the fall of their leader, the slavers offered no further resistance and flung down their weapons, just as O'Hare, pike in hand, dashed upon the scene with the welcome news that the rest of the ship was in the hands of the convicts.

"Good," gasped Nathan. He reeled suddenly and would have joined his late adversary on the deck had not the panting Irishman flung an arm about him and dragged Nemesis's limp body to a chair.

CHAPTER X.

"HEAVE TO, OR WE FIRE!"

A STIFF jolt of brandy from a bottle in the ship's pantry quickly restored Nathan to vigor. As his head cleared, his first act was to pass around a generous tot of the fiery liquor to such survivors as gathered about the mainmast.

One by one, bloody and weary, the gaunt wretches appeared in the rays of a single lantern, looking more like creatures from another world than human beings.

Silently the dipper of rum and water was passed, while the Carolinian counted fourteen of the convicts still afoot.

When the powerful drink had revived them somewhat, Captain Nemesis bade the naked, exultant men gather about him.

"You see now," he stated, "the value of discipline?" Eagerly the wild hairy heads nodded in assent. "Because our plan was well executed, we conquered, in spite of our shackles, a crew twice our size, and are now well on the way to fortune. Shortly I will select the watches. Those who have hurts will report at once to Mr. O'Hare in the main cabin."

He stood very straight in his rags and nakedness, once more an officer instructing his men. An expression of somber watchfulness was in his calm blue eyes, making every rascal of their number feel that obedience to his orders was inescapable.

"No more drinking!" added Nemesis sharply. "For the present we'll assume that Mr. Trumbull is first lieutenant." The seamen started in surprise as their captain gave the military rank of first lieutenant instead of the title of first mate to the New Englander. "Mr. O'Hare will act as surgeon and second lieutenant, and Feathersoft as boatswain."

Nathan long ago had deemed this last a politic move as he unerringly recognized the pirate's unmistakable gift of leadership. "In the morning I'll make other appointments. Now, my lads, we're short-handed with much to do, so be brisk!"

The first act of the conquerors was to locate a great hoop of keys which fitted the manacles of the slaves now sleeping in the stuffy hold below. By great good fortune most of the shackles could be unlocked by the cumbersome keys, and those which refused to open were quickly knocked off by a judicious use of the armorer's tools.

As the degrading manacles rattled to the deck, Nathan felt his pulses beat with wild exultation, and he looked quizzically at little red-faced O'Hare, who impulsively held out a hand. With

hearts too full for speech, the two gentlemen gripped hands in an understanding which was all the more complete because unspoken.

"Here's to our new life!" said O'Hare, as he lifted the spirit bottle, "and damnation to England!"

"Amen," agreed Nathan, and reflected curiously on what his fellow officers on the Avon would have said could they have seen him standing on the deck of a pirated slaver, bidding defiance to the might of England.

He laughed. "I'm thinking we're uncommonly like Ajax and the lightning, Mr. O'Hare—but who can tell?"

At last the final pair of fetters clanked to the deck, and the men, with fervent curses, hove them overboard.

"When my wife died," laughed one villainous convict, "I felt the same way—and now, lads, I'm beginning to live again!" And in those words were expressed the thoughts of every man present on that silent bark which rode motionless in the breathless Gulf of Guinea.

DAWN found the Condor, as the bark was called, plowing swiftly along under full sail, while the water, flickering past her sharp bows with a crisp, rushing sound, brought rapture to the heart of Nemesis.

"She's a main fine sailer," remarked Trumbull joyfully, "she fair flits along. Aye, man, she's nigh as fine as the Speedy Fortune they stole from me." And with the thought his hands, gripping the rails, tightened spasmodically.

"Aye," agreed Captain Nemesis, and passed a strangely clean hand over the unaccustomed smoothness of his cheek. He scarce looked his thirty-odd years, now that a borrowed razor had removed all traces of the ragged red beard.

He wore a pair of fine new trousers of blue sea-cloth, secured by a broad leather belt and brass buckle. A linen shirt with a plain white neckcloth and a

dark blue serge coat secured by bright golden buttons completed his attire. His long red hair was neatly combed back and tied into a short club by a black silken ribbon. A brace of short-handled flintlock pistols were thrust through the belt, from which dangled a sturdy cutlass in a black leather sheath.

"Aye, the Condor 'll do, but I dislike her name."

Like a lazy ball of fire the sun peered over the horizon and saw the black-painted bark spinning along with all sails set to catch the morning breeze. On her deck worked a mere handful of seamen in white canvas trousers and striped blue and white jerseys commandeered from the bark's slop chest. Even at this early date, Nathan attempted a sort of uniform, and found vast satisfaction in watching the transformation of the filthy, degraded convicts into comparatively clean, neatly-clothed seamen.

But the Condor's conquerors were not long to enjoy their new-found security, for, as the surviving slavers fed the wondering negroes their morning meal of corn mush, there came a faint hail from the mainmast.

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" called Nathan, his heart thumping with a dreadful presentiment as he recalled the words of the slaver heard the night before. What was it the fellow had said about that "damned frigate" being around?

"A tall vessel of three masts off the starboard bow, sir!"

The Carolinian could make out the lookout's face, a tiny pink dot against the snowy topgallant sail.

"Master Trumbull," snapped Nathan, "we'll try the Condor before the wind; I'm going aloft to throw a glass on the stranger."

Captain Nemesis swarmed up the ratlines and joyously felt the familiar lift and sway of rigging; he hoped against hope that his alarm was unfounded.

"Some dhow or mayhap a merchant-man," he muttered. Foot after foot he toiled up, past yards creaking as they bent under the pull of well-made sails bulging with the fresh offshore breeze, up to the mainmast, where he joined a seaman staring with apprehensive eyes at the distant sail.

"Well, Amos," said Nathan, as he caught his breath, "we'll take a look at her."

He braced himself against the quivering masthead and hooked his right elbow over the yard to steady himself as he raised the heavy brass spyglass he had brought. By his side the seaman, too, peered anxiously out over the sparkling tumult of the sea at that ominous speck of white on the horizon, while the wind whipped his lank black hair about.

A LONG time Nemesis remained poised, sliding the brass tubing back and forth, until the focus suited him. Then, with a sinking heart, he studied the distant ship intently, while his jaw tightened.

"What is she, sir?" inquired the seaman eagerly.

"'Tis a damned big frigate," replied Nathan calmly, his eyebrows knit in thought, "and a fast vessel. She's fair leaping along with a bone in her teeth."

The seaman's hand clutching the shrouds quivered spasmodically, as he asked: "Will she catch us?"

"God knows," replied Captain Nemesis gravely, and lowered the spyglass in preparation for returning below. "Not if I can help it." But as he descended, came again the vision of that dangling noose, swaying before his eyes, as he put foot to the ratlines.

Then began a race for existence which remained forever burned in the memory of Captain Nemesis—he that had been Lieutenant Andrews of his majesty's navy. He could recall every detail of that fearful ordeal, how the handful of untrained, weakened convicts piled on canvas until the stout

pine masts groaned under the unaccustomed burden.

He and Trumbull plumbed the depths of their experience and resources in an effort to overlook nothing which could increase their speed. It was a fearful weight of sail the Condor carried when at last the men returned on deck to nurse their raw and skinned hands.

"She's still coming up!" cried O'Hare excitedly, as with burning eyes he studied the white shape looming on the horizon. "No, by Crummel, we're gaining!"

Trumbull turned from shouting an order and scanned the creaking yards overhead, a look of intense anxiety on his smooth, hairless face.

"Aye, Mr. O'Hare, we're like to win and save our necks, if the wind don't freshen!"

"And if it does?"

"We'll have to shorten sail or risk the masts."

"If a mast goes, we are by that fact doomed," stated Nathan, "and yet we can't allow ourselves to get caught for lack of sail—not with a cargo of slaves below hatches. They'll string us up out of hand the instant they catch us. So, gentlemen, let us pray God the wind remains light!"

For awhile it seemed as though fortune, who had of late favored the outcasts, would once more turn her smiling face. The threatening billow of canvas astern dropped steadily below the line of the horizon, and proportionately the hunted look which had crept into the faces of the Condor's new crew disappeared amid sighs of relief.

So confident did they become that Captain Nemesis at last ordered the hatches to be taken off, in order that the fresh breeze might penetrate into the loathsome slave holds, where approximately three hundred black men—so said the manifest—suffered the same agonies which had driven Nathan and his fellows to the verge of insanity,

With the light, kindly wind humming in the rigging, and the trim bark rising and falling with an easy motion, the ship's company relaxed from their tension and many of them fell asleep in the shade of the long-barreled guns which ranged the decks—fifteen to a side. Meanwhile, Nemesis and his officers held counsel to decide whither they should shape their course.

"To the Carib coast—" suggested Trumbull, his cheek full of tobacco; "'tis a famous haunt of pirates, buccaneers and such."

"Nay," said Nathan, "after we drop the poor blacks at some small port along the Ivory coast, I've a mind to try the Indian Ocean. At Methelage on Madagascar I've heard they use the Brotherhood kindly, and God knows we've much to do ere I'll be satisfied. More long guns we must have—and gun practice, cutlass drill and musketry. We'll not engage a ship till the crew are finished fighters. Practice and drill, drill and practice, is all there'll be aboard this ship for months to come. I've no mind to have us all blown to Jericho by the first blessed vessel we bring to action."

AS the words left his lips, a sudden paling tinted the sky, and in alarmed unison, the three officers looked up to see a dark angry cloud rising from the east. There was no mistaking its portent, so, with a bitter curse at their misfortune, Nathan sprang to his feet, ready once more to lead the battle for existence.

The wind quickly increased in strength, transforming the erstwhile smiling blue waves into sullen gray rollers. The Condor's little crew wearily hauled themselves to the rigging and sought frantically to shorten sail before the main blast, now visible on the horizon, should overtake the fleeing bark.

"For God's sake, free some o' the slavers," bawled Trumbull from the mainyard as he desperately clawed at

the heaving canvas of the courses. "Without 'em we'll never shorten in time, and so lose the spars."

Accordingly, a dozen or so of the prisoners were liberated and at the pistol's point were driven up the shrouds; nor did they waste time when they saw the danger which threatened, knowing full well that they, too, would drown, should the squall strike the Condor with her present press of sail.

"Haste, ye dogs!" growled Feather-soft, as he sweated to secure the clew lines. "Ye'll hang wi' us, if yonder damned bulldog takes us!"

But the slavers needed no urging; they fairly flew about the rigging, while the furious, screaming wind tore at their dirty garments with fierce, unseen hands.

"A narrow thing," shouted Trumbull, as at last the rain came pelting down, lashing the rising sea with hard-driven drops.

"Aye," called Nathan, peering astern. "The man-o'-war's taken in, too. Now we'll see."

Like a frightened sooty tern the black bark scudded along under treble-reefed topsails and a couple of jibs, while the gale roared up from astern, and the angry seas flung cascades of drifting brine over the bows. But behind, the man-of-war was coming up "hand over hand," as the man Amos put it. By four of the afternoon the frigate's hull reappeared above the sky line, and her towering masts could be seen in greater detail. By six Nathan cursed, as he found he could count her gun ports in the narrow white band painted along her side.

"It's the old Trident, damn it, fastest ship o' her class," he muttered, "or I'm a marine!" As he dashed the mingled rain and spindrift from his face, he laughed bitterly. "And to think I just missed sailing in her—wonder what old Bagsley 'll say when he finds me captain of a pirated slaver."

Captain Nemesis made his way forward along the heaving deck to where

Trumbull's squat figure balanced at the base of the main mast.

"She's catching us fast, Mr. Trumbull," shouted Nathan. "She'll be within range in an hour!"

The New Englander bit his lips. "We can throw over the guns—should lighten her a mite; the boats, too, if we must, and all but one hook."

Working in a blinding tropical rain, the desperate men executed these measures and as the last gun splashed into the churning froth alongside the Condor, they had the satisfaction of seeing the frigate come up not quite so fast.

"Better," grumbled the old buccaneer, who had sailed with Lowther, "but old brass buttons will throw us into a clove hitch afore dark—"

"The dark, that's the ticket!"

"Aye, on a dark night like this, we'll give her the Crappoh's farewell."

And therein lay the crux of the situation, for could the fleeing Condor manage to stay out of range until night-fall, it seemed more than likely she might elude the warship in the rushing darkness.

So, with the seas creaming under her bows, she fled, her yards bent like bow staves and her shrouds singing like æolian harps.

The white-faced men clustered along the bark's side, studying the great ship inexorably coming up behind, and muttered fearfully among themselves.

"**W**ISH we dared clap on a gallant or two," groaned Trumbull, lowering his spyglass. "That blessed frigate 'll be in range in another half hour, and it won't be dark for an hour after that!"

Nathan was sorely tempted. It was a terrifying thing to see how steadily the frigate drew nearer, a smother of froth under her figurehead and her bright copper sheathing flashing as she plunged doggedly on in pursuit. A magnificent sight she would have been to any but the despairing men aboard the Condor.

"No, Mr. Trumbull," shouted the Carolinian, his eyes riveted on the bark's groaning spars. "I'm convinced that a square foot more of sail would snap the masts off at the deck, then, indeed, would we dance the floorless hornpipe."

Slowly and steadily the frigate came up, until Nathan could read her name and was justified in his suspicion that she was the Trident.

How grandly she came on, burying her bows in the sea up to the hawse holes, then, like a bull tossing a victim, she flung the cutwater violently up, driving the spray into mist, hurling the spindrift high over the foretop, while the red copper of her sheathing flashed like a great wound in her under side.

At length, just as the sky commenced to lighten into a pale yellow sunset, the frigate came to within two cables' length and let fly with her forward boat guns.

"Fool," grunted Captain Nemesis, with professional contempt at the distant gunner's folly in attempting to hit at such a range. "Short a good fifteen fathoms!" But the sight of that thick white smoke being whipped away gave him qualms especially as the clouds which scudded furiously overhead became thinner and gave promise of an unexpectedly long twilight.

Again the distant gunner fired, with a fluffy puff of smoke and a hollow boom, sounding thunderous as it came down the wind. This time the Trident's aim was better, raising a high, wind-twisted geyser of spray from the back of a great hissing sea not far behind the bark's counter.

"Set another topsail, Mr. Trumbull," ordered Captain Nemesis harshly, without taking his eyes from the stately pursuer. "At this rate, she'll surely sink us before dark." And, indeed, the frigate had now gained so much that two more of her guns began to bear and added their voices to those of the original two.

Anxiously the haggard, hopeless

wretches on the Condor's deck watched the close-reefed topsail being set, heard it fill with the report of a cannon, and prayed that it would not split.

Nathan sighed with relief as the weather shrouds and backstays only creaked under the added burden.

He looked restlessly about the tumultuous horizon, recognized distant perpendicular gray streaks that marked wandering rainstorms, and saw the white-headed seas thundering along the Trident's side. If only the Condor could hold her own till dark! And ever the vision of a long loop of rope dangled before Nemesis's eyes, while his fingers drummed on the rail in an agony of suspense, until he found that, due to the extra canvas, the Condor was now keeping her own, neither gaining nor losing distance.

Still the gunners on the Trident fired round after round. Most of the shot fell short, but one, fired in an upward plunge of the frigate, crashed clear through the forejib and left a gaping black hole which quickly widened until the jib split and flapped in streaming frantic tatters.

A LONG cheer rose from the man-of-war, but, diminished by wind and distance, it came thin as a sea-gull's cry to the Condor's men risking death on the plunging bowsprit to rig a new jib.

During the time it took to replace the ruined sail, the Trident gained another few hundred feet, which brought her into better range so, for a space, her shot splashed dangerously near or screamed ineffectually through the rigging. But once the jib was replaced, the Condor commenced to gain almost imperceptibly.

"New jib must be a trifle larger," said Nathan in explanation to O'Hare's unspoken query. "I'm sorry for that," he added.

"And why, Cap'n Nat?"

"The bulldog will risk a new sail, and then, *amigo*," Captain Nemesis

shrugged expressively, "old Bagsley will come up and blow us out of the water."

The wind increased suddenly, turning Nathan cold with fear that the masts would go by the board; and he nervously set himself to hear that grinding crash which would mean the end of all things. Then the sky darkened visibly, accentuating the flash of the Trident's bow chasers in the gloom as she hurled shot after shot at the victim now well within her clutches.

Half an hour of racking suspense followed, while the frigate fired faster, with the growing fear that her prey might escape in the darkness. One shot, spent by distance, actually buried itself in the bark's deck planking, but, beyond this, the man-of-war only wasted her powder.

Trumbull beat his hand on the rail in a frenzy of anxiety. "By God, cap'n, ten minutes more and I believe we're going to win free! I can scarce make out the bulldog's hull!"

And at last night fell, blotting out the tall ship which crowded on sail in a last-minute effort to overtake the fleet black bark.

From the howling, rain-filled night came a dull crash.

"Frigate's lost her blessed foretop mast," grunted Trumbull, "or some such spar—hear the crack as it went?"

Too full of relief to speak, the others merely nodded. Captain Nemesis gave orders to change course. This done, he prudently shortened sail and fled, like a homing swallow for the south, with the conviction that at last they were free from the shadow of the gal-
lows.

But again fate thrust forward her fateful wand, and, at the end of an hour, drew back the merciful clouds which concealed the escaping Condor. Gradually the sea lightened until the ominous ship astern could again see her quarry which had, in the meantime, won at least three miles of advance.

Feathersoft and the other men broke

into a torrent of exasperated curses as they beheld the Trident correct her course and once more come bearing down.

"It's a wonder she can make us out," cried Trumbull, in a frenzy of disappointment, "but she can, so we'll hang yet, or I'm a Hollander."

It chanced that O'Hare went below and found, to his amazement, that some careless rogue had lit a lantern, quite oblivious of the fact that its rays served as a very creditable beacon for the pursuing man-of-war.

"Damn yez fer a blunderin' spalpeen!" snarled the Irishman in an excess of fury, "you've put a hempen cravat about our necks!"

Long and bitterly the others cursed, as they realized that but for this bit of carelessness, they would have won free in spite of the cleared skies. Now the Trident was again so close she might easily follow the course without the helpful beam of light.

Again the fleshless face of death himself looked them all in the eyes, as the Trident came up, burning to capture the elusive bark.

"Well," said O'Hare quietly, "the damn English 'll never take Jack O'Hare living—I'll not go back to that hell of the convict hold."

"A moment!" Nathan held up a hand in the darkness. "Light the lantern again!"

"Are you mad?" O'Hare stared in amazement.

"No!" snapped the Carolinian, "I'm not, can't afford the time. Do as I say!"

Obediently the Irishman trotted off and, amid the horrified protests of the crew, rekindled the betraying lantern. Meanwhile, Nathan turned to Trumbull. "Quick," he cried, "if you want to save your neck, call the carpenter."

MEANWHILE, the eager lookouts on the Trident confidently fixed their eyes on the yellow gleaming star which beckoned them on.

"Careless rogues," commented the officer of the watch, "we'll hang them yet!" He turned to the two men struggling at the frigate's wheel. "Quartermaster, keep dead on that light!"

And obediently the helmsmen at the wheel fixed their gaze on the fateful lantern, but the gleam vanished as though extinguished; the quartermaster was about to hail the officer of the watch when suddenly the light reappeared, bright and strong as ever.

"Hum," meditated the steersman, "there's a traitor on 'er, wot I thinks." He threw his weight on the spokes of the great wheel, and steered steadfastly for the light flickering ahead on the black heaving water.

At last the Trident drew near, guns were run out on the upper tier as an officer raised his megaphone to shout into the deep darkness which had again descended.

"Heave to, or we fire!"

From the vicinity of the bobbing light there was no reply. The frigate yawed suddenly and fired blindly into the darkness, while the flame of her guns revealed, as does a flash of lightning, nothing more than a crude raft contrived of four water casks lashed together, with a short boom rigged as a mast.

On the end of this, a ship's lantern sent forth its cheery rays into the surrounding gloom, but the bark was nowhere to be seen.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Russia's Prodigality

NOT many nations will prove so short-sighted as to swap a billion for a million. But consider Russia: She sold Alaska in 1867 for seven million two hundred thousand dollars. Since that time it has produced in excess of one billion two hundred million dollars in wealth. Russia got less than two cents an acre for this treasure land!

Alaska is five hundred and ninety thousand square miles in area and is more than twelve times the size of New York. It has twenty-six thousand miles of coastline.

In the Innuít, or Eskimo language, Alaska means "Great Land." The Russians might have learned this to their own great advantage.

There are about six thousand Eskimos living in Alaska. Point Hope, or Tigara, is the typical village of the Arctic. The town has three hundred natives and very few half-breeds. There are two white men; one is the United States deputy marshal, the other is the school-teacher. The natives there are largely unspoiled and still cling to many of their ancient customs. There is less bootlegging and fewer drunken whites than in Greenland or at Point Barrow. Barrow, the northernmost point in North America, has been famous as a trading post for many years.

The Eskimos are gentle, quite pious, and well-behaved. All go to church, and they will not hunt, fish, play or work on Sunday. To hear them singing their hymns one might readily imagine them an ordinary group of religious folk in any American city or hamlet. But the women smoke, bob their hair, and are inordinarily fond of coffee. There is an incessant demand for chewing gum.

Tom Lewis.

Dirt Cheap

Political boss and business czar, Morgan Kent meant to crush young Frank Westfield like one of Kent's own steam rollers—and everyone in Rocky Ford thought he would

By CARL CLAUSEN



Morgan Kent cursed as he reached for the door

FRANK WESTFIELD was not his family's pride. The Westfields were commercially and socially hard on the make; and they did not consider him a credit to them. He was apparently perfectly satisfied with his position as bookkeeper of the Barnett Brick Company at a salary of a hundred and fifty dollars per month, and with his title of general manager, at nothing at all.

A phrenologist would have interpreted Frank's firm jaw as a sign of aggressiveness. His family knew better. It denoted simply mulishness of a particularly exasperating brand. The fact that he was good-natured was no comfort to them.

They remonstrated with him from time to time, threw out veiled hints about the ultimate fate of youths with lack of ambition, and snubbed him at mealtimes.

Marshall, his brother, was cashier of the First National Bank of Rocky Ford. It was the consensus of opinion that he would step into the shoes of old Nathan Stoll, the president, when Stoll retired from a c t i v e life. Colinne, Frank's oldest sister, was chief librarian of the Rocky Ford Public Library; and Gladys, the youngest member of the Westfields, had just returned from Columbia wearing the engagement ring of a Nassau Street broker.

These facts were pointed out to Frank frequently and with bitterness, and his own puny efforts at commercial and social success were held up to scorn; so he grew to look upon himself as the blight on the family tree, and kept in the background as much as possible.

He contributed fifty dollars per month to the family budget in exchange for a certain amount of erratic

board and the occupancy of the large dormered attic room, where he loafed about in the evening in loose comfortable clothes, smoked a pipe, and quarreled with favorite authors.

Abroad he always looked cheerfully shabby; therefore he was not popular with the ultra-modern generation of Rocky Ford. Moreover, he did not have a way with him; and he danced, as Minnie Sanders expressed it, like a bundle of laths tied loosely together.

His principal recreation seemed to be to tramp about the countryside of Long Island with a fishing rod, exploring angling holes. As he never brought home any fish, his family counted this as one more point against him. Even in his hobby he was unsuccessful. They did not know that the day's catch was usually baked in butter between two stones in a shady nook near the hole where they were caught, and eaten with great relish by Frank and another.

THIS other person was Ruth Barnett. Ruth was not beautiful, but after three years of companionship Frank still found pleasure in sitting quietly by her, watching the play of her dark eyes and of her lips when she spoke or was silent. Ruth was a wholesome girl of middle height and slender. You've probably seen thousands like her—but Frank hadn't. Her mouth was a little large, but her hair was a soft reddish brown that had a way of catching any stray beams of light that came her way, and of holding them.

Of course the Westfields knew that Frank saw a good deal of "that Barnett girl." It was perfectly in keeping with his past and present performances that he should wander afield in search of amorous adventure. The only comfort was that as he could hardly support himself decently on his salary, there was no immediate danger of the entanglement becoming permanent.

Ruth Barnett had nothing. Indeed,

she had something worse than nothing. Old Barney Barnett, her father, had fired his last batch of bricks some three years earlier, and had left his daughter the property known as the Barnett Brick Company, a concern that had been dying by inches for years. Only Frank's steadying hand as bookkeeper and general manager had kept it from breathing its last.

Frank's family did not, of course, know anything about this, nor did they know that quite frequently, when the monthly pay roll was a little short, Frank juggled the books surreptitiously, and as a result went without such things as a new hat or overcoat and other small necessities.

There were other things about which his family knew nothing, or rather about which they had known nothing until now.

Marshall, the brother who as cashier of the largest bank in the city was an important figure financially in Rocky Ford, had told his father about it one evening when Frank was out; and in the manner of the Westfields anything appertaining to the delinquency of Frank became at once the common property of the household. Mrs. Westfield discussed the matter in hushed tones with her daughters, while their male parent and elder brother settled the absent Frank's fate with firmness and dispatch.

When Frank came down to breakfast the following morning and found every member of the family buried in the various sections of the morning paper, their ominous manner ought to have warned him; but he was so used to being ignored that it went completely over his head.

Even when, as if by prearranged signal, his two sisters and brother folded up their news sheets one by one, laid them beside their empty coffee cups, and left the room gravely as if they could not bear to witness the blow of the ax that was about to descend upon his unsuspecting neck, Frank saw

nothing unusual in the proceedings, but merely asked his mother to pass the toast.

While Mrs. Westfield turned a piece of bread on the electric toaster, she regarded her second-born with a mixture of fear and speculation, apparently considering that she had committed an unwise act in giving birth to him.

Mr. Westfield arose. The interchange of glances between his parents was lost upon Frank. He was totally unprepared for what was to follow when his father's "harrumph" caused him to look up.

"I'd like to see you in the study when you've done breakfast, Frank," Mr. Westfield, Sr., said with the ponderousness which the presidency of the Westfield Knitting Mills had conferred upon him.

"Who—me?" said Frank in surprise. "Sure, dad."

He was about to inquire the reason, but before he had the opportunity his father had left the room and had closed the door.

"What's up, mother?" Frank inquired.

"I haven't the faintest idea!" she told him quite untruthfully.

"I hope nothing's wrong at the mills," Frank said.

Mrs. Westfield arose as the colored maid entered to clear the table.

"Your father's management of the mills would preclude any such contingency," she remarked as she swept out of the room.

Frank stared after her. "I wonder what now?" he muttered under his breath.

A NEWSPAPER reporter had once referred to Westfield, Sr., as a captain of industry. Ever since, Mr. Westfield had tried hard to live up to it. His name had been coupled with that of Morgan Kent, the domineering president of the great North Shore Construction Company. Mr. Westfield did not like Mr. Kent,

but he liked to have his name linked with him.

Kent had once stooped graciously to take seven hundred dollars away from him on eighteen holes at the St. George's links when Kent's regular partner had failed to show up because of transmission trouble.

Mr. Westfield always referred to the incident carelessly, in public, as if losing or winning seven hundred dollars at golf was a daily occurrence. He wisely refrained, however, from mentioning the episode at home, where the subject of a sealskin coat of the same price had been shuttled back and forth for some weeks and was finally abandoned in favor of one of silk velour with a fox fur collar. Which shows that Mr. Westfield was a diplomat.

In the main he was also a rather good sort, his ponderousness being more of a cloak to cover up a deep-rooted and pernicious inferiority complex than a mark of conceit. His occasional fits of bluster at home were the efforts of a fundamentally timid man to retain his precarious position as the head of his house and of three self-assertive and somewhat strong-minded women.

Such was the man who greeted his younger son in the study with a serious and troubled mien. He went straight to the point.

"Marshall met Sackett yesterday," he said in an accusing tone. Sackett was the vice-president of the Farmers and Merchants Bank, a rival of the Rocky Ford First National of which Mr. Westfield was a director and his son Marshall the cashier.

Frank tried not to look guilty.

"Yes?" he said.

"Sackett told Marshall what you've been doing. In fact, bragged about it!"

"Yes?" said Frank again.

Mr. Westfield thrust his head forward. No son of his could evade the issue with monosyllabic replies.

"If you wanted to borrow money,

why didn't you come to our—Marshall's bank?" he demanded.

"Because I didn't want you to find out, and because Marshall wouldn't have let me have it," Frank replied candidly and with some heat.

Mr. Westfield stiffened. He was forced to admit the truth of the latter half of the statement. The frankness of the first half took the wind out of his sails.

He was just a little bit afraid of his second-born. Frank reminded him of his own mother, an easy-going but stubborn old woman, still hale and hearty at the age of eighty-seven.

"What did you use all that money for?" he asked, less aggressively. "I hear that during the past year you have borrowed over six thousand dollars from the Farmers and Merchants in varying amounts."

"I don't see that it's any particular business of yours, dad," Frank replied without rancor. "I'm twenty-six, and responsible for my own obligations."

YOU mean to say that your ability to borrow money from the Farmers and Merchants was not due to the fact that you were my son?" Mr. Westfield returned with supreme frigidity.

"It certainly wasn't," Frank retorted as coldly. "I gave Sackett distinctly to understand that I was borrowing on my own responsibility and that you were to know nothing about it."

"Yes, yes," his father replied; "Marshall said that Sackett had told him something like that. Still, the moral effect of being a Westfield—"

"Moral fiddlesticks!" Frank retorted. "The Farmers and Merchants would cut your throat and Marshall's in a minute if they had the chance, and well you know it. I had the strongest sort of prejudice to overcome before I got my first five hundred."

Mr. Westfield blinked. The shot had struck home. And after all, the loaning

of money to responsible people was a bank's function. Marshall's professional ire had been aroused by Sackett's boasting about the new Westfield business which the younger scion of that house had brought to his bank. Mr. Westfield frowned.

"Business competition is not the question at issue," he said severely. "I—your mother wants to know what you've used the money for."

The shadow of a smile flitted across Frank's face. "I paid it back promptly every time it was due. If you're worried about it, go over to the Farmers and Merchants and ask Sackett. The last item I got was one thousand dollars on a thirty-day note. I paid it back four days ago with interest. Next month I shall need six thousand on the same terms. They were satisfied with the security I offered, and told me that I could have it."

"Six thousand! Security!" Mr. Westfield ejaculated. "What resources have you?"

"That is part of my secret," Frank informed him.

"I demand to know what sort of speculation—gambling—you're engaged in!" his father repeated with rising inflection.

Frank looked at his sire in silence for some moments. A curious hard look had come into his usually mild and deep blue eyes.

"The surest thing in the world, dad," he said quietly.

"I dare say," Mr. Westfield remarked dryly, "they all are. Sure things! For the sake of your mother I shall have to ask you to discontinue them at once."

"Suppose I refuse?"

This contingency had apparently not occurred to the older man. It brought him up with a start. "Then I shall have to confer with your mother and—er—Marshall," he said somewhat lamely.

"Let me know the verdict," Frank

replied. His hand was on the door-knob. "I can pack my trunk in half an hour."

Mr. Westfield's eyes traveled to a large portrait in oil on the wall opposite—Mrs. Arabella Westfield, his mother, painted by a famous artist when the sitter was about Frank's age. The qualities which that artist always recorded with his brush had made him famous.

Mr. Westfield seemed thoughtful as his eyes returned to the face of his son.

"Hm!" he said. "Harrumph!"

Frank saved him from further embarrassment by leaving the room and closing the door softly behind him.

FRANK WESTFIELD gave his card to the girl at the desk, who returned presently with the information that Mr. Morgan Kent would see him.

"Down the corridor, last door to the right," she told him.

A muffled "Come in" answered Frank Westfield's knock on the door whose frosted pane bore the legend "Private" in gold letters six inches high.

Morgan Kent looked up from his desk as the young man entered. Frank's card was still in his hand. He glanced from his visitor to the piece of pasteboard as if to refresh his memory, which was his way of humbling a petitioner.

"I heard that you had been awarded the contract for the Crown Hill tunnel, Mr. Kent," Frank said. "My firm, the Barnett Brick Company, would like to get a chance to bid on the glazed terra-cotta tile."

Kent laid Frank's card down. He was a large, powerfully built man, with a full, smoothly shaved face and a predatory, vikinglike aggressiveness in his manner and bearing. His eyes were of the peculiar pale-blue shade that shows almost colorless in certain lights and under certain conditions.

They seemed to be taking the young man's measure now.

"Your kiln has no equipment for glazing," he said finally.

"I know, but it can be installed at a small cost. Our clay is of the very best quality."

The contractor leaned back in his chair and regarded the other with his expressionless eyes.

"Westfield," he said, "some day you're going to find out that meddling in other people's affairs is bad business for a young man who's trying to get along in his home town."

Frank's eyes went wide.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he replied. If his blank amazement at this piece of advice was assumed, his innocent face gave no indication of it.

Kent rapped the arm of his chair with a peremptory middle finger.

"You know what I mean!" he retorted. "I suppose that you imagined you were protecting Miss Barnett's interest when you advised her not to sell me the yard?"

"Why, yes, but I didn't think that you'd object to her making a little money out of it before we're finally forced to shut down for lack of clay."

"I don't object. That's why I offered her twenty-five thousand cash for it—a good deal more than it's worth!"

"But," said Frank, "why not let us make the tile for you? You won't have to invest money in glazing equipment, and it'll give us a chance to make a piece of change. I've figured it from both angles, yours and ours. By the time you invest twenty-five thousand and another ten in glazing equipment and trackage, you're not going to be much ahead. It'll save you a lot of bother if we make your tile."

Kent waved the suggestion aside.

"How do I know that you can make tile to come up to the city's specifications, or indeed that you'll be able to live up to your contract at all? The past performances of the Barnett Brick Company would indicate otherwise."

"I had thought of that," Frank replied good-naturedly. "We'll post a bond of fifty thousand dollars guaranteeing delivery of the tile according to specifications. I've arranged for it already. The bonding people had an expert look our clay over. They are satisfied to take the risk."

KENT'S eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly.

"You've taken a good deal for granted, don't you think?" he asked in a dangerously level tone. "How d'you know that I'd be interested?"

"You will be interested in my figures when I give them to you," Frank assured him. "Being right on the ground here, we can beat any outside firm a mile on prices and delivery. I took nothing for granted. Anticipating your very good objections I simply went to see the bonding people before coming to you with my proposition. I didn't want to go off half-cock."

"I see. And where are you going to get the money from for equipment and trackage? No one's going to loan you ten thousand on that old hole in the ground!"

"That, too, is arranged for," Frank said blithely, "your signature on the dotted line will be met with ten thousand dollars in cash posted by us at your own bank to guarantee operating funds."

Kent moved forward in his chair with what looked like a start.

"In addition," Frank went on, "we're willing to let you insert a clause in the contract to the effect that if we fail to deliver the tile according to agreement and specifications, you may take the yard over and operate it until the tunnel is completed. Could anything be fairer, Mr. Kent? You'll be protected, both ends against the middle!" he finished.

The contractor gave Frank another of his quick glances from the depths of his chair. He searched the other's face as if for a trace of levity, and finding

none there, smiled himself. But it was a chilly smile, devoid of mirth, in which his pale crafty eyes took no part.

"Suppose you give me forty-eight hours to think it over," he said, looking at his fingernails. "If I decide to take you up, the contract 'll be ready for Miss Barnett to sign." He paused. "I hope that I can see it your way. I always like to oblige the ladies," he added with what he thought was a sly squint. Frank thought otherwise. He knew what Kent was capable of, and he had to restrain the impulse to clip the contractor over the eye and make the squint a permanent adornment. Picking up his hat, he controlled his voice sufficiently to say:

"Very well, Mr. Kent; you can reach me at the office of the yard any time."

The contractor stood looking at the just closed door until his visitor's footsteps had died away down the corridor. Then, he whirled in his tracks and reached for the telephone on the desk.

"Get Sprowl on the wire, Miss Toomey, and tell him I want to see him after the board meeting," he told the girl at the switchboard.

"Yes, Mr. Kent."

ONE morning a week or so later Frank returned to the office of the brick yard at eleven o'clock and found Ruth Barnett there waiting for him. By the troubled look in her eyes he knew that she had read the morning *Sentinel*, so he was not surprised when she spread the paper out on the desk and pointed to a paragraph on the front page.

He read:

Public nuisance abated. Council passes ordinance prohibiting the manufacture of bricks within the city limits.

He glanced away.

"I was served with an injunction when I went up to the city hall to see about it," Frank replied as he took a legal document from his pocket and laid it on the desk; "this is it."

The color had left Ruth's face.

"What *are* we going to do, Frank?" she asked in a small, frightened voice.

"Nothing. Sit tight."

"Not fight the injunction?" she asked.

"It wouldn't do us any good. There's been a lot of agitation about our making bricks within the city limits for the last two or three years—even before your father died. It was bound to come sooner or later."

"Then we're ruined unless we sell to Kent?"

"He told you that, did he?" Frank's eyes were unfathomable.

The girl glanced at him quickly.

"Why, yes. He called me on the telephone this morning and said that his offer of twenty-five thousand still held good if I took him up during the next twenty-four hours."

"In a hurry, isn't he?"

Ruth was silent for a minute, then she said:

"What have you against Morgan Kent, Frank?"

"More than he suspects," was the cryptic answer.

"I think it was very decent of him to stick to his offer. He might easily have taken advantage of the situation we're in, and have lowered his price. I'd have to take what he offered, now."

"That's what he thinks! Yes, I have no doubt that Morgan Kent regards himself as a philanthropist."

They had moved to the window together. At the bottom of the ten acre-pit the kilns squatted like the tombs of some ancient Pharaohs. From the apex of one of them a thin spiral of smoke from the last firing of bricks rose lazily to the sky.

The girl raised her eyes to the south where the tall office buildings of the city of Rocky Ford were flung against the morning sky. Many of them had been erected with bricks from her kiln. For thirty years her father had made bricks; good bricks. The name of Barnett was linked directly with the city's

growth, but like many other producers, Barney Barnett had got merely a pittance out of the business.

The middlemen—the great contractors, the architects and the real estate men—had got the cream. Still, faithfully, old Barney had gone on making bricks, literally eating up his patrimony. Of the small farm left to him by Grandfather Barnett, now overtaken by the city's growth, only this ugly ten-acre scar remained.

"**P**HILANTHROPIST or not, we've got to accept Kent's offer," the girl replied.

"I don't know about that," Frank replied. His arm had stolen around her waist.

"But, Frank, dear, with that four thousand mortgage on the house to raise the money for the glazing equipment, I wouldn't dare refuse his offer."

"That's what Kent figured," the young man said.

"Just what do you mean? If you thought he was crooked, why did you put your own six thousand in?"

"To catch big fish you need big bait," he replied.

"You mean that he was instrumental in getting the ordinance passed? I refuse to believe it! What good would that do him? He'd be unable to make tile himself!"

Frank laughed, harshly.

"You don't suppose he stands by his offer because he likes—the color of your eyes?"

He had not intended to put so much heat into the remark, but Kent's sly wink had set him to wondering. He had always prided himself upon not being jealous, and so far, Ruth had never given him cause, but he was very much in love with her, and he knew that Kent would stoop to anything to get what he was after.

The girl disengaged herself.

"You're forgetting yourself," she said sharply. She stood looking at him queerly for a moment. "Kent hinted

that you were trying to get me into a tight place to your own advantage. Don't force me to believe it!"

"He'd do that!" Frank snapped back.

"I don't know what you're insinuating," the girl retorted coldly, "I only know that I'm going to accept his offer!"

"You can't! I've something to say about that! The contract between you and me was drawn up by Judge Crail, and he specializes in iron-bound contracts. My six thousand are in the ring, to stay!"

"You mean that you're going to hold me to it and ruin me by preventing me from selling to Kent?" the girl cried, stepping back as if to ward off a blow.

"I certainly am going to hold you to it, and it's not going to ruin you!" the young man asserted.

"Then what Kent said was true! You made me give you power-of-attorney over the yard so you could juggle it to your own advantage!"

"So he said that, too, did he? You and Kent are on pretty good terms, aren't you? If you choose to believe that I'm juggling your yard, you're welcome! I stand pat!"

He put forth his hand. "I—I didn't mean that, Ruth, but you've got to trust me!" he said desperately.

He did not dare tell her what he was about to do. The enemy he was fighting struck in the dark. So must he! It was absolutely necessary for the success of his plan that Ruth should appear desperately anxious to sell. If Morgan Kent suspected otherwise, the whole scheme might be wrecked. Neither did he dare to speculate upon how far the contractor had wormed himself into Ruth's confidence. Near or far, he promised himself a reckoning with Mr. Morgan Kent some day, which that gentleman would remember to the end of his life.

"Trust you?" she mocked bitterly. "In the face of what you've just told

me?" Without another word she drew his ring from her finger, tossed it on the desk and left the office.

Frank stood looking at it for some moments, then he picked it up, put it in the safe and locked the door.

MORGAN KENT was a heavy and valuable depositor in the First National Bank of Rocky Ford. As the bank's cashier, Marshall took it upon himself to go after Frank, his recalcitrant brother. There was a stormy session, some evenings later in the Westfield study, between Westfield, Sr., and his two sons.

"One has to be plain with you!" Marshall told Frank. "Kent wants your yard."

Frank admitted that he was under that impression.

"He's willing to pay a reasonable price for it. More than Ruth Barnett could hope to get from any one else!"

"What d'you call a reasonable price?" Frank asked.

"Well—thirty-five thousand. Maybe a little more," Marshall ventured cautiously. "I'll do my best to get her a square deal."

Frank laughed.

"So Kent's resorting to family pressure! He stoops to almost anything!" Marshall's brows contracted angrily.

"Some day you're going to regret having got in his way. Unless Ruth's a fool, she'll take forty thousand!"

"Coming up!" said Frank. "Ruth's no fool. She simply can't take any offer without my agreement, and I'm not agreeing to anything like forty thousand!"

Marshall and his father exchanged glances.

"How much d'you expect to get for your precious brickyard?" the brother wanted to know.

"Two hundred thousand dollars," said Frank quietly.

The others held their breath.

"You—you're crazy!" Marshall stuttered.

"Think so?" said Frank.

"Do I think so! You poor boob, why should Kent pay you any such preposterous figure for that useless hole?"

"Ask him," Frank said, "and I'll bet you ten thousand on the side that he won't tell you."

"I'm no gambler," Marshall retorted coldly.

"That's why you'll stay cashier of the bank all your life, unless Stoll passes in his checks," Frank replied good-naturedly.

His father remonstrated mildly, waving aside the notion of any such figure.

"I'd like to see the man who could nick Morgan Kent for two hundred thousand," Westfield said, and he meant it.

"You're looking at him, dad," Frank retorted with a grin. "I told you a week or so ago that I was betting on the surest thing in the world."

Mr. Westfield shrugged his shoulders. Marshall's face had turned white. He seemed unable to control himself any longer.

"D'you know what this means to all of us—your getting in Morgan Kent's way? He'll withdraw his account from my bank and dump all his shares in the Knitting Mills on the open market. It'll cost me and your father thousands—thousands, d'you hear!" Marshall fairly shouted the words.

"I had thought of that," Frank said. "I'll grab every share in the mills as fast as he dumps them, and be glad to get them as long as you, dad, are the president. As to his bank account, I don't think you need worry about that, Marshall. There's no other bank in town that Kent would trust except Sackett's, and he's in bad there, over a shady real estate deal."

"You'll buy his shares in the mills!" Marshall scoffed. "Where'll you get the money?"

"From Kent, when he kicks through with the two hundred thousand. I've got a one-fourth interest in the yard, so

my share'll be fifty thousand. That'll more than take care of his stock."

With a snort of derision Marshall flung himself from the room.

ALONE with his second-born, Mr. Westfield ventured an observation:

"So that was why you wanted your six thousand?"

"Certainly." Frank smiled down at the fundamentally timid little man who was his father. "About two years ago you made an address at the Rotary Club—the time they printed that piece about you in the *Sentinel*, remember? The gist of your speech was that if a young man wanted to succeed, he must establish credit, and that the best way to establish credit was to borrow money often and pay it back promptly. It was good sound advice, dad, and I took it."

"I see," his father replied, disarmed by the compliment implied; "but supposing you had lost it?"

"I couldn't lose it. I told you the other day that I was playing safe. You thought I was speculating. I wasn't. I simply deposited the money as fast as I borrowed it, in a savings account in a New York bank, and drew it out again when my note fell due, or rather a few days before. As I always kept a balance of five hundred dollars there of my own money, the bank paid me three and a half per cent interest. The difference between that and the six per cent Sackett charged me, I made up from my salary."

Mr. Westfield drew a deep breath. He looked at his son with a new respect in his shrewd eyes, that was enhanced by observing the shabbiness of the suit Frank wore.

"And you used your borrowing ability to back a defunct brickyard?"

"Not defunct, dad. I knew what Ruth would be up against sooner or later, so I laid my plans. Sackett was satisfied with the security I offered—my fourth interest in the yard—considering its potentialities."

Mr. Westfield ran his hand through his sparse gray hair.

"I don't know what your game is," he said, "but I warn you that no one ever got the best of Morgan Kent." What he would have liked to add was that he hoped this honor would come to a Westfield; but being prudent of expression, even in the bosom of his own family, he contented himself with the warning.

"I'm not trying to get the best of any one," Frank told him, "I'm just trying to get a helpless girl what's hers by right of good fortune; and besides, Kent has run this town about long enough."

"And you're going to help him run it?" his father remarked. "I wish you luck," he added doubtfully, but with a sincerity that was not lost upon his son. "This Ruth person must be a very desirable young lady. I haven't seen her since her father's funeral."

"She is," Frank replied softly.

Mr. Westfield looked at his shoes. He always did when he felt it necessary to be diplomatic.

"I hope—harrumph," said he, "that you two won't get into a jam with Kent. I shan't be able to help you. We elected him to the board of directors last month, so you see the hole this move of yours puts me in."

"I'm sorry if I'm doing anything to hurt you with him," Frank replied.

His father glanced at him out of the tail of his eye, and Frank could have sworn that there was a wink in it.

"I guess the old man can take care of himself, son," Westfield, Sr., remarked with a toss of his head, "all I ask you to do is to step easy, until you're sure—then step *hard*!"

IT was a little after ten o'clock in the morning, a week or so later, when Frank, smoking a worried pipe in the office of the deserted brick company, was roused from his broodings by a peremptory knock on the door. At his "come in" Morgan Kent en-

tered and closed the door behind him. A glance was enough to tell Frank that the contractor had come gunning. His hands were incased in a pair of tasseled automobile driving gauntlets that added to his warlike appearance.

Legs apart and arms akimbo, the man stood looking down at Frank, who puffed quietly away at his pipe.

"Shut down, I see!" Kent remarked unpleasantly.

"Naturally," said Frank, "we're obeying the law."

Kent smiled crookedly.

"You're a good bluffer, Westfield, but bluffing doesn't get you to first base with me. The injunction kills you. I could wait and freeze you out, but I want the yard now."

Frank said nothing for awhile. He knew why Kent was in a hurry, and he had spent a rather bad week waiting for this moment. He was beginning to wonder if his wily antagonist had found a way to checkmate him.

He was at loggerheads with his family, to the point of taking his meals out rather than meet the accusing eyes of his mother and brother and his two sisters.

His break with Ruth worried him the most. She had not been at the yard since the day she gave him back the ring. His repeated telephone calls had been answered by the maid, who informed him that her mistress had gone to visit relatives in Boston. He guessed why. She had an uncle there whose business advice she no doubt had gone to seek.

For more than a week he had gone about his home town a marked man, wondering if he had overreached himself, and if so, what place on the map the climate would be the healthiest when his thirty-day note fell due. It was therefore with less confidence than he manifested outwardly that he forced himself to meet Kent's smoldering eyes.

"You could do that—freeze me out, but you'd get chilblains yourself in the process."

The contractor's teeth came together with a snap. He seemed to be trying to estimate the strength of this opponent sprawled so negligently in the swivel chair.

"What's your proposition?" Kent demanded thickly.

"Your emissary, my brother, has given it to you," Frank replied.

Kent made a wide sweep with right tasseled gauntlet.

"If you think you're going to get two hundred thousand dollars out of me for this stack of junk, you'd better think again!" he barked.

"I've been thinking so for over a year," Frank said, "ever since the agitation for the Crown Hill project began."

The contractor straightened up with a jerk. His face was working. It was evident that he restrained himself with a supreme effort from tearing his adversary limb from limb. Indeed, his right hand was raised as if to strike, then fell lamely to his side as a cunning look came into his eyes.

"All right," he growled, "have Miss Barnett put the deed in escrow at my bank."

"There isn't going to be any deed," Frank replied.

"What!"

"We're not selling you the yard, Kent—merely leasing it to you for the period of one year, or until the project's finished. You'll be permitted to use it for—the purposes you wish, but the title remains in Miss Barnett's name."

Kent raised himself to the full height of his six feet two. His face had turned the color of an overripe tomato, and the pupils of his pale-blue eyes were contracted to pinpoints.

"I'll see you in hell before I'll agree to any such proposition!" he stormed.

"That's where you're going if you don't change your tactics," Frank told him. "but I don't think you'll see me there. After having inhabited the same latitude with you in life, it'll be a pos-

itive pleasure for me to give hell a wide berth."

Frank arose, signifying that the interview was at an end. "When you've thought things over and learned to keep a civil tongue in your head, come around and see me; and if I were you I wouldn't delay. After twenty-four hours the price goes to an even quarter of a million."

Instead of replying, Kent kicked the door open and stalked out, muttering curses. He shifted the gears of his expensive roadster with a vehemence that all but ripped the rear end out of the car as it roared up the steep incline to the street.

RUTH BARNETT lived alone with an aged housekeeper-maid in the house on Griffin Avenue where she was born. The old house was a reminder of the days when city lots were measured in terms of acreage and it stood well back from the street in a grove of tall pines. The avenue was still an imposing thoroughfare. Giant locust trees lined its broad parkways, and there was an air of tranquillity about the street that reminded one of a country lane.

She was eating an early breakfast after having returned from Boston the night before, when Nelson, the foreman of the yard, called her on the phone.

"They're doing what?" she exclaimed in consternation. "Are you sure, Nelson?"

"Sure as I'm alive, ma'am!"

"I'll be right' down!"

She hung the receiver up, flew down the steps and flung herself into her roadster, taking the corner on two wheels and opening the throttle wide.

At the brickyard a strange sight met her eyes. A thousand feet or so distant, six great steam shovels of the variety known as "hell-diggers" were loading dirt from the approaches of the new Crown Hill tunnel into great dump cars. A tramway had been laid from there to the edge of the pit, along

which a small, champing engine was backing a string of cars loaded with dirt, and dumping their contents over the bluff into the pit.

She slammed her brakes on and sat petrified, watching two great five-ton cars tilt and spill their contents down on the roof of the old tool house. The vandals were burying her kilns, equipment—burying everything she possessed with dirt!

She left the machine and ran to the spot at the end of the tramway from where Kent was directing his men. On a stack of lumber, near by, Frank was seated with a talley board on his lap and a pencil in his hand. He arose as she came up.

"Frank! What are you doing? How dare you—" she panted, beside herself with fear and anger.

Morgan Kent removed a black cigar from his heavy lips.

"The boy-friend slipped one over on you, didn't he?" Kent asked with a sneer.

"What does he mean, Frank?" the girl cried bewildered.

"I mean that he sold you out—that's what!" Kent rasped. "Got you to give him power of attorney! I told you he was a crook!"

The girl stood looking at Frank to give him a chance to deny the contractor's allegations, but the young man made no reply. His eyes were fastened on Kent's towering figure as if to weigh his chances with him in physical encounter.

"I didn't know you had returned from Boston, Ruth," he said presently. "Please go home. I'll be with you in an hour."

"I won't go home!" she cried through a blur of tears. "I demand an explanation!"

"All right, honey," he replied wearily, "this is a free country. Stay and see the fun, if you must." He turned on the contractor. "Kent," he said, "I told my dad that you'd run this town long enough. I was wrong.

You've run it too long. You're through; and I'm going to celebrate the event by licking you—or you me. Calling a man a crook is libel, but I'm not going to wait for the law to take its course. Take off your coat; I'm coming!"

THE fight that followed went down in history. Frank was a good twenty pounds lighter than his adversary, but what he lacked in weight, he made up for in enthusiasm. Kent, looking for escape, glanced down the pit at his back. It was either a drop of thirty feet to the bottom or fight. He chose to fight. A coward at heart, fear of the thirty-foot drop goaded him on.

He fought blindly, madly, to ward off the blows that rained upon his face and neck with the precision and regularity of trip-hammers. There was no escaping them.

Twice he went to his knees. As he did so the second time his hand came in touch with an iron bar. His fingers closed about it. With a bellow of rage he hurled it at the other. It struck Frank a glancing blow on the temple.

Almost at the same moment Frank's left hook caught the murderous Kent behind the ear. Kent reeled back and clutched wildly at the edge of a dump car for support. The loaded car tilted and the contractor, losing his balance with it, went backward, and slid rather than fell down the sheer slope of the pit. He fetched up on the roof of the toolhouse twenty feet below, stunned and half buried in the avalanche of tunnel dirt.

Frank whirled as the crew of Kent's dump car closed in about him. Blood, streaming from the cut on his head, ran into his eyes, blinding him. Through a half daze he became aware that some one had sprung to his aid and was fighting beside him.

"Cowards! Scoundrels!" he heard a familiar voice shouting. The iron bar, which Kent had dropped as he fell, was being wielded by another. It came down with smack on the skull

of the nearest of his assailants, who a moment before had stood poisoning a rock in his uplifted hands ready to hurl it at Frank. Once, twice more, the bar came down, then the crew fell back in panic. On the ground a man lay groaning. Another was dragging himself after his retreating fellows.

Westfield, Sr., straightened up and grinned at his son. Mr. Westfield's collar had gone adrift. His Bengal silk cravat waved to the breeze behind instead of in front, and of his black derby, the pride of Rocky Ford, nothing remained but the brim. This was draped about his neck.

His face was smeared with tunnel dirt, but his small bright eyes blazed with the light of battle, and the efficient iron bar was still in his hand.

He poked the prostrate figure at his feet with the toe of his boot.

"I wonder if I killed the fellow," he remarked cheerfully. "I hope not. It'd be awkward."

Frank stared at his father. He wanted to ask him how he came to be there, but he was too dazed to speak, so he just picked up his hat and coat, and the two of them walked slowly to the office of the brick company on the opposite side of the pit.

Mr. Westfield, in passing, tossed the brim of his wrecked derby over the bank where it soared briefly and came to rest not far from where the contractor was disintombing himself from the load of dirt. "Mr. Morgan Kent," Mr. Westfield told his son, "circulated a report about you which not only was untrue, but which cast a doubt upon the name of Westfield. I couldn't stand for that. When I didn't find him at his office, I came down here to give him a piece of my mind. It appears that I arrived at an—harrumph—opportune moment, Ruth," he added, nodding to the girl who had followed them.

The two men were removing the most conspicuous marks of the tournament, assisted by Ruth. Mr. West-

field paused in the act of removing, as best he could with a towel, the tunnel dirt from his linen collar.

"What a fine strapping girl you've grown into. I suppose you two'll want to get married next."

A wave of color suffused the girl's pale face. She glanced at Frank who was touching the sore spot on his head where the iron bar had come near ending the argument.

"Suppose you tell her, dad, while I go into the next room and get some court-plaster from the emergency locker," Frank said. "Ruth's been in Boston for the past week."

"I DON'T know how he did it," Westfield, Sr., said as the door closed upon his second-born, "but in some way he got wind that Kent had to have your yard as a dumping-place for his tunnel dirt, or else haul it to tidewater and load it on barges and tow them several miles out to sea. Frank's a wizard with a pencil. He figured that it would save Kent a cool half million in hauling charges if he could fill this old hole, and afterward he'd have a nice level ten-acre site to offer the city for a playground, at a very—er—substantial figure. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars is what he intended charging the city for it, and Sprowl was getting ready to jam an ordinance of acceptance through for him, when Frank threw his monkey-wrench into the proceedings and gummed the works."

Mr. Westfield paused and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

"The way those two highbinders bluffed each other with their tile propositions was a scream. Neither had any intention of making tile here. Kent had already let his tile contract and Frank knew it. He's a great boy, Ruth. Thanks to him we're going to have an honest administration once more. Sprowl hopped the train for Florida when the news of the intended playground steal leaked out, and the

rest of the board went fishing for the rest of the summer. You get a hundred and fifty thousand as your share of the deal, Frank makes fifty, and you'll have a mighty fine piece of ground here that I might be interested in for a new mill site if the price is right."

"I get a hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" the girl exclaimed.

"Sure, honey," Frank interjected as he wandered in with a strip of court-plaster adorning his temple. "I got two hundred thousand out of Kent on a yardage basis for the dumping privileges; fifty of that is mine. The rest is yours."

He stooped over the safe and began to twirl the knob.

"We'll have a regular old-fashioned wedding with roses and things," Mr. Westfield went on happily. "It 'll cheer the old house up. Between Colinne and her books and Marshall and his securities they've made it into a cross between a public library and a stock exchange. I'd like to see how it 'd look, dolled up as it used to be in your mother's time. What say?"

"How about it, Ruth?" Frank asked. He had opened the safe and had taken from it the circlet of platinum with its small but flawless stone. Moving to the girl's side he slipped it on her finger in the shelter of his palms.

"I—I think that it'd be wonderful, Frank," she replied in a low tone. Her dark eyes were contrite and humble. "Tell you what we'll do, dear; we'll donate the site to the city for a childrens' playground under the name of the Barney Barnett Memorial."

"Attaboy!" Mr. Westfield sang out. "Between the Barnetts and the Westfields, we're going to make this town a decent place for the kids—and others!"

"We've got to—for the kids," Frank mused, and Mr. Westfield wondered why the two were grinning at each other like a pair of Cheshire cats. His mental processes were sometimes a little leisurely, but when he got a point it arrived with the impact of a brickbat.

"If the first one's a girl, I wish you'd call him Arabella after your grandmother, Frank," he said, so seriously that both of them laughed out loud.

THE END.



A Northern Easter

I CANNOT think of Easter in those climes,
That know no winter and its holding snows;
Those listless lands of orange trees and limes,
South where the steady perfumed trade wind blows.
Where gardens flourish with the flaunting rose,
Or with the bougainvillæas' soft pink foam,
Where life seems some backwater of repose,
Alien to ocean floors where cold waves comb.

Give me a windy hill with Spring returning,
And odors stealing from far lilac lanes,
All of the languorous lotus lands I'm spurning,
Lost in the rapture of a warming rain;
Here in this virile Northland where the blood
Thrills to the splendor of the April flood.

Thomas J. Murray.



*The way in
which she literally
jerked about betrayed
her nervousness*

The Woolly Dog

A devilishly clever murder "plant," or a suicide? The Hart case baffles detectives as Semi Dual, seer and astrologist, looks into the occult for an answer

A Semi Dual Story

By J. U. GIESY and JUNIUS B. SMITH

Authors of "The House of Invisible Bondage," "Poor Little Pigeon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GORDON GLACE, who is telling the story, and James Bryce, private investigators, are retained by Smithson, city editor of the *Record*, to look into the apparent suicide of Helen Hart, who ran an advice-to-the-lovelorn column. She had been found in her expensive rooms in the Glenn Arms, dead, with cyanide solution in a partly drained glass by her side, clasping a toy woolly dog in her arms.

Before her was a picture of a boy,

a year or two old, with a similar or identical dog. She had, the doctors said, been a mother. Cyanide powder is found on the dog's wool; the police think she spilled it, in her nervousness, while mixing the solution. She was found by Molly May, cabaret dancer, who had an eight-thirty appointment with her.

Inspector Johnson believed it was suicide—until it is discovered by the hotel detective, Jeppy, that two calls were made from her room about 8 P.M.

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for March 23.

to Hubert Mumm, jeweler and rounder. A telephone number on her scratch pad proves to be that of the débutante Opal Raleigh, who is intimate with Mumm, and who had been seen in the hotel lobby that evening with Lorne, Helen Hart's lawyer. Finger-prints on the telephone stand prove to be those of Miss Raleigh.

The cabaret girl shows that her errand had no connection with the Raleigh matter, but was to get advice from Helen Hart and her lawyer. She has a letter from Miss Hart making the appointment.

Puzzled, the three detectives consult Semi Dual, a mysterious genius, keen, intuitive student of life and human emotions, and a master of the ancient lore of astrology. He is greatly interested, and by astrology determines that Helen Hart did not commit suicide from sorrow or mother-love, but that it was a fiendishly clever murder "plant."

Johnson, Bryce and Glace quiz Miss Raleigh, Mumm and Lorne in turn, and each conceals many details and lies about others. But acting on Semi Dual's reading of the stars, which indicate that Miss Raleigh was friendly toward Miss Hart, they tell her they are sure it was murder, not suicide, and that they know she was in the dead girl's room—which she had previously denied.

Immediately she, accompanied by her father and the lawyer Lorne, who is an old friend, come to the detectives' office, and she tells her whole story. She had received a phone call from Miss Hart, asking her to come to her room between seven thirty and eight; and she felt certain that Miss Hart somehow meant to do her a real service. She came—found her dead—and in terror called her fiancé, Mumm, asking him to hurry down. But in the lobby she ran into Lorne, and had him take her home instead.

Lorne admits lying to them in order to keep Miss Raleigh from being men-

tioned in connection with what was presumably only a suicide. Mumm's actions, of course, could be explained the same way.

The detectives' original suspicion, that Miss Hart might have been blackmailing through information received in confidences, is discarded; she had an independent income from writing, and all who knew her insist she was utterly altruistic, kindly, thinking always of others.

Lorne confirms their belief that the child in the photograph was hers. Her name had really been Hartwell. At the detectives' request, he agrees to open her safety-deposit box with them in the morning.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SAFETY-DEPOSIT BOX.

"YOU think Lorne and Miss Raleigh are in love?" Jim grinned. "Remember she is engaged to Mumm, an' she mentioned that little matter while she was talkin'. I don't doubt Lorne 'd fall for her in a minute. But facts is facts, an' the way it works out she's already fell for some one else.

"Not but what that would explain what's already happened, so far as concerns both him an' Mumm. Lorne's known her a long time, an' Mumm's expectin' her to be his wife. Naturally neither one of them boys would want to see her tangled up in something nasty. So they try to keep her out. It boils down to that. An' that's why. I say things is all washed up an' we're left all damp.

"We're r'arin' to go, but we got no place to start from. An' as for Lorne's knowin' about Hart's kid, she may have told him. Folks sometimes tell their lawyers quite a lot."

"Which is just about what I'm thinkin'," Johnson agreed. "But if we knew what Lorne knows about her, it might give us a place to start from,

an' if we knew what Hart had wanted to tell Opal Raleigh we might find that would help. If you'll think back, you'll notice that's the one thing Miss Raleigh didn't clear up."

"Or couldn't," said Jim. "I ain't more gullible than most, but it's my opinion that kid told the truth."

"Meanin' she didn't know," Johnson grumbled.

"Correct," Bryce agreed. "I was watchin' her all the time, watchin' her close. An' she wasn't lyin' about that. She—"

A staccato buzzing cut him off. I started up. In my private office was a little phone which led down from Dual's quarters in the tower. And it was purring its summons now. I went to answer it at once. And Dual's voice came back to me:

"Any new developments?"

"None," I told him, and went on to give him Opal Raleigh's story.

"So that none of the individuals interviewed to date would appear to be criminally involved," he made comment when I paused.

"No," I said. "We meet Lorne in the morning and examine the contents of the box at the Bankers Trust. He says the photograph in her room was a picture of her son and that the boy is dead."

"He knew that," he accepted the information slowly. "Ask him tomorrow if perhaps he has any definite knowledge of her age. And tell Inspector Johnson that I wish to examine the dog he found her holding. Good night."

I went back and delivered his message. Johnson scowled.

"That dog, huh?" he grumbled. "The thing seems to have got clear under his hide. But maybe he's right, at that. The thing's got to be mixed up in the deal if he's right, of course. Though what good it can do him to see it I can't make out. He already knows that cyanide was spilled all over it. But if he wants to see it, all right.

I'll see he does. Well, I suppose we may as well call it a day."

WE left the office together, and on the street we said good night. I got my car and drove home. In the light of our present knowledge Jim's assertion that everything was "washed up" seemed to me not inept. True, Semi Dual declared that a most foul murder had been done; and Dual, as I knew, was not one to voice such an opinion unless himself convinced that it was correct. He was a man who held that words and even thoughts were things not to be taken lightly—things for which he who spoke or formed them might well be brought to account.

But despite his deliberate declaration, there was as yet no least shred of evidence in our possession which we could offer in support of it. As Bryce had put it, there was no place to "start from" in our search for such supporting evidence. Our investigations to date had led us to nothing—had left us in what amounted to an impasse.

If murder it was, which was the one thing I did not doubt, then whoever was guilty of it had been not only a fiend of deliberate skill in its consummation, but a fiend of cleverness in retiring from the scene of its consummation without, in so far as we had been able to discover, leaving behind him a single tangible trace.

That Opal Raleigh had any connection with the matter beyond what she had said in the presence of Lorne, her father and ourselves, I no longer believed. The girl had impressed me well on that second meeting. She was young—a modern of the moderns, endowed, as I suspected, with something of the fire of the jewel for which she was named.

Her attitude had not been indicative of any guilt. She was just a girl who, finding herself in a startling position, had momentarily lost her head; yet,

learning more of the situation, she had been ready to explain whatever she could, despite her first natural impulse to shield herself.

No stigma could attach to Mumm, who had left a card game at a well-known club, to comply with the request of the woman to whom he was engaged. Nor yet to Lorne, who, meeting an old acquaintance, had acceded to her request and assisted her in escaping from an atmosphere by which she was distressed.

As for Molly May, the lissom dancer, she had gone to the dead woman's room, and within five minutes had fled, at a time well after that woman was scientifically admitted to have died.

On the face of the thing, then, it was one of those "perfect crimes" of which one now and then hears. Temporarily at least I wrote it down as such, stabled my machine, went into the house and to bed.

Nor did I feel any wiser the next morning when I met Jim and Johnson at the Bankers Trust. Lorne joined us in a few moments and led us to the vault. Five minutes later we were inspecting the contents of the box.

Besides the will, there were a few stock certificates and bonds and a folded document which proved to be a guarantee of ownership to a lot, issued by a cemetery association in a town of a neighboring State.

"Know she had this?" Bryce asked after we had identified it for what it was.

"I've never seen it before," Lorne said without the least hesitation. "But I knew she had a lot over there. It's her home town, you know. She was born there, and so was her baby. I've arranged to ship her body. She made provision for all that in her will." He smiled slightly. "She was a rather methodical person in some ways."

"Uhuh." Jim nodded. "An' I reckon I'll just take its description here an' now." He produced a memorandum

book and a pencil and proceeded to jot down the technical designation of the lot.

"Might come in handy," he said as he finished. "In case we want to check up over there. I see it's in the name of Helen Hartwell. That her married name, Lorne?"

"Her maiden name, Mr. Bryce," Lorne replied.

"Meanin' she wasn't married?" Jim suggested.

THERE came a little pause in which the attorney plainly considered his words before he answered:

"Miss Hart really told me very little concerning her personal affairs, beyond what I have already said. At the time I drew her will, however, she did mention the fact that she was born in the city where this document was issued, and that if anything happened to her she wished to be buried beside her child.

"Further than that, I did not seek her confidence. Yet in a way I gathered that she had passed through some serious crisis in her life. As to whether she was married or not, I have no first-hand knowledge. But from what I knew of her myself, I would certainly be inclined to believe that she was."

"And about how old was she?" I asked.

"I can answer that at least," he said and smiled. "At the time I drew her will she gave me the data for use in case it was needed. I pinned it to the will, and"—he lifted the document in question from the papers within the box, unfastened a slip of paper attached to it, and handed it to Bryce—"here it is."

Jim copied it into the memorandum book below the description of the cemetery lot, and gave it back, and Lorne returned it to the box.

"That's all, gentlemen," he said. "Shall I put the box back?"

"Might as well," Johnson decided. "An' thanks for your trouble."

"No clew as yet, I take it?" Lorne inquired as he returned the box to its metal cubicle and snapped the tiny steel door shut.

"Not any," Johnson said shortly. "That's the hell of it. Whoever croaked her was damn clever."

"Then what makes you so sure it really *was* murder?" Lorne inquired.

Johnson eyed him. I thought I detected suspicion in his glance.

"In a way, that's our business," he said then.

Which was about the only thing he could say, under the conditions, as I had to admit. It would hardly have done to have informed the man before him that our assumption was as yet based wholly upon the verdict of the stars.

"So we won't discuss it," Johnson went on. "We been hopin', though, you might know somethin' would help. Somethin' she might have told you."

"But I don't, I'm afraid. Not any more than I've already told you," Lorne said. "Possibly though you can discover something in the town where she was born and raised."

"Maybe," Johnson nodded. "Well, that's all here, I guess."

We left the vault and the bank. Johnson had a car outside. We dropped Lorne at his office and continued in the direction of headquarters.

"An' that bird's darned interested in knowin' what we're aimin' to do, from the line he pulled right at the last," the inspector growled. "But maybe at that we've got a startin' point. We know where she came from and where her kid is buried, an' we got her age for Dual; an' now we'll stop an' get that dog."

"Lorne's damned clever in suggestin' we go to her home town an' investigate. But a lot of clever guys have slipped. We'll get that dog an' go up an' see what Dual thinks about it. Meanwhile Mr. Lorne can think we're a bunch of dubs if he likes. The more

he plays with that notion, the more likely he is to trip. Here we are. Wait."

The car stopped; he got out and entered the station, to return in a few minutes with a paper-wrapped parcel in his hand. Climbing into the car again, he gave the Urania as our destination and sank down holding his bundle on his knees.

FIVE minutes brought us to our destination. Johnson dismissed the car and we went in and caught a cage. And so at length we once more reached the roof, flooded by a brilliant sunlight, and went up the central path of Semi's garden toward the glinting white cube of the tower about which white and gray doves fluttered as the mellow peal of the chimes rang out.

As before, Henri met us in answer to their warning of our approach, and bowed us welcome. Beyond him the door of the inner room stood wide. On the other side Semi Dual was waiting. But a different Semi from him we had left the previous night.

His white-and-purple robes had vanished, and he sat before us much as a modern might sit before visitors to his office, clad in a modishly cut gray suit, wearing a gray shirt with attached collar, and a tie that blended into the meticulous harmony of his attire.

"Good morning, messengers of the stars," he said, and smiled. "What are the latest items in the account?"

"Nothin' so very important," Johnson told him. "We've went where you said an' done what you advised. An' I've brought you that dog." He laid his parcel on the desk. "But if you're goin' somewhere—"

"Oh, no." Dual shook his head. "I merely have an appointment for this afternoon, and you see me prepared. Tell me what you have accomplished."

We did so, briefly, and gave him the data concerning Helen Hart's age.

"Some one should go to this woman's home city," he said as he made a note of the last. "What may be

learned at the place of her birth may possibly shed some light upon her death. In the scheme of the Cosmos nothing happens by chance.

"Hence in the present instance, wherein we appear to possess no definite line of procedure in our search for evidence against her slayer, we may find an indication of direction in her quite natural desire to rest beside her child.

"Little things, little things. It is of them the complex of life is made up, even as the complex of our bodies is the sum of a myriad of microscopic cells. So much then we have gained, and I would suggest that we let our friend Glace handle this end of the affair."

"I'll go over there this evening," I agreed. "I think there's a train. But I'll look it up."

"And in the meantime I shall use the data concerning her birth as a key to unlock the astral record of her life," he said. "And attend to any other details I may consider worth while."

"If one of them details should be to examine that dog," Johnson cautioned, "don't forget the thing's loaded with cyanide."

"That is a detail which I shall keep constantly in mind, my friend," Semi told him and smiled. "Come to me again when Gordon returns from his trip. And in the meantime contain yourself in what faith you may and the knowledge that despite any outward seeming, the Wheel of the Cosmos—which men call the mills of the gods—is never still. So then, for the present, that is all."

CHAPTER XIII.

BLIND ALLEY.

BRYCE and I left Johnson on the seventh floor. He went over to the station and we walked down the corridor to our office. We had given it little attention the past two days and

it seemed advisable to go into conference over any matters demanding attention since I was now slated to absent myself again that afternoon.

Danny Quinn, our red-headed record clerk, whom Jim facetiously called the "young sleuth," accosted us, however, the moment we were inside the door:

"And it's about time you two got back. If you hadn't come pretty soon you'd have missed one of the swellest tricks you've lamped in a blue moon. She come in about an hour ago and as I didn't know when you'd show and wanted to keep my mind on business, I shut her up in Mr. Glace's private room."

He was an irrepressible youth, was Danny, and prone to say what he pleased. But he was absolutely loyal to our interests and as we both knew he worshiped Jim. Wherefore we generally ignored his surface lack of respect.

"Assuming that you are speaking of a lady," I therefore said, "do you happen to know who she is?"

"Do I? I'll say I do. The lad's clever." Danny grinned. "She's a peacherino, the cat's pyjamas an' the kitten's cuffs. She's a baby doll an' a red hot mamma, wearin' five-dollar hose, twenty-dollar shoes, two yards of silk in the shape of a dress, a *brassière*, an' about thirty dollars' worth of straw for a hat. She uses brunette powder, rose rouge, and a kiss-proof lipstick. Otherwise she's ol' Jake Raleigh's daughter, Opal. An' oh, yes. Besides the things I mentioned, she's wearin' a sort of worried look."

I glanced at Bryce. That Miss Raleigh should have elected to call again at our office was, to say the least, a surprise. And to judge by Jim's expression, he took the same view of her presence.

"Come along," I said and crossed to the door of my private room with him at my heels.

Opal Raleigh turned quickly as we entered. She had been standing at a

window, looking out. She was nervous. The way in which she literally jerked about betrayed it and there was a tense expression about her mouth.

"I suppose you must think I'm crazy," she began speaking without any preliminary greeting. "But I'm not. Only, there's something I didn't tell you last night. I—well, I couldn't very well before Mr. Lorne and—dad. So I thought—that is, I came up this morning—"

"Sit down, Miss Raleigh," I said. "We appreciate your coming. Because, as a matter of fact, there is something very peculiar about this whole matter, and we shall certainly welcome any help you may give."

"Then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed," she returned as she sank into a chair. "Only, I wanted—I felt that I ought to tell you everything."

"You see, Dick Lorne never saw me the other night till I called to him. He was charging right past. I'd just come down from—that room, and was waiting for Mr. Mumm. Then I saw Dick. I spoke to him and he came over, and I asked him where he was going so fast. He said he had an engagement with Miss Hart. And then I guess I really did lose my head. Because I—well, I thought that if I let him go up there, and find her, he'd give the alarm. You see, he's that sort. He'd have just given the alarm and—they might have thought he had something to do with it. Or I thought they might. And I—I felt I couldn't let him run into anything like that. So I told him I wasn't well and asked him to call a cab. I meant to take him with me, of course. I—I'd have acted a lot sicker than I did if he hadn't offered to go with me. I meant to get him away from there, you see."

"**W**HY?" said Bryce.

"Why—" Opal Raleigh gave him a glance and dropped her eyes. Under the make-up Danny had mentioned, a deeper, more natural

color suddenly suffused her face. I saw her lids flicker, saw her lips set. "Why, because I've known Dick for a long time. I—I didn't want him to go up there and get mixed up in that—"

"You like him," Jim suggested. "Don't you? You like him a lot."

"I—why, yes!" Opal Raleigh stammered. "But I guess maybe I didn't know it, not really, till that night. Or at least, I didn't know how much. Because I just simply couldn't let him go up and find her sitting there with—that dog."

"I think we understand, Miss Raleigh," I said and smiled. Human nature changes little with the years. And despite her modishly scanty dress, despite her powder and rouge and tinted lips, the girl, as she sat there, was just—woman.

And despite the fact that she was Hubert Mumm's promised wife, it was Dick Lorne she loved.

She nodded. "You ought to," she said. "You don't look stupid. But I have been, I'm afraid. Only you see, Hubey Mumm is dad's friend, and he's everything Dick isn't. Dick's had an awfully hard time. He's made himself, fought his way up. Oh, I don't know why I'm talking to you like this. I shouldn't, of course. But when I saw him in what I felt was—danger, I simply—"

She suddenly caught her breath, broke off.

"You knew that you loved him," I finished the sentence for her. "And, as with any other woman, your first impulse was to save the one you loved, from danger."

"You're pretty clever, aren't you, Mr. Glace?" She gave me her eyes as she spoke. There was an indefinable light deep within them, a wistful little smile upon her mouth.

"We're just human, all three of us, Miss Opal," Jim said before I could answer. "An' it's awful nice to be human. About the only time a guy don't

get along about as well as he can is when he tries to be something else."

"Why, you—you darling!" Opal Raleigh cried. "You dear, ducky darling. I'll never be afraid of you again, after that."

"Nope," Jim grinned. He appeared pleased. "An' I don't want you to, I reckon. Though I'll admit I'm a mite jealous of Lorne. Referrin' to avocados—you ain't got the least notion what it was Miss Hart wanted to see you about?"

"No." Opal Raleigh shook her head. "I wish I had. But all she would say was that it was something of vital importance to me. And I've tried and tried to think of anything it could be. But I can't. I'd like to help you. I really would. She was so pretty; I can't forget her. I'm sure we'd have been friends, if she had—lived."

Venus was friendly. Dual's assertion to that effect flashed through my mind.

And this girl was Venus. I no longer doubted the sincerity of her words, despite Jim's grumbled comment after she had gone.

"An' that's washed up, too, unless she an' Lorne talked it over an' framed up this visit of hers. She's in love with him all right, an' she's, well, vital. I reckon she'd do about anything he asked."

That was a point to be considered, and I carefully weighed it before I answered:

"It's possible, of course, old man, but according to Dual, Venus is decidedly more friendly to the Moon than she is to Saturn and Mars."

"Huh?" He grunted and nodded. "Well, yes, he did say that. An' Opal's Venus. It's all of a pattern. I reckon we're just gropin' in the dark. But use your head, son, when you get over there where you're goin'. That croaker was clever. But he knew she'd had a kid. Some way this thing's mixed

up with her past life. An' maybe you'll spot it if you dig."

"IT'S a chance at least, Jim," I agreed and reached for a telephone to inquire the leaving time of the train I intended to take.

I spent the afternoon in the office doing some routine work. A little after four I said good-by to Bryce and punched the down button for a cage. It stopped on the light, and I stepped inside and looked straight into a remembered face.

It was that of a slender blond girl in a trig little walking suit. And as our eyes met, I saw a mutual recognition in hers.

Too, I saw that the blue of them was nearly blotted out by widened pupils, marked a subtle quality in her expression I could only describe as rapt.

Indeed, for just a moment the thought came to me that so might one look if walking in one's sleep. The quality of her whole bearing was like that.

And then it altered. Her lips parted and she nodded.

"How do you do, Mr. Glace," she said.

"Good afternoon, Miss May," I replied.

For it was the little adagio dancer from the Bohemian Club whom I faced in the down-dropping cage.

She had been in it before I entered, which meant that she had come from one of the upper floors. And suddenly I saw that the fingers of one small hand held what appeared to be a letter—at least an envelope torn open across one end, the sight inspired a thought that left me tense in every nerve.

If it should be the letter Johnson had obtained from her and delivered to Semi Dual, the letter from Helen Hart to this very girl before me, making an appointment with her for the last tragic evening of her life—if it should be that letter, then Dual himself must have

given it to her. She had been with him, in his presence; why?

CHAPTER XIV.

HELEN HARTWELL'S PAST.

BUT if I was surprised at my meeting Molly May, another surprise awaited me at my destination, and one which made my errand to Helen Hart's native city a far simpler undertaking than I had anticipated.

Making my way to the undertaking parlor to which her body had been shipped, I found the gilt letters above its doors:

MICHAEL MCGONIGLE, MORTICIAN

A few moments later I was facing a man past middle age, with the long upper lip of the Celt, coarse graying dark hair and a pair of spectacled blue eyes.

I introduced myself and explained my presence.

"And 'tis of little Helen Hartwell you're inquiring, Mr. Glace?" he said when I paused. "Well, she is here. Yesterday they sent her to me and to-day I lay her in the grave. Poor girl. I find it hard to believe she should have taken such a step. True, she'd had a none too happy life. But—to have ended it herself! You see, Jim Hartwell an' I were friends. I've known her practically all her life. Many's the time I've ridden her on my knee as a child, an' I buried her baby when it died."

Here was more than I had hoped for, more than there had been any reason for me to hope for. Not only was I in touch with one who could probably give me most of the information I wanted, but one whose aid would be invoked by a friendly interest. I sought to appeal to that interest at once.

"She didn't take her own life, Mr. McGonigle," I said.

"Eh? What's that? You can't mean it was murder! D'ye mean that?"

"We think so, Mr. McGonigle," I replied.

"But how? Who?" he stammered. He seemed startled, shaken by my words.

"We don't know as yet, of course," I told him. "My main reason in coming to you this morning was the hope that you might know something about her—something, that is, which might give us a little help."

"Why, God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "I know all about her, until she left here, Mr. Glace. An' I'll tell you anything I can, to help bring whoever it was that harmed her to his just deserts."

"That's what we want," I accepted. "Because you see, we feel that her former life may have held something that would have a bearing on her death. For instance, you say she had a child."

"Herbert Benedict, Jr.," McGonigle said, nodding. "Didn't I have the tombstone put up over his little body just as she asked?"

"Herbert Benedict?" I repeated. "She was married then?"

"And you'd ask that?" He gave me an instinctively reproachful glance. "Did you think she was a careless trollop? She was not. Nor was she married, either. Not but she thought she was."

"Tell me about her," I urged.

"I will that," McGonigle agreed. "Have you seen her, Mr. Glace?"

"No," I said and shook my head.

"Come and I'll show you," he invited, half turning toward the door as though to guide me out.

I DID not refuse. Here was the thing I had come for within my grasp inside an hour. And besides I was curious, I confess. Opal Raleigh, Molly May and even Johnson, the police inspector, had commented on the beauty of Helen Hart. So I followed into a room where a casket stood on trestles.

Beside it McGonigle paused and I ranged myself at his side. And then I

knew that what I had heard had been well justified.

She lay there, as though asleep. One half expected to see her lift the lids as a sleeper will when roused. And the semblance of sleep had been assured by the modern undertaker's art. Pink and cream was her complexion, pink were the lips of her quiet mouth. And her hair, trimmed in the mode of the day, was like spun gold against the white pillow beneath her well-formed head. I felt something grip my throat then, became aware that the man beside me was speaking:

"You'd not think any one would wish to hurt one like her, would you? But there's plenty of devils on earth. An' Herbert Benedict was one of them, Mr. Glace. 'Twas him she thought she married, the dirty bigamist!"

"You mean he actually married her?" I said.

"And how could he, with one wife already living and no divorce?" McGonigle asked. "But there was a ceremony, if that's what you mean. Helen thought she was a wife. There was nothing against her. And I think she was fairly happy durin' the two years before his legal wife showed up. Come on back and I'll tell you the whole story."

We returned to his office and he redeemed his promise:

"He was a handsome blackguard, with a way about him, as I'll not deny: a traveling man for a fur-importing house. And as I say, they seemed to be happy. And none suspected what was coming then. Because, when he was around her, he treated her like a queen. And so everything seemed to be as it should be till the baby died—of pneumonia.

"Then it seemed like everything happened at once. The baby died, and Benedict's wife showed up. She'd trailed him, just how I don't know. But she came here and went to the house. And it was then Helen learned she was no wife and that the man she

had thought was her husband had naught but black deceit in his heart and was no man at all in his wickedness, but a weak-kneed coward to boot. Because the other woman threatened him with the penalty of his act, spoke of having the law upon him, as she could, unless he returned to her—"

"Returned to her?" I echoed. The suggestion surprised me. "You mean she actually wanted him to come back to her?"

"'Twas so I have always understood," McGonigle nodded. "'Tis hard at times to understand a woman. In her shoes, had he served me the trick he had served her once, I'd not have given him the opportunity to repeat. But that is the way I had the story. And so what does Benedict do but write Helen a note sayin' he was goin' away to save himself. After which he and the woman who claimed him disappeared."

"They went away together?" I said.

"We've always thought so," he responded, nodding. "At least they disappeared at the same time and never have been heard of since."

"And afterward?" I prompted.

"Afterward?" he repeated and shook his head. "Ah, yes, afterward, of course. 'Twas a heavy blow to Helen. But she held her head high. She had her pride and she carried on. There had been no open scandal, you understand, and she had her friends. Her father was still alive although her mother was not. So she went back to Jim's house and kept it for him and she found employment. Joe Bludsel—you ought to meet Joe; he was editor of the *Clarion* and Jim's friend—he took her in. She ran a sort of information column. She'd stood high in her grades at school and she'd been a great reader and she answered all sorts of questions about all sorts of things. Her column was a success. She kept it going until after her father died, and then it just seemed as though she wanted to get off away by herself. So she quit

with Joe and came over to your city."

"And she never heard of Benedict after he left her?" I asked.

"Not that I know of," he returned. "She may have, of course. You see, most of what I've told you I had from Jim. Helen wasn't a hand to talk about her troubles. She was the sort that suffers in silence. Something Spartan about her if you understand."

I NODDED. Recalling Lorne's statement in the bank that his client had told him little beyond certain salient facts, but that he felt there had been some crisis in her former life, I found full support for his words in the story just heard. It was a story of crisis indeed, of mental travail.

"I do. And I thank you, Mr. McGonigle," I said. "She married Benedict here?"

"Oh, yes. It was a beautiful wedding," he replied. "I attended it myself."

"Then there should be a record at your courthouse," I went on. "I'd like to see it. And I wish you would direct me to a reliable photographer, if you will." For suddenly it had come to me that I would like a photostatic reproduction of the marriage license.

"A photographer?" McGonigle said, frowning in apparent puzzlement. "And why a photographer, Mr. Glace?"

I explained my purpose, and he nodded. "D'ye mean you fancy there may be some connection between that man and her death?" he inquired.

"Hardly," I said and smiled. To me the mere suggestion seemed far-fetched enough to be a trifle weird. "I never even heard of the man before to-day. What I am going to do is merely provide against any possible use to which such a reproduction of the signatures on the license might be put."

Even to myself that sounded vague. And apparently McGonigle agreed. The momentary light of quickened in-

terest which had lighted his features vanished. But he directed me to the courthouse and named a photographer upon whom I might call for the service I wished.

"You'll be at the funeral," he suggested as I thanked him again and rose. "It's at two o'clock."

"Why—" I began and paused. It had been my first intent to decline the invitation. But something in the man's bearing changed it. "If you wish," I replied instead.

"I would," he accepted nodding. "You see, I've known her so long. And her folks are dead. There won't be many—just maybe you an' Joe Bludsel and me, to show her that last respect."

"I'll be there and I'll send flowers," I promised.

And that promise I kept. So that at two o'clock with my other business completed I sat in the undertaker's chapel. And at the close of the services I entered the single car which followed the hearse to the grave.

To the result that I stood while the quiet earth took the body of a woman who had died with a toy dog in her arms, into its mothering embrace. And I was glad that I did so. For besides the flowers which I suspected McGonigle and Bludsel had bought for the child of an old friend, and my own, there were very few indeed. They made a little blanket of color on the dun soil, beside which there was a tiny headstone at the end of a tiny grassy mound.

"Herbert Benedict, Jr., Aet. 1 yr, 9 mo, 21 days," I read the lettering upon it, and computing the difference between dates of birth and death, decided that Helen Hartwell's son would have been a little more than eight years of age, had he survived.

"That was her son," Bludsel, whom I had met in the car that brought us to the cemetery, spoke beside me. "Mike says he told you her story. She was a wonderful girl, with a wonderful poise,

a wonderful character, a splendid intelligence. I want to wish you luck in seeking to bring her destroyer to justice, Mr. Glace. It's shocking to think of her as a victim of murder, but I'd rather think of her so than as a victim of her own hand."

That night, as I rode back home, I recalled the words he had spoken beside the graves of Helen Hartwell and her child: "A wonderful girl with a wonderful poise, a wonderful character, a splendid intelligence." Almost they took on the semblance of an epitaph.

CHAPTER XV.

SEMI DUAL PREPARES TO STRIKE.

TOO, as the train pounded onward, I decided that the next day I wanted to see Attorney Lorne.

Naturally in her sudden death she must have left certain things of a personal nature in her quarters. And of those things, Lorne, as her attorney, might well have taken charge.

Consequently I took the matter up with Jim the minute I reached the office next morning.

And he grinned. "You're a bright lad," he declared. "I've always said so, m'son. But this time Jeppy put somethin' over on all of us, I reckon."

"How come?" I demanded. "Do you mean he's searched her things?"

"Well, he did and he didn't," Jim informed me. "But he found the only thing that seems to matter, an' he's all swelled up like the mumps. It seems he got it into his bean that he'd take another look-see through her rooms. So he does. An' he finds a note that would certainly back up the assumption that there'd been a man in Miss Hart's life up to the time it was written, but that he'd run out on her after that."

"Signed Benedict?" I very nearly shouted, my every nerve gone tense with this news of the apparent discov-

ery of the very bit of writing McGonigle had mentioned.

"Benedict?" Jim eyed me in seeming surprise at my manner and tone. "Naw. It was signed 'Herbert.' Where's this Benedict come in?"

I grinned myself then. I was no longer in doubt. I was certain. Jeppy had found the farewell note. Benedict's given name had been Herbert. "It comes in just where it should," I said and explained to Jim who nodded in comprehension at the end.

"Benedict, eh?" he said. "Well, seein' as how marriage would seem to have been gettin' to be a habit with that bozo, Benedict wouldn't appear to have been such a misfit name."

As I recall it now, I actually stared. His remark had been no more than a play on words, of course—a reference to the use of the term "benedict" as applying to a married man. Yet as he spoke, some vague premonition of a deeper, more occult meaning gripped and held me with its hint of a purpose, a deliberate intent, of perhaps a thought-out motive of deception, which it appeared in the very next breath my partner had not missed.

"Maybe that bird had a sense of humor of a sort," he went on. "An' havin' one woman on his hands already, he picked on that moniker when he decided to grab another, as we gathered from his note he'd done."

"WHAT did the note say?" I questioned. "Did it mention time or place or names?"

"I can't quote the thing exactly," Jim frowned. "But the main idea appeared to be that some dame to whom he was already married, havin' run in on him an' Helen, he was duckin' out with her to save his skin."

"With her?" I queried sharply. "You're sure of that, Jim?"

"Yes, I'm sure," he assured me. "I know the thing struck me as a blamed odd deal. But I guess women are funny. Seems like the first one must 'a'

wanted him bad enough to chase him in spite of what he'd done. Anyway, I remember that much of the thing verbatim. 'So I'm going away with Claire' was the way this lad Herbert expressed their intention of leaving town. That would look like they'd teamed up again."

"Yes, rather," I agreed. "And did Jeppy find anything else?"

"Nope. An' neither did we." Jim shook his head and chewed on his cigar. "But if you've got a photograph of the marriage license it might be interestin' to match up the signature on it with the writin' in the note Jeppy found."

"Of course," I said. "Where did Jeppy find it?"

"Darned near in plain sight." Bryce grinned again. "You know that little table beside which she was sittin' when Johnson saw her first? Well, there was some books between bronze ends on one end of it. An' this note was inside the cover of one of them books. Jep picked it up, he says, an' the note fell into his hands. Johnson gave it to me and I took it up and told Semi how Jeppy had found it."

"And what did he say?" I asked.

"Well, he practically said 'thanks,' " he told me in a tone that was well-nigh bored. "Beyond that, however, if he had any sort of an opinion he kept it to himself. And he kept Herbert's note."

"Which is more than he did with the one Miss Hart wrote to Molly May, I imagine," I remarked.

"Molly May? What about her?" Jim's boredom vanished on the instant. He gave me a narrow-lidded glance.

I described my meeting with the little cabaret dancer in the cage, the afternoon I had left on the errand from which I was just returned.

"Funny," Bryce said. "Here's something else for the book. Now that you mention that kid, I remember that while we were going through Hart's place yesterday, Lorne said she'd been to see him about that

brother of hers. An' his story matched the one she told us that night at the dump where she works. But you'll remember she didn't know the name of the lawyer she was to meet with Miss Hart, then. On the other hand, we told Dual what she said about her brother along with all the rest. An' Dual knew Lorne was the Hart girl's attorney, of course. You don't suppose he sent for her an'—"

"Why should he have done that?" I cut him off. "We mentioned Lorne's name to her at the time, and she's not a nit-wit. She wouldn't have needed Semi's intervention to have got in touch with Lorne."

"Nope. She wouldn't," Jim admitted. "An' of course we ain't sure she'd been with Dual at all. Are you going to tell him what you've accomplished or not?"

"I am," I said. "How'd Lorne take Jeppy's finding that note?"

"How'd he take it?" Jim shrugged. "How could he take it? That baby may think a lot, but he don't say much. He asked where you were, and I told him just to see what he'd say. An' what he did say was that if you'd waited twenty-four hours, Jeppy's prowlin' that note would have saved you a trip. Which in the light of present information was dead right, except that if you had'n't gone, we wouldn't know that Herbert's hind name was Benedict. Well, come along if you're goin' up to the roof."

I ROSE, and we left the office. Five minutes later we were approaching the white cube of the tower. It was eleven o'clock by the shadow of a tiny sundial beside the central path:

Eternal justice,
Eternal right
Lie in the hands of God,
From Whom comes light.

The words were carven in Arabic symbols about the rim of the dial, as Dual had told us in the past.

"And I wish we could see a little light in this business," Jim made comment as we passed it.

I nodded. I felt the same way myself. The garden was all golden light, beneath the blue of a cloudless sky. But we walked in mental darkness as Henri met us and waved us to the farther room, where Semi Dual sat.

He smiled on us as we entered. He was placid, undisturbed, as always perfectly poised. The calm of the little world in which he dwelt seemed mirrored in his face and the steady glance of his gray eyes. Always those eyes of his steadied me, gave me renewed confidence. Always they seemed so undismayed, so quietly assured.

And assurance was in his voice as he spoke. "Greeting to you, my friends, who are feet for me and ears and eyes. Speak to me quickly those things which demand recounting, if perchance they may compass details of importance which may be turned to our use. For I have looked upon the Records of the Past since last we spoke together, and I have read therein things which to-day demand material proof."

"From the astrological figure of Helen Hartwell?" I asked.

"And from the life chart of Opal Raleigh." He inclined his head.

"But—" Bryce began.

And Semi Dual smiled. "The keeping of vital statistics is an admirable thing, my friend. There is a record of her birth among them," he said. "Now, Gordon, your report."

I gave it to him. Suddenly I was keyed to action by the subtle urge of his voice and words. A premonition of impending things laid hold upon me there in that room, in the corner of which his great clock ticked. As I spoke, I heard it dimly. Its beat was like the beating of a pulse; like the footfalls of unseen passing feet. It was like the throb of the Heart of the World.

So I told him all, as briefly, as concisely as I could without omitting any

single detail. And at the last I gave him the photostatic reproduction of the signatures on the marriage license of Helen Hartwell and Herbert Benedict.

He took it, bent his glance upon it and then, once more he smiled. And suddenly there was a mystic something in his expression, and in his words, as though in full realization he was enunciating a mighty truth:

"Nothing is ever lost from the Karmic Record," he intoned in the bell-like voice he at times employed. "All, all is set down on the Infinite Scrolls. Thereon a man writes in his passing his motives and his deeds. And thereon they stand afterward against all Eternity as that man's account. Verily, verily is it written that no man lives to himself alone. And how may he, when the sum of mankind is no more than the Body of the Cosmos, and the Cosmos the Body of God. Woe, woe to him who forgets it. Even now Neptune helps to that time when, in the fullness of the measure of his deeds, the guilty shall be destroyed."

"You mean that you've an idea, a suspicion?" Bryce half stammered a question as Semi paused.

And for a long, long moment, as it seemed to me, sitting and waiting for his answer, Dual made no response.

"PEACE," he said at last. "Since last you were here the Wheel on which all Life is bound, has moved. Whereby, the veil of cold deceit in which this one has wrapped himself has been a little rent, to the end that, even if faintly, his lineaments begin to stand dimly forth. Yet the time is not yet; the measure is not filled. Wherefore, I refrain from so definite a statement as your words suggest, until it lies within my power to support my words with more concrete evidence."

"Which bein' translated," Bryce declared in a tone of satisfaction, "boils down to 'Yes.' This ain't the first time I've heard you talk like that, just

about the time you were getting ready to strike. An' it's all jake by me. There's a certain satisfaction in feelin' that there's somebody in this business who ain't quite as blind as a bat. Personally I'm in the latter condition. But then that's all right. I ain't runnin' the show. I'm just one of the bookkeepers tryin' to keep tabs on some of the sub-totals this here now—Cosmic Addin' Machine—shows. The main trouble with that is that while all I know is English, most of 'em appear to be written in Greek." He grinned and stood up.

I followed suit. "Anything else?" I asked.

"For the present, no," Dual replied. "I am expecting Neptune within the hour. Go, then, my friends. I shall call you to me should the need arise."

I nodded, and we left him. He was expecting some one. So much was clear as we crossed the outer room to gain the garden. He was expecting some one whose coming had a bearing on the matter which held our common interest. And the thought was confirmed even before we reached the rectangle of the open door, beyond which the light of noontide showed.

The chimes rang out above our heads as we emerged. A slender figure was coming toward us from the bronze-and-marble stair-head, along the central path. It was a graceful figure, filled as it appeared with a resilient life. It appeared to float to its meeting with us as much as walk. It was Molly May, the little dancer, with the sunlight all around her in a golden flood.

Beside me Jim uttered a startled exclamation. Molly May saw us and paused, marking our approach with what seemed to me a light of faint amusement in her wise young eyes.

"Howdy, Mr. Glace. Howdy, Mr. Bryce. Looks like you two dicks knew the Master, as that Frenchy of his calls him, too," she smiled.

"For years, Miss May," I returned

and lifted my hat. "He is waiting for you."

"I know. See you some more," she nodded and went on up the path.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISING DEVELOPMENT.

"NEPTUNE, by golly!" Bryce broke into comment as we reached the head of the stairs. "Neptune or his daughter. But why? What manner of help does he expect to get from that cabaret chick?"

For a moment I did not answer.

"As a matter of fact, Jim," I decided, "I think it quite likely that he's already gained that help. It's my opinion that Molly May was simply going up there, the same as ourselves, to report."

"Well, dog my cats!" he grumbled. "I guess your idea is that he's been usin' her as a sort of scout. An' I wouldn't wonder if you'd hit it. She certainly looked like she was dyin' to give us the laugh."

"And that could only mean she knew something she knew we'd give a leg to know," I nodded.

We continued the discussion at lunch. Bryce finally summed up:

"If it wasn't for what Semi's said an' the way he's actin', I'd be about ready to admit we were makin' a whale of a fuss over nothin'. You can't blame Johnson for callin' it suicide at first. It looks more like it than anything else."

"Which it was meant to do," I rejoined. "That much, I think, is clear."

"It is," he assented, nodding. "It's the only thing that is. As a murder, the thing's a work of art, damned clever. An' one of the cleverest things about it, if we ever learn it, is how in time that girl was ever induced to drink that cyanide. She certainly wouldn't have just sat down an' done it after seein' it spilled all over that dog. Otherwise you might think it had been

slipped to her without her knowin'. It don't taste much an' it acts darned quick."

"Possibly," I suggested, "it was spilled on the dog afterward."

"Eh?" He gave me a quick glance. "To throw dust, you mean? Huh! I'm gettin' funny, ain't I? 'Throwin' dust' ain't so bad. You mean to make it look like she'd mixed the stuff herself?"

"Exactly," I replied.

"Let's get back to the office," Jim said at last.

Before the door of a fashionable lunching place, a few doors from the less pretentious establishment we were leaving, a rakish roadster drew up. From it a woman and a man descended, the former dark and slender, the latter heavy-set. They were Hubert Mumm and Opal Raleigh.

As we approached, the girl turned her head and saw us, nodded and smiled and spoke to her companion. He nodded and lifted his hat.

"Venus," Bryce mumbled beside me. "An' we left Neptune on the roof. Danged if we ain't seein' stars to-day, even if we ain't seein' anything else."

There was a disgruntled intonation to his words that hinted of a mental dissatisfaction akin to my own. And there was a scowl of dissatisfaction on his face as he went on:

"Another thing I can't see is why that girl's goin' to marry Mumm, when she as good as made a trip to our office the other day to tell us she was overboard about Lorne, an' that the reason she run out on Mumm that night at the Glenn Arms was that she wanted to keep her boy-friend lawyer from goin' up to the Hart girl's room."

CONSIDERING Opal Raleigh's explanation of her visit to our office, his comment was not without point. As I sat in my private office, confronted by a mass of correspondence, the question refused to be ignored.

Why, I asked myself, should a girl of wealth and social position such as Opal Raleigh enjoyed, deliberately link her future with one man, when, as she had confessed in my hearing, she was in love with another and one she had known for so long? But perhaps that was it. I recalled her words as she had sat in this very room.

Perhaps she had not known. Perhaps it had required the threat of a possible danger to him to make her realize the depth of her feelings toward Lorne. If so, then the thing was simple enough. Familiarity was said to breed contempt. Might it not also breed a commonplaceness engendered by frequent contact, long association? I thought it might.

Certainly she had not looked happy just now, as she went to lunch with Mumm. And I wondered if her bearing might not have been entirely different had the man beside her been Lorne. Some way I thought so; and somehow I hoped that she might have realized her position in time.

I was rather taken with Jake Raleigh's daughter. There was a certain straightforwardness about her—such as had brought her back to our office the second time. I smiled, and decided that she was probably of a type to solve for herself the problem by which she was confronted. I turned my attention again to the pile of neglected papers on my desk.

It was between three and four o'clock when Danny Quinn came in and laid Hubert Mumm's card on my desk.

I took it up, glanced at it, and handed it to Bryce; saw a surprise equal to my own awake in his face.

"Mumm, huh?" he grunted. "Now what do you reckon that stone peddler wants?"

"From the looks of things, he's waiting an opportunity to tell us," I suggested, and turned to Danny. "Show Mr. Mumm in," I said.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Framed Fifty

Fifty dollars was the face value of that bill framed over the bar—but it was worth more to sentimental old Mike O'Donnell than to any one else

By KARL DECKER

OVER the center of O'Donnell's bar hung a fifty dollar bill ornately framed in mahogany and gilt.

It was to Mike O'Donnell what the gin-bottle-eyed god N'buango is to the tribal chief of the Mampasis. It was his fetish and his faith.

An old custom this, of framing the first bill taken over the bar, a custom fallen into decay in the United States since the coming in of the Volstead law.

To O'Donnell, however, the Volstead law now meant no more than a dry-sweeping ordinance to an Eskimo. O'Donnell had left the Volstead law far behind him.

When that wrecker of barkeepers' happiness had fallen upon his native land O'Donnell migrated. Packing up everything he had—bar, bottles, chromos of attractive ladies in attractive if unconventional poses, and the framed fifty dollar bill—Mike O'Donnell had taken ship to Havana. There he set up his establishment line for line, bottle for bottle, keg for keg, as it had been when it was "Mike's Place" on Broadway. And squarely over the center of the bar was placed his talisman, the framed fifty-dollar bill. O'Donnell would have left everything behind rather than that.

It was part of him, of his prosperity.

Years might come and years might go, but O'Donnell would never forget that first night of freedom and independence. He had served his time as an apprentice. He had mixed 'em and shaken 'em and poured 'em straight for years, in the days before

the cash register had cast its blight over the bartending fraternity. Making his own change, trusted by his boss, he had played fair with that boss. He had never at any time held out more than twenty per cent, but this, thriftily hoarded, had set him up in business.

Rare good fortune was his when it fell to his lot to locate on a Broadway corner in the Thirties, when that section was the very heart and center of New York and the Tenderloin police station the busiest in the world.

Now; from the vantage point of his safeguarded retreat in la Calle Dragones in Havana he grew to look back upon those early days with something of dislike and displeasure. Nostalgia never affected him. He was glad to be in Havana.

During the long, drowsy summer months he did better than he had ever done in the United States. A steady trade in the American colony and scores of tourists drifting in day by day kept his bank account sturdy and kept him out of the red. He was growing older, but he handled the trade himself. To put in an assistant would mean putting in a cash register, and O'Donnell was decided and firm in his refusal to permit the ghoulish chimes of Dayton to ring out across his bar.

In winter he flourished like a palm tree in a flooded oasis.

The élite of his own country flocked in upon him. Ladies whose names he knew from the society columns as well as he had known the politicians of his own ward in New York, came fluttering gayly into his bar, calling it "quaintly homelike," perched on stools.

they ate frankfurters and sauerkraut and chile con carne as though to Havana bred. Men famous and widely heralded by the press called him by his first name and seemed pleased at his recognition of them.

It was paradise to O'Donnell. New York had never been like this.

AND always after one of his pleasanter evenings, before drawing the heavy steel blinds in front of his door and starting off for his home in Jesus del Monte, O'Donnell looked for a moment upon the framed fifty-dollar bill as though burning incense before it.

He could never forget the night it came to him, back on Broadway.

His was not a crowded opening. In the street outside, a sweeping, whistling wind drove the massed snowflakes in a white cloud across his windows. On the pavement, where it drifted, there were white hills four feet deep.

He had set his opening for six o'clock in the evening, and at that black hour only a scant half dozen of his friends appeared.

But among them was "Red" Walker, smiling, debonair, sheltered in one of the huge tan overcoats popular among the wise ones of Broadway in those days. Young Mr. Walker exuded prosperity.

"The first bill goes into the frame?" queried Red.

"Sure, sir," said O'Donnell. "The first bill over this bar will hang over this bar as long as I live."

"Then frame that," said Red, tossing a fifty-dollar bill on the counter.

It was opposed to all the ethics and conventions of bar openings. One is supposed to buy the first drink with a one-dollar bill. It is a purely economic proposition, that takes only a small amount out of circulation and cripples the finances of the establishment not at all. Every one present realized Red had made a faux pas.

But the effect upon O'Donnell was

as though he had stepped upon a high tension wire. The economics of the situation affected him not at all. Whatever of thrift and canny calculation there might have been in his blood took a vacation. He flushed with pride—a pride that sent the blood dashing through his body as though under fifty pounds pressure. He lifted the bill proudly and tenderly.

"It 'll always hang over my head, Mr. Walker," he said.

They might have a fifty-dollar bill framed in Delmonico's, he thought, although he had never been in the place; or that newly opened castle of magnificence on Thirty-Third Street, the Astoria, might be able to show some such trophy; but he alone of all the humbler sort in his profession could display such an evidence of high-class trade. He was smitten with a quality of pride that almost became arrogance.

"You'll always keep it in the frame?" asked Red.

"As long as I live," said O'Donnell almost devoutly.

"That makes me the godfather of the joint," said Red. "Another round for everybody."

And then, taking a handful of change that almost wrecked O'Donnell's till, Red Walker disappeared into the white-blown night.

He never came back. Long after, O'Donnell gathered from conversation in front of his bar that Red Walker had done two stretches in stir, one in Joliet and another in San Quentin; and he worried and sorrowed as if over a wayward son. He always had the feeling that some day the debonair youth who had become godfather to "Mike's Place" would come swinging jubilantly through his slatted doors.

BUT when he set up shop in Havana this feeling died. He felt now that he was cut off forever from the man to whom he felt, in some vague fashion, he owed his fattened prosper-

ity. In the bar business so much depends upon the auspices under which one makes the first plunge. This ranks not with superstition, but with folklore.

More than a third of a century had been tossed into the discard when O'Donnell one night discovered that when he wished he might retire.

The statement from his bank over which he pored at his desk told him this. In Spanish though it was, he knew what the figure meant. With no children to think about and only one aged sister, an annuity that would bring him in a yearly fortune lay ready to his hand.

But then the whirl of the arrival of a crowd of Americans changed the trend of his purpose. After all, he liked what he was doing too well to quit.

In the bar were women in pearls, men in evening clothes; folk fresh from the many delights of an Havana afternoon, preparing for the delights of an Havana night, were waiting for him. They wanted cocktails, the kind he had made in the old days when the number of varieties could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The joshing, kindly meant, the praise of his skill, the happy gay atmosphere, strengthened the old man's decision. He would tend bar so long as he could stand on the grating.

And as they left, Mike shot one swift look at the framed fifty-dollar bill.

How Red Walker would have fitted into this environment! Red was refined and had a snappy line, to use the language of these later days. He would

wise-crack with the best of them. He would have belonged.

"That's a pretty bill you've got up there," said a gray man in gray clothes and a gray hat who stood in front of the bar; an inconspicuous man, the sort one would never notice whether alone or in a crowd.

"Yes," snapped O'Donnell, suddenly laconic. The man looked like a dick.

"Lemme see it," said the gray one.

"Why?" asked O'Donnell, but there was nothing of the old pugnacity in his tone.

"Hand it down," said the other, and O'Donnell, clambering upon a chair, detached the small frame and laid it reverently on the counter.

The man in gray squinted at it for a moment then ripped the backing off and took out the bill. As a mere formality he tossed upon the bar a small gold pin he took from his vest pocket. It was a United States Secret Service operative's badge.

"We are working here with the co-operation of the Cuban government," he said. Then he took a fountain pen from his pocket and across the bill in red ink scrawled the word "Counterfeit."

"How long you had it?" he asked.

"Thirty-six years," groaned O'Donnell huskily through dry, parched lips.

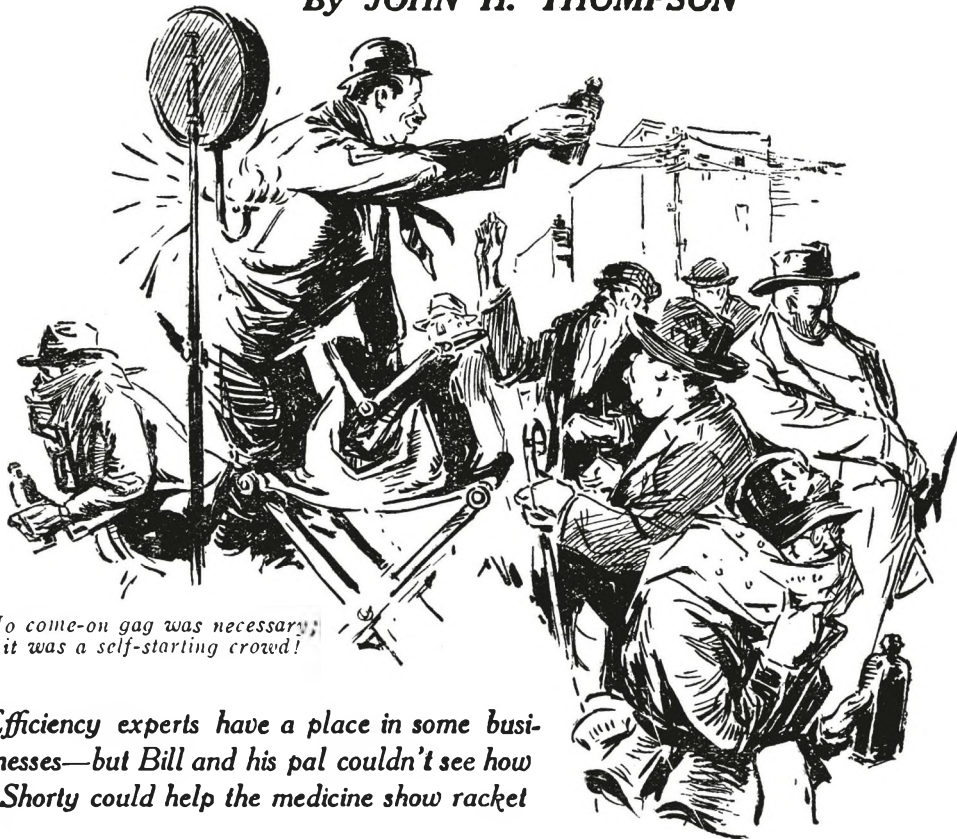
"Well, you're an innocent party, all right," said the man in gray. "This is some of old Paul Schwartz's work, and he's been dead for twenty years. We got all his plates. Never made a vignette yet that didn't squint. Red Walker used to shove for him, and Red died in Atlanta."

THE END.



Feeling Fine, Doctor

By JOHN H. THOMPSON



*No come-on gag was necessary;
it was a self-starting crowd!*

Efficiency experts have a place in some businesses—but Bill and his pal couldn't see how Shorty could help the medicine show racket

SHORTY pulled out a leather card case, extracted a card and handed it over to us with a flourish. "That's me," he said complacently.

Bill took the card and examined it, while I peered over his shoulder.

BERNARD McGLOSTER, B. D.

Efficiency Expert

1805 Main Street

"Can you imagine that?" demanded Bill, turning to me. "The last time we saw Shorty he was running a tent show in Waterbury. Now he's dressed up like a garbage collector on a holiday, and hands out cards like a doorman outside a painless dentist's office."

Shorty puffed at a cigar and tried not to look self-conscious.

"What does B.D. stand for?" demanded Bill critically. "And who gave you the degree?"

"Doctor of Business; and I gave it to myself," said Shorty, with no little self-satisfaction.

Shorty used to drift about the country with us back in the carnival days before Bill and I invested in a gasoline torch and started selling Higgins' Indian Oil; and we never figured that he knew very much about business, or anything else, for that matter.

"What in thunder do you know about business?" asked Bill, with the frankness of an old friend.

"Everything," conceded Shorty airily. "I can take any business, I don't care what kind it is or how sick it may be, and put it on its feet. I'm a business doctor, and believe me, if I do say it myself, I'm a gol-dinged good one. When a client engages my services I first make an analytical survey of his business, then a diagnosis, and then I introduce remedial—"

"Shorty," interrupted Bill accusingly, "you've been going to college."

"No, I haven't," protested Shorty. "That's just the spiel I use. All a fellow needs in this business is a classy front, like you see now right before you, and a good spiel. You remember I used to be one of the best little spielers that ever hypnotized a crowd outside a tent show. That lands the customers, and after they're landed it's just a matter of using ordinary common sense."

"I've got three clients now in this town: three different kinds of business that were all shot to pieces, but every one of 'em is now getting on its feet again. You see that printing plant over there, f'r instance?"

He pointed to a brick building across the street. Through the windows we could see people busily working.

"That plant was almost broke six weeks ago, with no business in sight. They called me in. Look at 'em now!" Shorty complacently blew smoke skyward. Bill and I couldn't help but be impressed.

"But where did all the new business come from?" demanded Bill.

"They're working day and night printing efficiency forms for my other two clients," explained Shorty. "One of the other clients is that restaurant down the street. They've had to put on an extra man to wait on the lunch-room crowd from the printing establishment. The third client is the electrical firm which is putting up those big electric signs on the restaurant and the print shop. Other firms along the street have seen the new signs, and the

electric company has ten other orders to be filled."

I TRIED to figure it out, but it was too deep for me. Bill's brow was wrinkled like an old-fashioned washboard.

"Create business—that's the secret," said Shorty, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper.

"Supposing—" began Bill.

"There's no supposing about it," declared Shorty. "My system's airtight. I can take any kind of business, small or large, and make it more successful."

Bill and I looked at each other. No words were necessary. Each knew what the other was thinking.

"Say, Shorty, old pal," demanded Bill, turning to the business doctor, "take our business for instance, Jim's and mine—could you do anything for that?"

"What you selling—fake oil stock?" countered Shorty.

"We never sold anything that was a fake," retorted Bill, bristling. "We are selling—or rather, trying to sell—Higgins' Peerless Indian Oil, good for rheumatism, internal disorders, and all other ailments of man or beast. The finest and most beneficent medicinal preparation ever devised—a secret blend which came direct from Chief Klockerbocker of the—"

"That's enough," pleaded Shorty. "It's the same old spiel—I know it all by heart. But what's the trouble? You don't mean to tell me that you can't stand under a gasoline torch on any street corner and put on that spiel without raking in the loose change?"

"We've only made two sales in three days," sighed Bill. "If any business ever needed the services of a business doctor such as you claim to be, it's the business of selling Higgins' Peerless Indian Oil."

"The oil's all right, and the spiel's all right, but the people seem to have quit buying. It's the radio that's hurting it, I guess. People hear a lot of

high-class orators over the radio and become hardened. They're not so easy to swing as they used to be. But I guess this is one kind of business that you couldn't help, no matter how good you are."

"How much of this Indian Oil have you got in stock?" demanded Shorty.

"A month's supply—a hundred and fifty bottles," said Bill despondently.

"Haven't you got any more?" asked Shorty disappointedly.

"What in thunder do we want any more for?" wailed Bill. "We can't get rid of what we got."

"You remember that time the strong man in Beary's circus was going to bang me on the head with a hammer because I gave his wife a wilted carnation?" asked Shorty irrelevantly.

"And I came up behind him and grabbed the hammer?" chuckled Bill reminiscently. "You bet I haven't forgotten it. That bird swung on me with his fist when you beat it."

"Well, I haven't forgotten it, either," said Shorty. "I'm going to reciprocate now. I'm going to show you what an efficiency expert can do, even for your line of business. How much money you got? All you have to do is pay the actual expenses. I won't charge you a cent for my services. You'll sell all your stock to-morrow night."

Shorty's confidence was contagious. "We've got four dollars and eighty-five cents, haven't we, Jim?"

Bill turned to me for confirmation. "Four eighty-five is right," I said.

Shorty nodded approvingly. "Let's see if I can pull this off to-night, by any chance," he said. He took a newspaper out of his pocket and glanced at it.

"Looks favorable," he muttered. Then he glanced up at the roofs of the Main Street buildings. "All O. K." There was satisfaction in his voice.

Bill looked a bit doubtful. I felt mighty skeptical myself. I couldn't see where all this mysterious maneuvering

was going to help the sale of Peerless Indian Oil.

"Four eighty-five, you've got?" continued Shorty briskly. "Where is it?"

"Maybe we better not bother you about this," suggested Bill weakly.

"That's all right," insisted Shorty. "I'm only too glad to return the favor which you did me once. Where's the four eighty-five?"

Bill meekly handed it over.

"HAD dinner yet?" asked Shorty. Bill shook his head lugubriously. With the four eighty-five out of our hands, it looked as if we wouldn't have any dinner at all.

"Well, take a dollar of this and go to that restaurant up the street." Shorty pointed to the place where the men were installing the electric sign. "Get a couple of dinners there," he directed. "With the three eighty-five that's left I'm going to have some handbills printed."

"Too bad we haven't got enough to buy an electric sign with, so we could help that third client," interposed Bill somewhat sarcastically; but Shorty already was hustling across the street toward the printing establishment. He turned and came back.

"I'll just shake hands and say good-bye now in case I don't see you again," he said.

"In case you don't—you— Aren't you going to help us out?" Bill was nonplused.

"Get to bed early to-night," directed Shorty. "You're going to have a busy night to-morrow night. Don't bother trying to sell any stuff to-night. Wait until to-morrow. Your stuff will go like hot cakes. Well, so long; I've got to get over to the printers."

He left us gaping in astonishment on the sidewalk.

"Four eighty-five shot to help rejuvenate two decrepit clients," mourned Bill indignantly. "And all we got for it was advice to wait until to-morrow

night before we try to sell any of our own stuff. Lucky our room rent is paid in advance, otherwise we'd have to sleep in the park to-night, and it looks as if it wasn't going to be a very good night for sleeping in the park."

Even as he spoke a light drizzle of rain began to fall.

Grieved and sputtering, we headed up the street to do our bit for the financially ailing restaurant man.

Before we were finished eating the rain was coming down in a veritable flood.

"The first rainstorm we've had in this section in nearly a month," commented the counterman sociably. "Everything round here is dried up."

But Bill and I were in no mood to chatter about the weather or anything else. Our bereavement was too great. After all, four dollars and eighty-five cents is four dollars and eighty-five cents, and that's a heap of money when a fellow is broke.

We made a wild dash from the restaurant to our rooming house after finishing our dinner, and glumly sat at the window watching the rain come down.

It was the longest afternoon and evening we had put in since we hit the East. Shortly after dark Bill was going downstairs to borrow a newspaper from the landlady, but we heard her go out. It was an hour or more before she returned. It was still raining.

Bill hurried down to get the paper. He returned without it.

"The old lady has a beautiful grouch," he said. "She went down to the park to see some kind of a spectacular free entertainment which was to be put on there, and after she stood around waiting in the crowd for half an hour or more somebody announced that the show had been called off. She is down in the hall blotting the water off her hat and sputtering like a fire-cracker fuse."

Bill took off his shoes and angrily

flung them across the room. "Some night, eh?" he growled.

I agreed with him. The last thing I heard as I dropped off to sleep was the monotonous patter-patter of the rain on the tin roof of the porch outside our window.

It was nearly noon before Bill and I turned out the next day. Like all old show people, we've got the habit of waking late. The sun was shining brightly, however.

"Let's pack up and beat it to the next town," I suggested.

Bill seconded the motion; but just then the landlady rapped on the door and handed us a letter.

In the corner of the envelope appeared the name of Bernard McGlosser, B.D., Efficiency Expert and Creator of Business.

Bill angrily ripped the envelope open.

There was a chance that Shorty had experienced a twinge of conscience and was returning our money. The hope proved in vain.

There was only a short note inside. It read:

Everything working fine. You're going to have a big business to-night. Congratulations. SHORTY.

"The only thing we deserve congratulations for is that we saved twenty cents last night with which to buy coffee and sandwiches to-day," growled Bill.

Nevertheless we decided to stay in town; and that night we set up our stand and torch on a busy corner. Not that we had much hope. Our faith in Shorty's ability was weak despite his apparent success in creating business for his other clients.

WITHIN ten minutes we realized that something had happened.

Ordinarily my part of the work is to rush forward and buy a bottle of the Indian Oil as soon as Bill reaches the grand climax of his spiel; but

before I could move there was a rush forward of eager customers. No come-on gag was necessary. It was a self-starting crowd.

Bill was almost swamped. Higgins' Peerless Indian Oil sold like toy balloons during a circus parade. Three times Bill gave his spiel, and three times there was a rush of customers. Then we quit—not for lack of customers, but because the supply of Indian Oil had given out. Every bottle had been sold.

"What in thunder did Shorty do?" demanded Bill in awe as we dismantled the folding torch and shoveled the pile of silver into the otherwise empty valise.

I couldn't dope it out myself. It had been the same spiel that Bill had given two nights previously; but nobody could be induced to buy the stuff then, and here to-night, with a lot of the same birds in the crowd, we could not hand out the stuff fast enough to supply the demand.

Just then Shorty himself blew along.

"Well, what luck?" he demanded.

"Complete sell out," chuckled Bill delightedly. "I never saw such a demand for the stuff. How in blazes did you do the trick—or was it just plain luck?"

"Just plain luck?" snorted Shorty indignantly. "This little business doctor pulled off that stunt for you. I created the business."

It sounded rather far-fetched to me. I couldn't see where Shorty had done anything."

"These here things did the trick." Shorty pulled something out of his pocket and handed it over. It was a handbill.

Bill grabbed it, and we read it under the street light.

"What's this got to do with it?" demanded Bill. "This handbill is about a big free spectacle to be presented in Center Park Thursday evening, May 16. That was last night."

"Sure it was last night," agreed Shorty. "My client, the printer, did a good rush job on those handbills yesterday afternoon."

"But what's that got to do with the rush we had here to-night?" persisted Bill.

"Just a matter of creating business," said Shorty complacently. "The business doctor attended to that for you."

"Creating business?" Bill couldn't dope it out any more than I could.

"Sure. There's so little going on here that nearly everybody in town went over to the park last night and stood there for half an hour in the pouring rain waiting to see something for nothing. It was the first wet night in a month. Why shouldn't there be a big demand to-night for your peerless remedy for rheumatism, colds and other ailments?"

Bill and I must have looked a bit shocked.

"Oh, it was all on the level," said Shorty reassuringly. "One of my clients was going to give a big free display of electric signs, a really worthwhile and highly spectacular show. It wasn't his fault that it rained, was it?"

"He'll give the show to-morrow night if the weather's clear. The crowd will be on hand just the same. Those who are subject to rheumatism probably bought your peerless oil, so they need not worry. You see, you help him, and he helps you. All you needed were the services of a first-class business doctor."

"Holy mackerel, Shorty, you're a genius!" declared Bill admiringly. "What can we do to show our gratitude?"

"You might blow me to a rattling good dinner," suggested Shorty. "Come on, we'll all go up to that restaurant up the street where the big electric sign is being installed."

And he led the way.

THE END.



The ray seized them, held them, pulled them relentlessly up into the air

The Sea Girl

With the oceans drying and the surface world disrupted, mankind has not long to wait for the mysterious attack of the Gians—and for the terrific climax of this threat from under the sea

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "A Brand New World," "Beyond the Stars," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

DURING 1990 and 1991, the civilized world faces a strange menace, when rifts in the floor of the Pacific start draining the world's oceans. Arturo Plantet, son of the oceanographer, confirms his father's theories that there are subterranean honeycombs far below the ocean floor, and on a Pacific island he finds "Nereid," a tawny-haired, fair-skinned girl, who takes him down under the ocean floor to the strange dark cavernous world of her people—the Midge—and the other ruling race, the woman-ruled, gray-skinned Gians.

Rhana, the powerful and fiendishly cruel empress of this underworld, is opening the dikes and flood-gates, filling the caverns and draining the oceans as the opening steps of her war against the people of the upper world.

Arturo gets Geoffry Grant—who is telling the story—to meet him at Nereid's island and come down into the dark world, hoping that Jeff, whose six-feet-two makes him tower over even the mighty Rhana, will captivate her and turn her from her destructive plans.

But despite their efforts, she destroys

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for March 2.

the dam, and the oceans flood in. The Gians had escaped through the locks, leaving the Midge to drown; but the fair-skinned race had found a way out. Arturo and Nereid were supposed to wait along the tunnel for Jeff and Tad Megan—a friend who had been captured by the Gians off one of the first ships they had sunk. But Jeff and Tad fail in their attempt to save the dam, and barely escape into the tunnel ahead of the flood, searching for the other two.

Meantime life on the surface has been disrupted, with the drying oceans and changing climate. To the Highlands, as the former land areas come to be called, are added the Lowlands, the former ocean floor; and government planes are exploring this new, rotting, mist-hung expanse for their possible enemy—for Dr. Plantet, Polly—his daughter—Jeff, Arturo, and Nereid had seen and forestalled an earlier offensive move against Hawaii, and the world governments are sure the infernal enemy will now move in some mysterious attack against the surface civilization.

CHAPTER XXI. (*Continued*).

THE WHITE AËRO ATTACKS.

THE oceans were down some eight or ten thousand feet now. No one could measure the exact level. Oceans? The word had lost its meaning. There was no body of water left of any great extent. The realm of the Lowlands was an actuality.

Far down among the black mists water often was seen. Lakes perched in mountain caldrons. Giant waterfalls; tumbling rivers; cañons, some dry, some filled with tumultuous water; domes rearing their rounded heads into the heavy clouds; domes, lower, isolated at the water level; great trenches filled with moving water; ridges, like mountain chains standing aloft.

Strange, black new realm. Its main configurations were beginning to take form. The great ridges of the Atlantic Basin were showing. The huge central basin of the Pacific lay like a dark inland sea. The great deeps were still all unbroken water.

On September 30, a plane was passing over the Micronesia section of the Pacific Lowlands, scouting the tumbled abyss down there, the precipitous slopes from the ridges and domes down to the water-filled caldrons and trenches.

The exact latitude and longitude were not given by the discoverer. The report said: "Micronesia, north of the Caroline Mountaintops." Seen vaguely through a rolling cloud mass was what might have been a plateau, with mountain ridges around it. The plane was flying at about our Continental level, the former sea-level. They were calling it now the Zero-height; and in the new technical language this plateau was down in the Lowlands at minus ten thousand feet.

The observers could see very little. A fiercely flowing river, still lower, was tumbling into a boiling pit. The plateau was broken and pitted with dark round areas like cave-mouths. There were moving human figures on the plateau! The plane swept on, came back, and descended to what they claimed was minus fifteen hundred feet, the lowest level any plane had yet attained. Through a cloud rift the observers saw human figures clearly. A brief glimpse. There seemed hundreds, perhaps a thousand figures.

Polly and her father were at home when the news came. Polly, all that morning, was silent. Thoughts seemed struggling to reach her. Once she leaped to her feet, stood trembling.

"Father! I hear—I feel words from Nereid! Arturo—Jeff—they're safe—still alive!"

She knew it. And then her mind rang with other words:

"*Stop! Don't let them attack us! Stop them!*"

It was hardly half an hour later when the newscasters had another report. Two planes had gone back with the discoverer to verify the existence of this enemy. The figures were still to be seen down there. The planes had dropped bombs—they believed, with effect. They had had a brief, telescopic glimpse. The white skinned people had scattered. Some lay still; many were seen running—small, white-skinned people.

It was plain to Polly. These were people like Nereid. And Nereid's thoughts were saying: "*Stop them! Don't let them attack us!*"

Dr. Plantet talked with the authorities. A week went by.

Planes watched this enemy, but no more bombs were dropped. Polly strove for further connection with Nereid, but could not establish it.

On October 8 the Gians were discovered. "Gray-skinned people," the reports said, "with apparatus of metal."

They were seen less clearly and more briefly than the Middge, and were farther to the south. Dr. Plantet and Polly identified it as being fairly near the Zero-height peak which was Nereid's island.

The Gians were seen in a tumbled region which since has been termed the Southwest Mountains of the Moon. The planes circled in the neighborhood for an hour, awaiting a rift in the concealing cloud-banks. But the gray-skinned figures were gone—withdrawn probably into the myriad caverns of the region. And the Middge, too, seemed now to have retreated, hiding down there in the caves and passages which were numerous in all this area of the Micronesian Lowlands.

OCTOBER 15 came. The authorities were studying the region. Plans for attack were being made, volunteer armies were being organized, and armed planes were being equipped. There was much sci-

entific discussion over changes that would be necessary in wing areas, curvatures, angles of incidence for flying in the greater air-pressures of the Sub-zero levels.

The world, with the enemy now discovered, was immediately less apprehensive. White, and gray-skinned people down there—they seemed neither very numerous nor very menacing. The public rang with boastful predictions of what would happen when our planes were ready to attack.

Not a very numerous enemy, nor very menacing! Not menacing? A gray-white shape was observed on the night of October 15, flying at the Zero-height near the Australian Continental shelf. It was vaguely described. An aéro—very flat and narrow—wingless—several hundred feet long by twenty feet wide.

On October 17 a strange disease was reported from Southeast Australia. People were stricken by it over a widely separated area. But all of them lived at or near the Zero-height, at the edge of the Southeast shelf, the border of the Lowlands.

Strange disease indeed! The reports came to Dr. Plantet. A number of the suffering victims were brought by fast airline to Washington. Dr. Plantet, with a group of leading medical men, met in Washington to study the disease.

Whether contagious, or infectious, or both, they could not say. A germ disease undoubtedly. Swiftly progressing. A day of darkening fingernails. Fingers and toes turning numb and black. The whites of the eyes turning dark. A lassitude. A gruesome coma with the victim screaming as in a nightmare. Then a calm, trancelike catalepsy, followed by death.

Dr. Plantet came back to Polly. He was grim. He slumped in his chair.

"We don't know what it is, Polly. Nothing we have ever had to deal with before." She had never seen him so solemn, so drab. He lifted his white

tired face; his eyes were burning from lack of sleep.

"It's from that thing they saw, Polly—that gray-white *aëro*. Nothing much has been said about it publicly, and I hope to Heaven they won't yet for awhile. But that's where this disease came from—we're sure of that."

He sat up with a slight return of his old energy. "They've got to annihilate this enemy! At once—it's got to be done. They've been saying: 'We've got them helpless, down there in the Lowlands. They can't harm us.' Harm us? This is no warfare of the kind we've ever known! Inhuman, unreasoning—what sort of men must these gray people be! No attack—nothing military—no open warfare—nothing! Just spreading a disease. There are women and children among those victims, Polly—more women than men. It will wipe us out—it will mean the end of the world for us all unless we can check it!"

CHAPTER XXII.

REFUGEES OF THE LOWLANDS.

TAD and I struggled upward into the tunnel-passage. The fact that with Arturo and Nereid, and some two thousand of the Middge people, we at last reached the surface I have already made evident. I need not detail those weary, despairing days and weeks in the darkness. It may have been a march of several hundred miles. I do not know. I would have said it consumed a year, rather than those weeks.

We came upon Nereid and Arturo within a few hours. The passage was strewn with the Middge refugees. Out of the million in the abyss, perhaps a hundred thousand actually got into the tunnel. And only two thousand survived. We passed them hourly; families resting, encamped, to take up again the burden of the march. We passed them dead, or dying—burned and

maimed at the tunnel-entrance, or before they got into the tunnel—struggling on now, falling at last.

The tunnel was heavy with gases. Sometimes, when we thought our last choking breath had been drawn, side rifts would seem to bring us purer air. We had started without equipment or food, or water, but there were hundreds of loaded *arras* in the long line of refugees. We very soon found one whose owner had succumbed. Arturo and Nereid, when we overtook them, we found them well supplied. They had waited until a wave of flame had surged to the tunnel-entrance. They had even gone back there once; then despaired of us, and left.

We heard, soon after we four were again together, a muffled, terrible roar far away in the earth, and felt the tremble of it. It was the earthquake under the Pacific, though we could no more than guess it then. The tunnel shook; part of the roof near us fell, crushing a score of the Middge. We saw then that behind us the tunnel was blocked. The air ahead soon grew purer. No Middge could follow us, but those in advance were in less distress. We made better time, but at that it seemed an endless struggle.

Weeks of August's close, and of September. We lost all possible track of them. We did not know until afterward that it was probably September 29 when the first pitiful little vanguard of our party reached the new world.

The food and water were running low. The *arras* had all given out and were abandoned. The changing air-pressures, the new quality of air, affected us all somewhat, but the animals were stricken, a few at a time. We left them, pitifully breathless, gasping.

There was one stage of the march where for what might have been a week we were halted by a subterranean river torrent. We waited, helpless, despairing. But the water in the cross passage into which our tunnel abruptly ended,

at last roared away. New air came to us, dank, with a rotting, salt tang to it.

We traveled, those final days, with the surviving Midge scientists. They told us that they had a weapon; a huge affair, for long range operation. It was not assembled. But when we reached the surface—

Ah, how many times in those days of struggle we voiced the thought: "When we reach the surface!" To come out upon a friendly earth. To join, with this weapon, the earth's armies against the Gians. "When we reach the surface—"

"Why," said Tad, "everything will be all right then. What can those Gian women and men do against our earth? Say, what is this Midge weapon?"

Good old Tad! His spirits never flagged. There were moments when his cheering voice to the Midge—the laugh which they could understand though his words were foreign—helped many a despairing family to get up and plod on farther.

Nereid did not know what the Midge weapon was. They did not care to talk about it now. But in the times of rest there was much talk of our food and water supply. If it would only last us to the surface. Ah, when we reached the blessed surface!

I THINK I shall never forget that moment when we struggled out into the dim light of the Lowlands. I stood with Tad and Arturo, half blinded. But of them all only we three had eyes that would adjust to the light. We stood in a cave-mouth, seemingly upon a mountainside. There were a score of ramifying caves beneath us. The Midge were crowding up into them. The light! The blessed, frightening daylight! We could hear the Midge babbling about it. Safety at last!

We three stood, with our pupils contracting—and at last we could see. It must have been nearly noon; through a

rift in the dark clouds the sun momentarily showed.

Our blessed sun! Here again in our own world! But we stared, unbelieving. Foul mist hung about us, thick with the heavy, choking smell of ooze and slime. Beneath us, a thousand feet or more, a land surface lay in a tumbled mass of black crags. A river flowed tumultuous in a gorge. Behind us a great slimy plateau spread into the misty distance. Ooze caked by the daylight heat lay red and black upon it. Dark peaks, rounded and blurred, showed looming against the far horizon.

Our world? It seemed perhaps a lunar landscape. No, for there were clouds and dank mist enshrouding everything. A strange world, an infernal landscape, not of this planet, nor even of the moon.

Disappointment, such as I had never known before, flooded me. Not a living being to be seen here in all this desolation! Why, I could seem to see out over this tumbled waste for hundreds of miles! Safety here, with our food and water nearly gone? Why, we were as far from safety as any ancient explorer of the Polar icefields, standing lost upon a berg, surveying the desolation around him!

In a chain of dank slimy grottos close under the surface of this plateau-like elevation, the Midge clustered to await our communication with earth civilization. In a score of dim caves, the families grouped together, setting up small shelters of garments and robes, like tents, for privacy. The night came. Small glowing hand torches sprang with points of dim light. Strange encampment of struggling humans, here in the new world, waiting to be rescued!

Arturo, Tad and I came to prominence. The Midge leaders were already working on their war equipment. With Nereid for interpreter, we were questioned on where we were, and what was best to do. But we did not

know where we were! This had been the Pacific Ocean. No islands were near here; in all this desolate panorama there had been no mountain top with any sign of verdure.

Could we travel on foot, here on this land? We did not know. A mile or two a day, perhaps; climbing the crags, descending into valleys, avoiding mountain torrents, picking our way over the caked ooze—struggling as men on foot have struggled over Polar icefields!

But in which direction? How far to the nearest mountain top where people might be living? We could not say.

"But one thing," said Tad, "they'll be planes flying over here. We must go up in the daylight, many of us on top where they can see us."

We built, that next day, a tent of white for a signal, and crowded around it. The Middge came up, blinded by the light.

A plane went overhead. We could barely see it, just for a moment in a rift in the clouds. It seemed ten thousand feet above us, at least. It was a familiar model, we recognized its shape. But a bomb came whistling down. Our little tent was gone. A score of the Middge lay maimed and dying.

IT was then that Nereid thought she had communicated with Polly, sending her desperate plea: "*Don't let them attack us!*"

She was sure she had reached Polly. And all that day she struggled to communicate further. The night came—our second night in the Lowlands. Nereid had a little tent to herself against the wall of one of the caves. Arturo, Tad, and I had a shelter near it. We had discussed the possibility of organizing a party to start on foot for help.

A week or two here, even with the starvation rations upon which the encampment now was put, and our plight

would be desperate. Nereid opposed it—she still thought she could direct Polly to bring help to us. And she believed, that evening sitting alone in her tent, that she had reached Polly again. But she said nothing to us.

It may have been midnight. Arturo and Tad were asleep. Exhausted with weeks of marching, this inactivity here was needed by us all. I had been sleeping soundly. I do not know what awakened me—chance perhaps, or fate.

I went to the flap of our little tent. The cave was in darkness; the fantastic tents, with a dim light here and there, were silent.

I saw a figure moving, recognized it for Nereid. She had evidently just come from her tent. I was alert at once; but instead of speaking to her, I drew back, watching. There was a furtiveness about her; she moved swiftly, silently across the grotto, her hair and veils floating as she walked.

In a moment, I followed. She was headed into one of the small tunnels that led a few yards upward to the open plateau. I lost sight of her for a time; but when I was out upon the upper level I saw her again. She moved along the rocks cautiously but swiftly and came to the edge of a cliff that fronted the distant void of the abyss. I stood watching.

It was dark enough, so that she could see comfortably. The clouds hung low over the plateau. The rounded rock spires, caked with ooze and slime, were dark sentinels in the gloom. The further distance was solid black; but in a moment moonlight broke through, edging the naked black rocks with a green-white glow.

In a hollow down the precipitous slope, a tangled rotting mass of sea vegetation lay slumped and limp in a dark pool of water which was trapped in a basin of the rock. And miles away and a thousand feet below where I stood, the moonlight slanted down through the clouds in a great white

shaft and fell upon a giant caldron of inky water, painting it with white fire.

Against the moonlight Nereid flung a protecting hand to her eyes. She sat on a rock. The clouds closed over us; the scene was dark when I reached her.

"Nereid!"

She started, alarmed. Then relaxed. "Oh, it is you, Jeff."

I sat beside her. "What are you doing up here?"

She hesitated, but she answered softly:

"I am very glad you came. I was frightened, to be up here alone. But I thought I wanted to be alone. Polly is coming! I have reached her—I am sure of it."

"Polly?"

"Yes. With help for us. This morning I reached her." She put a timid hand on my arm. "You, Jeff my friend—you know I am trying my best. I think I reached her this morning. And later, a few hours ago, I think she understood me again. She is coming—"

If only she were! My heart was beating fast. "But not alone, Nereid? She isn't coming alone?"

"No. With others. I think she laughed when she told me there would be others."

BUT you don't know where we are—how could you tell here where to come?"

I stood up. Polly, with a searching party, here in this abyss—"But Nereid, we must show some light." I stared up at the impenetrable dark mist hanging in a low ceiling above us. Nereid stood with me. She said anxiously:

"Do you think there is a chance? I tried to describe these cliffs, this level top, the cave mouths. It was two hours ago, I think, when she said she was starting. Jeff, would she be that near here? Could any one fly from your cities nearest here in a few hours?"

Polly, down here on one of the mountain tops which had been a South Sea island? It was possible. And the Marshall group, I thought, ought to be within a thousand miles to the east, and the Carolines not much more than half that to the south. Mountain ranges towering above the clouds of these desolate Lowlands. Was Polly on her way down from them to seek us?

"Nereid, we must show a light as a guide."

She produced a globe from her robe. Futile little spot of radiance! We held it aloft.

An hour or more passed. We sat on the rock, with the light between us. Who could ever see us, tiny figures down in this barren, cloud-swept waste?

There was not a sound; a heavy thick silence hung over the Lowlands, with just a sullen murmur floating up from the tumbling water of the lower levels to the north.

"Nereid, you'd better go down. I'll stay here—"

"No."

Another hour? We heard nothing. But from over us presently there seemed movement. A blur in the cloud-bank; a blurred, nearing shape, hovering.

I leaped to my feet. Something quite close over us, stolen upon us. No earthly airplane! A long, narrow, gray-white shape!

Nereid gave a little cry. I gripped her; started to run. But too late. From above a light darted down in a narrow beam. It seized us, held and pulled and sucked us upward. I did not lose consciousness. I clung to Nereid. We were whirled, gasping, through the air. The gray shape magnified, gigantic at our heads. Hands and arms came reaching down; clutched us; the light vanished.

We were hauled, as swimmers are hauled from the sea, over a low rail and flung to the aëro's deck, with the

tall gray figure of Rhana imperiously surveying us.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHITE SHAPES IN THE MOONLIGHT.

WE were upon that gray-white aëro which, like a ghost, swept at the Zero-level along the edge of the Australian Highlands. We had been upon it, and in the encampment of the Gians, some two weeks. The aëro had only been observed in Australia—the seeds of the new disease were first scattered there and nowhere else. But the aëro had made a far longer voyage—a strange, weird exploration through these vast new Lowlands!

It was Rhana's desire to survey this world she was about to conquer. She avoided the Highlands where an attack upon the aëro might be made. She had wanted, if I were still alive, to capture me in advance of the active warfare she contemplated. She believed I would be with Nereid.

The Gian encampment was located within some hundred miles of where the Midge emerged. The Gians were south, across a gradual rise toward the Caroline Mountain chain. Rhana had been alert to receive any possible thoughts from Nereid. It was Rhana whom Nereid had reached—Rhana, quick to simulate Polly—Rhana, laughing ironically and saying she would not come alone.

She was triumphant to have me; and pleased to have Nereid, whom later she would use as envoy to the Midge when our surface nations were conquered. And myself—she told me characteristically when first we were drawn aboard the aëro. Its twenty feet of width held small cubbies, like cabins. I was taken from Nereid and thrust into one of them alone. Rhana came presently to see me. She sat beside me.

"So we are together again? That is very good, Jeff Grant."

Cool, ironical smile. I could not forget that last time I had seen her, in the roaring gate-house when she had struck Entt down.

I drew away from her. We were rushing through the black mist. The dark panorama of the Lowlands was spread outside the cubby bull's-eye.

"What do you want of me?" I demanded.

She told me tersely. This world of mine was strange to her. There was much that I could tell her about it. I could be of great help to her, if I would.

She toyed with her dark-lensed eyeglasses. "If you wish to help me, Jeff—"

So strange, her caressing use of my single name! I think she was barely aware of that caress in her tone. She leaned toward me as I shrank away.

"So? You are afraid? I thought the big man was different." It was not irony this time. Her dark eyes glowed. She touched my arm, and I held tense. "You interest me, Jeff—" Then she sat back, away from me. "I would not frighten you." She added quietly, but there was a sudden sweep of emotion back of it—unreasoning creature of moods and passions: "Can't you guess, Jeff? I want your regard—I want you to admire me, respect me. I want your love. I frighten you? Oh, that I would not do—"

HER smoldering eyes held me. Her voice was gentle. Life has different standards. To her, man was a quarry to be pursued. She must not frighten me!

She added: "You could have guessed that I loved you. It comes, this thing that is love, so suddenly. You do not speak—"

I managed, "I did not guess—" This gray, imperious feline creature—suddenly amorous now, I could not doubt. But the change from love to hate could be swift. I repeated cautiously, "I did not guess."

"But now, Jeff, you know, and I am going to conquer this big world up here. I am a masterful woman, Jeff—most powerful. I want you to think of that—you who are so big, so strong and beautiful of body—a man so worthy to rule this world with me. You could help me, Jeff—the inspiration I would have with you beside me—"

She paused. I began: "Why—"

"Do not answer now. You are frightened. I would not confuse you. I want, some time, not now, your love."

"Why—" There was nothing I dared say. Her mood, exactly as I feared, turned suddenly.

"This girl of the Midge I found you with!" She rasped it out. "You love her?"

"No," I said, alarmed for Nereid.

Rhana's gaze searched me. "You are lying! Oh, but why should I think that little white creature could interest you? She amounts to nothing."

"She loves my friend," I said, "not me. Nor I her." I decided to chance it; I might perhaps bargain. "You want me to help you, Rhana, to tell you what I can about this world of mine? If I do it will you treat me kindly?"

She smiled gently. "Why should I harm you? I want your admiration for what I do—for the woman, the leader that I am. A woman of destiny, as you call it, Jeff."

"And this little white girl—this Midge we named Nereid—you will guard her safely? Because I ask you to, for the sake of my friend?"

"Yes."

She stood up suddenly, as though my insistence annoyed her. "We will talk again. You have nothing to fear."

She left the cubby. At the door a Gian came and stood to guard me.

I WAS allowed a fair liberty, here in the gray-white aëro. I moved where I pleased with increasing freedom, though always with a watchful man of the Gians beside me. Often I was with

Nereid; there were times when we could snatch brief moments of talk, but always with watchful eyes upon us.

The aëro, with its length of two hundred feet or more, was decked over with a long, low narrow cabin, which was divided into many small compartments, with a narrow passage down the center. A few of the rooms occupied the entire width of the vehicle; one such was in the bow-peak, with the operating mechanisms; behind that, another which was Rhana's cabin.

There was a narrow outer deck the length of the ship on both sides. Amidships was a room of weapons and apparatus for war. But this I was never allowed to approach. I think that the mechanism for spreading the disease germs was here. I never saw it.

The vehicle, with its glowing side pontoons and its faintly luminous spar projecting from the bow, quite evidently operated similarly to the ones we had flown in the abyss. There were aboard perhaps fifty Gians. The men did what heavy, unskilled labor was needed and prepared the meals. There were women at the controls.

Besides Rhana, I remembered having seen but one of these Gians before—that man, Bhool! He came sniveling up to me; and as though I did not know the full extent of his treachery, like a proud child he told me. He had murdered Fen; had been there in the house when we arrived; heard our plans to go to the gate-house; had hurried to tell Rhana. She had made her hasty trip to thwart us.

He ended: "Bhool is very clever? You know it?"

I cuffed him; and met Rhana's approving, tolerant smile.

How far we flew on this trip over the Lowlands I could not say. Or at what speed? I would have guessed it to be fully eight hundred, or even a thousand, miles an hour. The daylight came; we settled into the depths and waited for the light to pass. I was closely guarded in a cabin made dark

so my guard could see. And when night came we started again.

In all the swirl of mist and vague moonlight, it was a flight unreal, unearthly. I kept my general sense of direction, from the sun, and at night from the glimpses of the moon. I wondered how these women could pretend to navigate, especially an unknown region. But I saw they had curious instruments, and were making charts of what was passing beneath us.

I asked Rhana.

"We do not know where we are going," she said. "But to come back the same way is very easy."

In general we flew, at first, to the north. I imagine at about three thousand feet below the Zero-level. Occasional rises lifted above us. The water was always far below—for a time there was an unbroken sea down there—one of the great mid-Pacific deeps. Or again, a tumbled land of black crags; ravines, gullies, with river torrents of water surging everywhere. We reached the fallen Polar Sea with its jammed masses of ice; the heights of the Aleutians loomed ahead of us and we turned back.

There was a night when I fancied we were flying in a gigantic circle over the Central Pacific Basin. A broad, level stretch of water, far down—receding but still many hundreds of fathoms deep. I saw what might have been the sharp, jagged rise up to the Hawaiian Peaks.

Verdured mountain tops were up there, unreal, fairylike in the moonlight, towering above the Zero-level, above the dank, evil mists of the Lowlands; a purple sky up there, with the mountain peaks standing into it; the stars, and the white clouds of a world serene. We avoided the heights. I had even fancied I saw the lights of a plane up there.

We stopped at the Gian encampment—I think about the time it was first discovered by the searching earth planes. None had seen us in our low,

night flights; and in the daylight stops Rhana had always chosen places well obscured, far in the depths.

WE made a second flight—the one to the Highlands of Australia—where first the earth saw us. Nereid and I were not aware of Rhana's purpose then; not until afterward, in the Gian encampment, did we learn it.

I had, that second flight, a clear view of the topography of the Lowlands in this section. We came from the south, that night of October 15. What had before been called the Coral Sea we saw as a great, irregularly circular valley, a giant caldron surrounded everywhere by the Highlands. It was empty of any expanse of water save a few mountain torrents tumbling down its slopes or an occasional shallow lagoon, trapped in the rocks, drying by evaporation.

It was my studied policy now to win Rhana's confidence. I told her always what I could of the geography of the regions through which we flew. The caldron of the Coral Sea barred us dangerously by its Highlands. I turned us northeast. At a depression of perhaps a thousand feet beneath the Zero-level we passed to the right of the Solomon rise and came again over the lower levels of an open abyss.

We stayed high. I think now that what might be termed the "ocean level" was down fifteen or twenty thousand feet below Zero. Certainly I saw no evidence of the sea here. The Japan Trench might still be full. I did not doubt but that the great Nero Deep off Guam was still and probably always would be a great salt lake ten thousand feet or more in depth.

Sweeping north, we saw under us the Caroline rise coming up. We passed through a broad valley of the Caroline Mountains. The verdured island-tops occasionally showed. I did not know it then, but since the discovery of the Gian encampment by the

world, the Carolines were deserted by most of their inhabitants—all who could get away had already fled.

Beyond the mountains here, the Lowland floor again sank. A broken, desolate plain lay down there, blurred with rising mist. We crossed it; and soon it began rising again to the ridge we now call the Moon Mountains. None rose nearly to the Zero-level. A volcanic region, starkly grim with its inky black shadows, and weird patches of moonlight that sometimes filtered down.

It lay strewn like wreckage; here, undoubtedly, some great cataclysm of nature had in by-gone ages convulsed it, leaving the strewn crags and boulders; pits like black holes, roundly punched by some giant finger; precipitous cliffs; ravines, narrow and deep.

But the whole, from this southern approach, was steadily rising. On the top of the ridge, still many thousands of feet below Zero, the Gians were encamped. Porous, honeycombed volcanic mountains these were, like a great oblong sponge, perched here. They contained caves, grottos, passages and tunnels of every size and character—a vast catacomb.

It lay, I think, some thirty miles in east and west extent along the top of the ridge; and ten miles north and south. Beyond it, northward, the mountains and the catacombs ended in a descending northward slope a hundred miles over a broken floor to where the Midge at a still lower level, were entrenched.

The grottos, as I first saw them, presented a darkly sinister, wholly unearthly scene. They held fifty thousand of the gray Gians. Already it had the appearance of a fantastic underground city. Hundreds of the dark caverns were occupied by men, women and children in crude interior shelters. But work was going on. Small stone houses were being built. Lights were erected. The openings to the upper air—this was all near the surface—were shaded against the periods of daylight.

A scene of sputtering lights, grotesque shadows—unearthly.

A subterranean stream of fresh water had been found. The Gians seemed well supplied with food. There was a cavern of war equipment. The army was organized—an army of men, drilled and led by the women. There was a broad passage that rose to the outer air in which I saw three other aëros such as the one Rhana was using.

I SLEPT in a newly-built, small stone house, always closely guarded. Nereid was with two of the Gian women. The encampment slept during the daylight periods. There were guards then, with heavily shaded glasses, at all the many upward passages. In the night, the activity went on.

Neither Nereid nor I were able to learn many details. No one would talk to us, except occasionally Rhana. And our pseudo-liberty was always closely watched.

I wondered what could be the plans of these Gian women against our great nations. I could imagine, once our existence here was discovered, that the earth armies could drive us out of these grottos and exterminate us. Yet there was about these women an aspect of confidence. Was it ignorance of what our civilized millions could do in warfare? What weapons did these Gians have to make them so confident?

I said once to Rhana: "If you want me to help you—why not tell me your own plans? These nations you are going to conquer are very powerful."

She told me abruptly. I sat, speechless, stricken, and stared at her. Ah, the warfare of our civilized millions! I could see now how readily it might go down into defeat against this enemy inhuman! Spreading broadcast a fatal, incurable, uncontrollable disease!

She did not seem to notice my horror. She told me many things of the past; how long the Gians had planned this; how, when a year ago the gates had been opened a trifle, she had

thought to come with her army up through the water. That menace at Maui, which we had seen from the Dolphin. But she had found it impractical—and had planned this present method.

It was the longest talk I ever had with Rhana. It was, I think, about the night of October 17. Nereid interrupted us. She came, forcing her guards to let her join us, vehemently protesting as they tried to hold her.

Rhana frowned. "You make a disturbance?" She said it in English; and Nereid answered the same way.

"I do not! They tried to hold me. I—I have communicated with some one I know—she—"

"That girl you call Polly?"

"Yes."

I was on my feet. "Nereid! Think what you say!"

But her swift glance reassured me. She was careful.

She said: "Yes, I have reached her. She has been trying to reach me."

There had never been, I knew, an hour when Nereid had not been flinging her thoughts toward Polly. And now, at last, Polly's thoughts—a message—had come clearly back. The world was alarmed. The authorities wanted—before they attacked this enemy—to talk about it. Polly was trying to arrange a meeting. The United States proposed to send an unarmed plane with a white banner of truce to a designated place over the Lowlands.

I could visualize it. I had met our kindly, earnest President. I knew well his ideals, his aspirations to instill in humanity that unselfishness, that altruism it never has had, and never will. I knew also his closest friend, the gray-haired British minister. And the Anglo-Saxon director of foreign relations.

I could imagine these three—highest types of our great civilization—in conference now over this sudden menace. I could imagine them saying: "These people are human like our-

selves. Misguided, that is all. Why should they attack us in this fiendish fashion? Why force us to make war upon them?"

Unanswerable arguments of idealism! The earth with all these new Lowlands, had room for all. Why should one or another set of humans strive to kill, or to be killed? Unanswerable.

RHANA listened quietly. "So? They are frightened? They fear me already? That is good. Can you still talk with them, Nereid?"

"Yes. I think so. I will try—if you will meet them."

"Of course, child. Tell them what they wish shall be done."

Calm, impressive, gray face. That hawklike profile, impassive, unruffled. "Tell them, Nereid, I will do what they wish. I am glad I have you now." She just barely smiled. "You and Jeff will go with me to this meeting—you are a good interpreter with your flying thoughts."

She made no effort to keep me from Nereid. "Tell me when you have arranged it." She strode away.

"Nereid, is that true what you have told her?"

"Yes."

"But not Polly—Polly isn't coming? Tell her and Dr. Plantet not to come. No use. Why, Nereid, she might hold them here—keep Polly away from here."

"The foreign director will come. Oh, Jeff, do you think it will be of any use? I want it to be. I pray—I have prayed so much—to my God—to Arturo's whom he told me about—which is the same God."

She sat beside me. Poor little Nereid! The struggles through which we had passed; the murder of her father—her people lost with their doomed realm; the long fight to get upward into the daylight—it all had changed her. She was pale and wan; always trembling, eager, earnest, pathetically anxious to be of help.

We were, for this moment, quite alone. She put her hand on my arm.

"Jeff—I was thinking of Arturo. I have tried to reach him, but I cannot. I wanted you to know. Did you know I love Arturo?"

"Why, yes, Nereid."

"I think he loves me. We have never spoken of it. I just wanted to say that if—if you ever get back to Arturo, safe out of all this—"

She stammered, her voice broke, but she went on with a rush: "If you are safe sometime with him and I—I am not, I want you just to tell him that Nereid loved him. Will you do that? I want it very much—want him to know what might have been for us—it seems so very beautiful, what might be."

Dear little Nereid! I said quietly: "You are coming safely through it, Nereid. Don't think things like that."

She sighed. "Sometimes I wonder. You will tell him?"

"Yes. I will. But it's nonsense!"

I met her eyes. They had always seemed eyes with the green mystery and romance of the sea in them. I had thought of that often; there was no sea in the abyss of the Mound. I had spoken of it—her love for the water—the way she swam. There was a river, by the City of the Mound, and all the joy of her girlhood was found in its murmuring water.

And now the sea was gone from our world up here. But still, she could have a river. I met her eyes. The sea was gone from them now as it was from our world. Its dancing light; the sparkle that Arturo had described as she swam for him those first nights in the pool of the island cave. Her eyes were worn and dark now with trouble, sorrow, apprehension.

"I'll tell him, Nereid. But it's nonsense, because you'll tell him yourself."

I pictured, while she clung to me, our beautiful world of stars and moonlight for her and Arturo. "You shall live

by a river, little Nereid—sparkling silver water with the moonlight on it. You and Arturo."

And the wistful thought was in my mind: "And you, Jeff Grant, with Polly!"

I HAVE read of those ancient times when a party of explorers often was stranded and lost in the unknown polar wastes. Two or three of its members, sometimes, would leave the others, and try, desperately to reach civilization. So it was with Tad and Arturo, there in the Middge camp after Nereid and I had so mysteriously disappeared in the night. They waited for a time, hoping for our return. But we did not come. Food and water were giving out. The Middge soon would be in desperate plight.

With Nereid out there as interpreter, Arturo and Tad had difficulty talking with the Middge leaders. And soon they began feeling like outsiders, aliens. The Middge were busy with their activities, but Arturo and Tad were made to feel that they were not wanted in that grotto where the war equipment was being assembled.

"They seem resentful of us," said Arturo. "I don't understand it." Resentful, almost suspicious.

But Tad thought it perhaps natural enough. Their desperate position in this inhospitable world of the Lowlands.

"And don't forget," said Tad, "the first thing that happened here. Down comes a bomb and kills a dozen or so of them. Our people did that to them, Arturo. How would you feel?"

With the recurring daily periods of blinding daylight the Middge seemed disinclined to venture from the caves. But Tad and Arturo were aware that they had sent an exploring party back underground.

There came a day, while the camp was sleeping, that Arturo and Tad decided to leave it. If they could reach civilization, they would send help back,

They made packs of a few belongings; a supply of food and water. They slipped quietly away; out to the mouth of their cave; clambered down the slope into the desolate barren wastes.

"TAD, look! Look up there!"

They had been wandering for several days and nights—covered with ooze and slime now, torn and bleeding with stumbling, falling on the rocks. How far they had gone they had no idea; traveling, they calculated, generally eastward. There were a few island mountain-tops, they thought, between here and the great Marshall Rise. It was soon not a journey, but a desperate wandering, with mountain streams to avoid; cliffs to descend, to climb again when the valley laboriously had been crossed; mud, sometimes like quicksand, upon which they crawled. Dank, hot days, often with blinding sunlight; dank, cold nights with the black noisome fog settling around them.

Arturo was burning with fever now. They were both gaunt, haggard.

"Tad, look! Look up there!"

It seemed about sunset, though of that they could never be sure. The sun was gone down behind some distant up-standing rim. There was sunlight on the white clouds of the heights, but in the abyss the deep purple shadows of night had long since gathered. There was sunlight still on the distant domes; a waterfall, halfway down, gleamed like a white veil; but the crags and tumbled land beneath it were grim and dark.

Tad and Arturo stood gazing up into the fading daylight. A white-winged plane was slowly circling, up near the Zero-level and five miles or so north of them. It came nearer, like a great white bird, soaring. The sunlight up there edged it with yellow and red. A long white banner streamed from it, waving with its forward motion. Silent, soaring white bird, it circled, and went slowly back northward.

The mists of the Lowlands were not

yet gathered. The scene was clear to Tad and Arturo as they stood down on the dark floor. Breathless, awestruck; a silent drama was beginning up there.

The plane with the white banner was alone. But far above it, off in the northern distance, a speck showed close under the white clouds, several thousand feet above the Zero-level. A speck; another earth plane, taking no part—like Arturo and Tad, just watching.

For a time the white banner of truce circled alone. And then, as the night gathered and deepened, another shape appeared, wingless, long and narrow, and gray-white.

The sunlight soon was gone up there. The yellow glow merged to the silver of the moon—a full moon, still below the eastern horizon of the Lowlands. But it caught and painted with its silver the fluttering white banner; the narrow, wingless aëro glowed in it, unreal as a ghost.

The two white shapes neared each other. The wingless aëro stopped dead, poised. The white banner, fluttering its peace offering, its message of humanity, approached slowly.

Tad and Arturo stood, gazing, breathless. Then suddenly stricken. Why, what was this! What—What—They stared, unbelieving, clutching each other.

Drama, tragedy, so silent up there in the moonlight over the darkly spreading wastes of the abyss!

They stared. And presently when it was over, they started forward, running.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CRIMSON RAINBOW.

"YOU shall interpret for me, child Nereid, if we wish to talk at a distance." Rhana stood before us. "And you, Jeff Grant, are you ready? You shall see me, the great woman conqueror!"

She was garbed rather differently now. At first I did not understand the reason. Ah, but I was soon to know! The same sheathlike body shield; same type of cloak; same grotesque metal headdress. But on her gray bare limbs a strip of flexible metal was fastened, hinged at the knee to bend as she walked; a metal plate like a broad collar was on her neck and shoulders. The chains that usually dangled from her wrists were gone. Along her arms, as on her legs, were strips of gray metal, wound, it seemed, with tiny white wire.

She stood regarding me with impassive face. "You are ready, Jeff Grant?"

"Yes."

She moved away. I thought as she walked, that her arms were joined to her body-shield by folds of black fabric.

It was late afternoon. Against the fading daylight Rhana wore dark-lensed glasses. She offered a pair to me, but I refused them. She adjusted a pair on Nereid. Strange woman! Impassive, expressionless now; calmly imperturbable. Yet within her there was that obvious vanity. I should see her triumph; she wished even Nereid to witness it.

We boarded the aëro. A crowd of Gian women stood silently in the passage and watched us off. We lifted gently; moved forward, up and into the afternoon twilight of the Lowlands.

We were all in the forward control room. There seemed no one aboard save us who were here. Nereid and I, and Rhana; and two Gian women, and two men. One of the men was Bhool. He had no glasses. He sat crouched in a corner, shading his eyes, and did not speak. Occasionally Rhana issued him some gruff order. He moved to obey, and stumbled in the light.

The others all wore the glasses. The two women were at the controls; the other man stood alert with a weapon upon Nereid and me.

The control room was about twenty feet square and ten feet high to its curved cabin roof. It occupied the full width of the aëro, except for the narrow deck which flanked it on both sides. There were several wide transparent window panes.

Looking forward to where the bowsprit glowed luminous ahead of us was a broad streamline window, V-shaped.

The controls were there on a table—a row of small switches and domelike buttons, with an array of strange instruments of navigation on a board over them.

To one side, in the front pane, a projector was mounted, a bowl-like black projector with a grid of wires across its face. Its mechanism stood separate on a table near it—a range-finder like a small telescope swung in a universal; dials, and levers, and a coil, with wires to a storage tank that lay along the wall.

It was a short flight—we had not far to go. My heart was unreasonably pounding as I sat by Nereid, watching and waiting. The details of the meeting had been carefully arranged; there could be, Nereid was sure, no error. A lone, unarmed plane with a white banner to meet us at the Zero-level. The foreign minister would take off from it in a small helicopter and descend to us. He would come aboard, at Rhana's mercy, trusting to her honor.

The world would offer every conciliation to her; land should be hers, for her people to live here in our world, at peace with us. There would be, when the meeting took place, another earth plane in the far upper distance. It would carry Dr. Plantet, Polly and a corps of observers with a telescopic image-finder by which our world would see in the mirrors this friendly meeting. Propaganda to insure a friendly public spirit, so that the new race could come and settle and be welcomed.

Nereid had been very earnest. "Do you understand all that I say?"

And Rhana had¹ said: "Yes, of course," with impassive face and a tone devoid of any feeling.

WE flew away from the setting sun, upward in a long slant toward the Zero-level. The control room was silent. Rhana sat alone to one side. Bhool crouched in a corner. The two Gian women were intent at their instruments. Near the center of the room Nereid and I sat together, with our guard watching us.

The windows were broad and clear. The abyss moved past us, their gaunt, rounded cliffs moving backward and dropping away as we mounted. To the west, high above our level, a golden glow marked the setting sun. It was behind us, and we faced a silver night, moonlight streaming above the dark elevations in the murky distance.

Occasionally Nereid would whisper to me. "It will be all right, Jeff?" A hope, a prayer. But I noticed that she was very watchful, her gaze roving the cabin, remarking all its details.

Once Rhana turned. "Nereid, child, do you hear from them now?"

"No. But I am sure they are coming."

At last we saw ahead of us, a thousand or two thousand feet above us, the plane with its streaming banner. It circled like a giant bird, with motionless outspread wings. The gold of the sun and the silver of the rising moon mingled upon it. But the yellow faded; it soon turned silver, ghostlike.

An added tenseness had come to all of us in the cabin. The goggled women at the controls looked questioningly for Rhana's orders. Our flight slackened; we hovered, with the plane almost over us. Its banner fluttered, a long silver streamer in the moonlight. The shadows of the abyss gathered beneath us; the cabin, to my eyes, was dim; moonlight came in the side windows and lay in white liquid pools on the floor; it bathed the control table; it etched with silver lines the dark figures

of the two women sitting watchfully there.

We were evidently just beneath the Zero-level; the abyss was a dark void some ten or twelve thousand feet down to an undulating rocky floor. I gazed up at the cabin ceiling. Through the transparent pane there I could see the plane with its white banner. Slowly circling, evidently making ready to put out its helicopter.

Nereid whispered: "Did you see the newscasters' aëro, as they call it?"

"Yes."

I had seen it, indeed. The plane carrying Polly. It could still be seen—a tiny dark speck up in the distant silver sky. Nereid said aloud to Rhana:

"There is the aërocar watching us."

Her voice was earnest, tense, vibrating with her emotion. "You see it off there? This world watching us, great Rhana—to see your friendly greeting—to welcome you—"

Rhana moved toward us in the shadows with her soundless, catlike tread. "So? Yes, I see it. You say they have instruments to see us clearly from such a distance? That is very good." Her tone was emotionless.

She moved away like a gray shadow. For a moment I did not notice her. My attention was fixed on the ghostly outlines of the plane over us. It bore now a small light; in the glow I saw the helicopter in its bracket; the figure of the kindly gray-haired foreign director—I recalled him well—showed in the helicopter seat.

My heart stopped, and then wildly plunged. Incredible, this that I was seeing! From our cabin a light sprang upward. It glowed, narrowed to a beam. It caught the plane up there. The fluttering white banner of truce shriveled and burned. The plane rocked. It tilted; rocked and swayed in the grip of the light.

Incredible! I was on my feet with Nereid clinging to me in stupefied horror. The Gian man sprang, a gray menacing shadow in the gloom of the

cabin—sprang and crouched between me and Rhana. His weapon was leveled upon me. Rhana was bending tense over the projector mechanism. It hissed, snapped and hummed with its current.

The plane up there was rocking, struggling in the grip of the beam like a wounded bird. Coming down.

It only lasted an instant. Then Rhana snapped off the light. I stared, transfixed with horror. The silver shape of the plane swayed crazily. It was on fire; red tongues of flame licked at it. The light sprang again; caught it; tilted it over—left it. The plane flopped in an arc, righted, and flopped again. At our level now. Then below us. With its crazy swoops the red-yellow flames streamed from it.

Down—then I saw it whirl in a dive. A red-flaming torch, dropping, spinning downward with a line of flame and smoke like a tail streaming above it. Down—dwindling as it fell into the abyss. A tiny red spot down in the darkness—a flaming falling torch. A soundless impact down there, with a faint red glow where it lay.

IN the dark tenseness of our cabin Rhana's voice rang out. Triumphant now. "You see, Jeff Grant, how Rhana rules this world?"

A minute. It had taken no more than a minute. Sixty seconds is sometimes an eternity. I stood confused, my senses groping with the shock of these whirling events.

"Oh, Jeff!" Nereid's voice; her hand plucking to turn me. I saw through the side window, far off to the west where the sun had been golden, but now there was only the purple night—saw a white flare puff like a bomb. The Gian encampment was off there.

Rhana's voice came sharply. "What is that?"

It was no Gian light-flare. She was surprised, and she rasped: "What is that?"

It caught little Nereid; confused with horror, she blurted: "The earth attacking you—you have broken faith!"

And then there was a red-yellow spot like a bursting shell in the distant darkness. It seemed, after an interval, that we could hear very faintly in the heavy air of the abyss, the muffled explosion.

"You—have broken faith—"

Amazement swept Rhana; amazement and a dawning wild anger. "Attacking? Your earth dares attack—me?" She stood half crouching behind the Gian man whose weapon was still levied at Nereid and me. "Attacking?" The moonlight caught her hawklike gray face, showed it distorted now with fury. "So? I will show them! Why, there will be millions of them dead in another day—"

She straightened; issued swift orders to the women at the controls. Our aëro began rising. My thoughts whirled. Sixty seconds. It had been enough time for that watching plane to radio Washington; and for Washington to order its army, already assembled in the abyss, to the attack. Another red explosion showed off there.

We were rising swiftly. I whispered: "Nereid, what is she going to do?"

"She—oh, Jeff, she'll rush to the Highlands, find some great city, loose the disease broadcast, pollute your great cities!"

To-night, in one flight, spread death over the world. Thoughts are swift-flying things. The red spot in the abyss where the plane had fallen was still almost beneath us. Nereid was whispering to me vehemently, but my thoughts flew afield.

The observing plane with Polly and Dr. Plantet could never follow our nearly thousand-mile-an-hour flight. A few hours in the moonlight over the Highlands, loosing the germs of that foul disease, polluting the air of our great cities! It would sweep our continents. What use if, in her demoniac, unreasoning fury, Rhana was finally

brought down? What if our attacking army back there were able to annihilate the Gians? They would drive the Gians out of the grottos in a few days, no doubt. What of it? An uncontrollable plague would be sweeping our world, bringing death to millions.

But what was Nereid saying? Her vehement whispers penetrated my consciousness; her fingers were digging into my arm.

"That little coil, there at the edge of the control table—you see it? I can get to it with a sudden leap. I know what that coil controls. If I could tear it with my fingers—"

The confusion of my thoughts dropped away. Death? There is a calmness comes to one who finds death at hand. It seemed that all my thoughts were sharpening—all my senses sharp and clear to hear Nereid's whispered words of death.

"—tear it, rip it away. It controls the current in the side pontoons, Jeff. If I break it, we will fall. You see? Fall the way the plane fell—kill us all."

Was the burning plane still almost beneath us? An eternity passed in these few whispering seconds.

"I'll jump at the table, Jeff. You leap on the guard. He'll fire at you—he'll forget me. You see?"

"Nereid—death, now?"

"Yes. We'll fall—but Jeff, those millions of people!"

Death? Why, Polly was in that distant plane—Polly! I would never see her again.

"Death, Nereid? You are right. Those millions of people or just us."

"Arturo—and your Polly—will remember us."

Her fingers seemed pressing a goodbye. I answered it. Polly's face was shining in my mind. Good-by, Polly—

"Jeff, when I start to move, you leap. Now—"

"You wait, Nereid! A second after the guard has come after me! Your best chance then."

The figure of Bhool had come crouching toward us. He shouted a warning: "Rhana!"

It may have distracted the guard. A rush of confusion was in the moonlit cabin. I leaped low at the guard's legs; the upward desperate sweep of my arm struck his weapon; its stab missed me. Nereid's leap landed her at the control table. The two women and Rhana were upon her; but her frantic clutching hands ripped and tore at the little coil. The cabin seemed to lurch; the shafts of moonlight swayed. Through the windows the abyss was turning over.

We were falling, irrevocably. Every one in the cabin knew it. Death! The strife among us ceased abruptly; the women cast Nereid away and Bhool gave a long piercing scream of terror.

Falling.

But I saw Rhana spread her arms. Black folds of fabric hung like wings from them to her body. The metal strips on her limbs and her metal collar glowed green with a current in them. She flung open the door, gripping its casement to steady herself. I heard her words clearly. "So you wish death, you fools!"

Realization swept me. She wore a device like the pontoons of this aëro to protect her, as a parachute once protected the old-fashioned aviator. She was on the deck.

I recall snatching up Nereid, then leaped with her and caught Rhana at the rail. We three went over into the uprushing void. Rhana was struggling silently, and her arms flapped like a frantic bird. The wind rushed up at us. An endless fall. Momentarily I was aware of a gray shape like an arrow plunging past. A muffled, splintering crash came from below, where the aëro lay, mangled metal upon the rocks.

Rhana fought to cast me off, but I was far stronger. My arm was crooked about her throat, and I held Nereid with the other. The glowing

metal on Rhana burned against my flesh. We fell—a fluttering gray bird with two enemies clinging to it, pulling it down with their weight. Rhana's fingers tore at me futilely. I tightened my grip about her throat. I think I recall a crack. Rhana went limp.

A black surface of rock rushed up at us and struck us.

"JEFF! Come back to me." Soft, whispered, woman's voice; soft arms were holding me. "Jeff, dear—please!"

I struggled back to consciousness as though from an emptiness remote. This was Polly's voice; these were her arms. I murmured: "Polly, dear?"

There was a dark confusion around me; but in the midst of it I lay and knew that I was unhurt. And Polly was here, with me at last. Dr. Plantet was examining me; he said I was unharmed. I remembered Nereid.

"Polly, where is she?"

Then Dr. Plantet's voice: "She's all right, Jeff. Here she is."

And Nereid's voice: "Is he safe? I—I was afraid it had killed him."

All like a dream. My head was whirling with it, and my ears roared. But I found myself sitting up, with Polly helping me. Dark rocks; heavy air, making me gasp. Grim dark shadows, but the moonlight hung a great silver canopy far overhead.

Other figures were here, and Dr. Plantet's plane stood near by. Its engine smoked; its navigators were moving about it anxiously. A red glow a mile away showed where the other plane had fallen. And nearer, there was a tangled mass of gray-white metal. Rhana's aëro.

"No one left in it alive," said some one. "We've been there."

And Rhana—she lay here on the rocks, broken, crumpled. I did not go to look at her.

"Neck broken," said Dr. Plantet. "Broken when she struck."

I let it pass.

A man came up. "I don't know if we can get up out of here with that engine. The Allen climber is the worst type for a depth like this."

"We'll start." Dr. Plantet helped me up. "Good enough, Jeff—you're fine. You want to start now, Smithby—we're ready."

Nereid, unhurt and gently smiling, stood before me. My body, and perhaps Rhana's, had broken her fall. She murmured to Polly: "We said goodbye to you and Arturo up there. I'm so glad, Jeff, it did not have to be goodbye—not for you and Polly."

But Arturo?

There was a distant shout. Two figures, half a mile away, were clambering down the rocks, shouting weakly.

They came. Our men from the plane here rushed out to meet them, and came back, carrying the two bloodstained, tattered figures, covered with mud and slime. Their torn and bleeding feet were wrapped with cloth into bulky bundles.

Reunion. A babble of voices. I stood confused, my ears still roaring, my legs weak from the shock of the fall. I heard Tad's cheery, tired voice. I saw Arturo carried past me, and glimpsed his haggard white face, his eyes burning with fever. The man set him down. Arturo stood; he called; and I saw Nereid run like a child into his opened arms.

ONE scene more—an hour later, as from the cabin of the Allen climber we gazed down into the abyss. We had come up laboring. At the Zero-level we soared to the west. The full moon was well above the horizon behind us. Beneath, the Lowlands were white with patches of moonlight, black with inky shadows. Ahead some twenty miles and a few thousand feet down, the jagged ridge of the Moon Mountains lay white and black, sharp-etched as a lunar landscape.

The abyss was like a great deep bowl, rising everywhere to a dim high hori-

zon. To the south the tremendous slope rose toward the Carolines. Our earth artillery had been sent there—a precautionary measure if the truce should fail.

We could see now the bombardment proceeding—the Essen fire-shells rising in a tremendous hundred-mile arc, dropping, pounding the Moon ridge; some of them releasing their gases.

Over the ridge a covey of war-planes hung, directing the range. Occasionally a light-flare was dropped. Bombs were dropping. We could see them strike. The noise was like a muttering muffled thunder in the distance.

The Gians had evidently remained inactive. Then we saw their attacking light-beams spring up. The planes scattered—some of them were caught. But the slow bombardment from a hundred miles away, went methodically on. It would take days.

Smithby, at my elbow, babbled of the earth plans. And questioned me avidly.

With my information to give our authorities, we could land planes closer; send in an army, fighting in the grottos—or perhaps the artillery could pound this porous ridge to pieces in a week or two.

Could the enemy retreat farther underground? We would have to stop that.

If we could get the wind right, our gas-shells would fill those caverns—smoke the enemy out like bees. And if we could get them out into the daylight, blinded—

Nereid's cry silenced him. "The Midge! Look!"

From the dark northern horizon a crimson light came in a beam. Light, or fire? A beam of something, crimson as a blood-stream. It rose from the northern distance; like a gigantic crimson jet of fluid it arched up and fell. An arc, huge as a rainbow—a rainbow of blood across the void of the abyss. Its distant source we could not

see; its end fell here upon the Mountains of the Moon and drenched them with its crimson.

The planes overhead winged away; the earth bombardment stopped. We approached within ten miles or so, with our image-finder trained upon the scene.

Smithby could never forget his mission; our snapping sender flashed out the image to be caught and relayed over the world. Hundreds of millions of people everywhere sat tense at their mirrors watching the silent red scene.

Rainbow of blood-light falling upon the dark Moon Mountain ridge. A great round pool glowing at the end of the rainbow. The mountains were melting; as though they were molds of black and white wax under the heat of a pressure torch, they melted.

The rainbow end moved over, slowly traveling along the ridge, melting it away—wax fuming, bubbling and plowing in lava streams down the slopes. The nearer end of the ridge where first the blood-light had struck was a depression now—a great caldron where the ridge had been; a caldron of fused molten rock, viscous, cooling from yellow-red to red and then to black. Along the whole length of the ridge the blood-red rainbow sprayed its penetrating heat.

A silent, red inferno. And presently there were dim muffled sounds as underground gases exploded; and the hiss of the licking gas flames.

We could feel the heat. The glare rose and painted all the sky with blood.

Abruptly the crimson rainbow was gone. The Moon ridge had vanished into a boiling trench of lava, topped by hungry licking red-green tongues of flame, with a huge black gas cloud, rolling up.

The fires cooled and died. The red turned slowly black. The trench lay naked and dead in the moonlight—fused rock cooling into shapes fantas-

tic. A dead, empty trench with a gray mantle of ashes sifting down upon it, to mark where the Gians had been.

CHAPTER XXV.

MURMURING RIVER.

THEY call this now the era of our Greater World. This year that has passed has brought us many strange things. I am not one to recount them—the wonders of the Lowlands, the world's changed climate; the struggles, the reorganization, it seems, of everything which we held to be standard.

There is still chaos. I could not, with authority or understanding, write of it. I have told the rôles which I and my friends had forced upon us, that is all.

For those many omissions which would have made my narrative more logically clear, I ask indulgence.

Books, in future years, will be written upon many angles of the subject. The science of those two races who with enmity and smoldering strife lived in the depths of our great earth—our scientists will attempt to picture it. But that will be futile, no doubt. The Midge have gone. From that very night when their crimson rainbow annihilated their enemy, they have never been seen.

Strange race! Our scientists say that in those last days they undoubtedly located the Gians and blasted them with a hatred born of centuries of oppres-

sion. And then, with their exploring parties underground finding food and water, they vanished with their weapon into the dark realms from which they had come. They wanted nothing of our world—feared us perhaps.

We are an adventurous civilization. There is already talk of exploring the depths—finding the Midge.

There will be books of sociology written upon the strange Gian civilization. I have no more than hinted at it. Already there is much controversy. It has been said that Rhana was the personification of all womanhood if given unlimited power. I think that is unjust to womanhood. In every age and every race there have been bad men and good men—bad women and good women. There was Rhana—and there was Nereid.

A river flows beneath these windows of the house where Polly and I are living. It murmurs its endless song. Arturo and Nereid are no more than half a mile up its stream. They often come past in a boat—sometimes swimming down, with the boat floating after them. They went past like that this evening, just a short while ago. Polly was here with me then—pushing aside these pages to sit with me and watch the moonlight on the river.

And Arturo and Nereid came swimming past. They looked up and saw us. They waved. Nereid's hair streamed out long and tawny in the silver rippling water; her face was laughing as she flung up her arm toward us and dived after Arturo.

THE END.

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The Readers' Viewpoint



THIS JOKUS FELLOW

FROM time to time we have published in Argonotes accounts of a mysterious "Jokus" who haunted Scranton, Pennsylvania, and surrounding towns, spreading the ARGOSY gospel by sample copies, acrostics, signs, *et cetera*. Certainly he brought ARGOSY to the attention of many new readers, a good number of whom informed us of his activities as does Mr. Chase:

Scranton, Pa.

A couple of weeks ago I found an ARGOSY in the place where I work. I am a night man in charge of a restaurant and food parlor.

I did not take much notice at the time, but I saw the word "Jokus" printed on the cover.

A few mornings later when I went home from work I found another copy on my front porch, which also had "Jokus" printed on it. I wondered about it, but not until the other night did I take any particular notice.

A book which I am sending you by parcel post was left in the lunchroom by some one, and it also had "Jokus" printed on it. At last I came to the conclusion that this Jokus has some sort of an advertising scheme and was probably working for some prize. I hope he wins.

The stories in the two copies of ARGOSY I read were very good, and if the issues are all as good I intend to be a steady reader of it, as I work all night and have lots of time to go through them.

Hoping that this letter will not take up too much of your valuable time and that "Jokus" will be found out, I remain,

HAROLD CHASE.

"JOKUS'S" activities were in no way connected with our Circulation and Promotion Departments, so we started a still hunt for this zealous ARGOSY propagandist. And with success. He has been smoked out—and now stands up to confess:

Scranton, Pa.

I am sorry that my real identity was discovered, although I did not take any special pains to keep it secret. Anyway, it was a lot of fun, as well as giving ARGOSY a boost and doing the public a favor by letting them know

that there was such a wonderful magazine on sale every week.

Now that you have learned that I have been boosting ARGOSY, I wonder if you know in how many different ways I have been sending out the good word? Well, here is the whole thing in brief:

I found that I had a surplus of books and ARGOSIES for about twenty years back and a good many of *Flynn's*, also later *Detective Fiction Weekly*, and quite a few *Munsey's*. I started out by taking a few copies of ARGOSY with me every time I went out and left them in lunchrooms, pool rooms barber shops, railway stations, on street cars, busses, in stores, in fact, any place where I knew they would be found.

When working nights I would drop a copy in a parked automobile or on somebody's porch. I figured if they liked fiction and once read ARGOSY—well, it would speak for itself.

The other magazines always contained some reference to ARGOSY so that it could be seen. I probably disposed of more than a thousand magazines in this manner. The five issues which contained the "Seven Footprints to Satan" I left in the West Side branch of the Public Library.

In the meantime I dashed off that acrostic which you know about, typed several hundred copies in my spare time and placed them in library books.

Lately I have been pasting copies of the same poem on the inside cover of books of all descriptions and leaving them in various places, as I did with the magazines, with a penciled note for the one who found it to pass it on to a friend after reading. I know some of these books have done quite a little traveling. Two of them, "Ivanhoe," by Sir Walter Scott, and "The Eleventh Hour," by David Potter, have circled back to me.

If I am not becoming too much of a bore, friend editor, let me inform you that you have the best magazine at any price on the market.

I consider myself in a position to know what good fiction is, fiction reading being my favorite indoor and outdoor sport for about twenty-five years. I have read the Bible through, "Pilgrims' Progress," Shakespeare, "Josephus," Coleridge, Milton, Sir Walter Scott, Longfellow, Dickens, and many other big things in the line of reading. In fact, what I have not read is hardly worth reading.

After all, I always come back to ARGOSY. I haven't missed an issue since I returned from France. Before joining up in 1917, I did not miss ARGOSY for several years. How many I missed during those hectic days "over there" I do not know.

I am sincerely glad that my efforts to boost your magazine seem to be fruitful and I shall continue to boost it as much as ever.

I don't care how much publicity you give to "Jokus," especially if you think it might be an incentive to your other readers to pass their copies of ARGOSY to a non-reader of the magazine, but please let me remain "JOKUS."

SO "Jokus" he shall remain—and may his good work continue. "Jokus" has no copyright on any of his activities and is perfectly willing to have other ARGOSY fans emulate him by passing along their finished copies to possible new converts.

HULBERT FOOTNER collected his share of bouquets on "The Black Ace":

Chicago, Ill.

Of late, your magazine has been the cause of my sitting up too late nights. However, Fred MacIsaac's "Golden Burden" was splendid reading.

Mme. Storey is superb. "The Black Ace" so far is most thrilling, and has all the earmarks of keeping me up a few more nights.

I have never commented on any stories in your magazine, but I will truthfully say that most of them are splendid stuff, including "The Silver Fang."

G. A. KRUEGER.

Wichita, Kan.

Let's have more stories by Wirt and Hulbert Footner. Their stories are the best I have ever read. Don't pay any attention to the knockers. Your magazine is fine the way it is. I haven't missed a copy for over four years.

JOHN C. MCCARTNEY.

THIRTY-FIVE years of reading—and this old-timer is still satisfied!

Mamaroneck, N. Y.

Have often wondered why some of the real old-timers did not drop in a few lines to the Argonotes. By this I mean those who started reading the ARGOSY in the wicked nineties or the woolly eighties. Of course, I am not one of those birds, but my steady reading does date back to 1894, when the ARGOSY was a monthly. Also read the *Ocean and Railroad* until they were combined, and later combined with the *All-Story* and later, about 1910, I believe, if my memory serves me right the *All-Story* and *Argosy* got together as ARGOSY-ALLSTORY.

In the thirty-five years of reading the ARGOSY I have no complaint to make about any of the stories published, with one exception, they have kept me up all night on quite a number of occasions. Have no suggestions to make, only keep the good work going

R. W. HAWKINS.

A YOUNG lady from Texas has the floor:

Fort Worth, Texas.

Although I can't compete with the old-timers, I most certainly devour each issue now. I can hardly wait for Wednesdays to arrive. To me Wednesday will ever be a red-letter day.

Whenever I see a kicker Argonote I pass it by and enjoy the rest of them.

My home is in Missouri, but I've been to the Dakotas and now must help keep Texas in the limelight. I love to read your clean outdoor stories and Westerns.

MILDRED NELSON.

A "RECENT convert" to ARGOSY is Mr. Bell—and a well pleased one, too:

Los Angeles, Calif.

May I congratulate you on the superb stories that have recently been published in your magazine?

I am a recent convert to the ARGOSY ranks, but I have a deep respect for your publication.

Need I mention any particular stories? They are all good, and I have passed many enjoyable evenings with them.

Continue your Argonotes by all means, for therein lies half the charm of reading.

ERNEST BELL.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

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



Looking Ahead!

Something good ahead on every side next week! Feature stories in every direction—and variety in every title in

The ISSUE OF APRIL 13th

NORTH—there is:

THE BRANDED MAN

A "Mounted" Serial

by VICTOR ROUSSEAU

It is a long while since we have had a Northern serial; but this novel of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is worth waiting for. It is replete with action and sparkles with the exhilarating bite of the clear cold of the frozen North. The tale of a man terribly misjudged—and of his struggle for vindication.

WEST—there is:

ROBBERS' ROOST—by George M. Johnson

A Complete Novelette

Starting with the kidnaping of "Doc" Carter from a railroad train, this is a tense and fast moving Western story that is quite out of the usual Western mold. A tale that should appeal to any lover of good stories regardless of setting.

SOUTH—there is:

THE CASTAWAY—by Eugene Cunningham

A Feature Short Story

"On the beach" in Central America—and faced with life's crisis.

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

coming in the issue of April 20th!

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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\$100
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No. 850
\$50
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No. 857
\$37.50
\$1.00
a wk.



No. 854
\$75
\$1.75
a wk.



No. 855
\$125
\$3.25
a wk.



No. 857
\$150
\$3.75
a wk.



Wedding Rings
No. 824—The "Elite" \$8.00
18-k white gold.
Set with 3 Diamonds. \$22.50
5 Diamonds. \$32.50; 7 Diamonds. \$42.50; 9 Diamonds. \$52.50; 12 Diamonds. \$67.50
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for PILES

When you start a serial in the Argosy-Allstory you only wait a week to go on with it. Start one this week, and you'll buy every number until it's concluded.

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by diet alone is merely treating symptoms and not the disease. Naturally if no sugar is taken into the system there will be none to excrete. My book

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Do you know why many men are old at 40, while others are young at 70? Do you know why the prostate gland slows up and why it causes bladder weakness, sciatica, pains in the back, feet and legs? Write today for scientist's new book FREE. Learn just what these symptoms mean. Learn of a new kind of drugless treatment. Learn how 50,000 men past 40 have found quick relief without medicine. Learn facts of priceless value to you. Write now for an

interesting illustrated and copyrighted book, "Why Many Men Are Old at 40." Address The Electro Thermal Co., 3016 Morris Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio.

How Would \$150 a Week Strike You?

Start right in making real money—\$90 to \$150 a week full time—\$50 to \$75 a week spare time. You can do it. With my Profit-Sharing Plan, Arthur M. Stone cleared \$110.55 in 2 weeks. You can make these big profits, too. Just help me introduce my amazing Raincoats in your territory and make 3 to 4 times as much as you've ever earned before. Prentiss, Mass., took hold of this proposition and cleared \$945 in 1 month. Brooks, N. Y., has made as high as \$80 in one day. Now it's your turn to share in these fat profits.

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You don't need any capital, training or experience. There's a tremendous demand for my Coats because I make them up in the newest styles and the latest colors. They are well tailored of high-quality fabric—wind-proof, dust-proof, rain-proof. Yet, due to huge production I can sell these Coats at prices far below usual market prices. No wonder it's easy to get orders. And that's all you do. I deliver and collect. Every man, woman and child a prospect.

SEND NO MONEY

Just mail a letter or post card. I'll send FREE everything you need to start right in making \$75 to \$150 a week. Also sample Coat FREE to workers. You don't risk a penny. The only way you can lose is by turning down my offer. So act quick. Write today to C. E. Comer, Pres.

The Comer Mfg. Co. Dept. 481-L, Dayton, Ohio.



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Imagine being able to purchase these magnificent thin model watches at lowest factory prices on easy payments out of your income, or for cash! Let us send you one of these marvelous watches—you are under no obligation to keep it. You'll agree it is the world's greatest watch value. Send coupon for free 6-color book and learn the true facts!

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If you write at once, will send beautiful style book, showing lowest factory prices on these lifetime insured watches. Thousands save money this way. Send coupon TODAY!

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Luxurious strap and bracelet watches at remarkably low prices! Your greatest opportunity to save! Send coupon for free style book TODAY!

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*... and so to bed ... late ... too much supper ... wish
I could get to sleep ... bad dreams ... business worries ...
dog barks ... baby cries ... time to get up ... jangled nerves
... irritable skin.*

—then is the time your skin
needs the comfort of a fresh Gillette Blade



THE NEW FIFTY-BOX

Fifty fresh double-edged Gillette Blades (10 Packets of five) in a colorful chest that will serve you afterward as a sturdy button box, cigarette box or jewel case. Ideal as a gift, too. Five dollars at your dealer's.

down to the last squeeze and you scarcely have time to lather anyway; mornings when all the cards seem stacked against your Gillette. But slip in a fresh blade. Enjoy the same smooth, clean shave that you get on the finest morning.

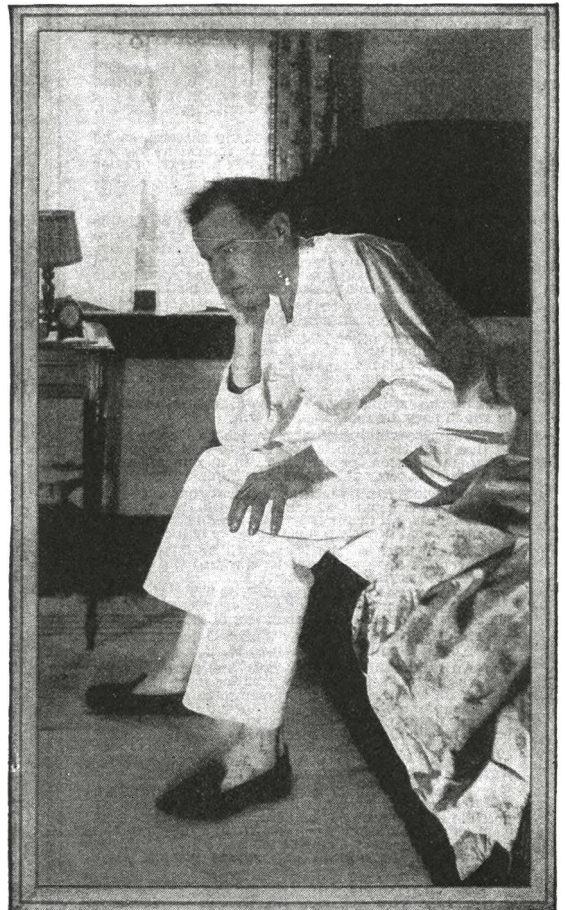
You have to go through the Gillette factory to understand how it's possible to pack so much dependable shaving comfort into a razor blade.

There you see some \$12,000,000 worth of machinery invented and improved continuously for twenty-five years for just one purpose: to make the Gillette Blade—every Gillette Blade—do its smooth, expert job every morning for the thirty million Americans who count on it.

There you see in operation the unique system which makes four out of nine Gillette blade department workers inspectors—paid a bonus for every defective blade they discard.

At least a dozen varying conditions affect the comfort of your shave. But the Gillette Blade doesn't change. It is the *one* constant factor in your daily shave. Gillette Safety Razor Co., Boston, U. S. A.

★ **Gillette** 



EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY *Announces*

\$30,000

Read these simple conditions:

1 Any resident of the United States and its dependencies or any resident of the Dominion of Canada is eligible, excepting individuals and families of individuals engaged either directly or indirectly, in the manufacture, sale, commercial finishing or professional use of photographic goods. This contest is strictly for the amateur. Contest starts March 1, closes May 31, 1929.

2 Any Kodak, Brownie, Hawk-Eye, or other camera producing negatives not larger than $3\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (postcard size) and any brand of film, chemicals and papers may be used in making pictures for this contest. A contestant need not own the camera. The finishing, of course, may be done by his dealer.

3 Both ordinary contact prints, and enlargements not to exceed 7 inches in the long dimension, are eligible; but,

4 In the Special Enlargement Competition, prints having a long dimension of not less than 9 inches or more than 17 inches are eligible. Entries in the Enlargement Competition are eligible for Special Enlargement Prizes only.

5 Prints shall be unmounted, but an entry blank shall be enclosed. Use the accompanying blank, obtain others from dealers; copy the form, or write Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

6 An entrant may submit as many pictures as he pleases and at as many different times as he pleases, provided that the pictures have been made on or after March 1, 1929, and that they reach the Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., by the specified closing date.

7 Entries in the Child Picture Contest to be eligible for the March award shall be received at the Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., by midnight of March 31, 1929; and for the April award by midnight of April 30, 1929. The child in the picture shall not have passed the twelfth birthday.

8 A picture that is to be considered in the Child Picture Contest must be so designated on the back.

In the case of other pictures, however, the entrant need not, unless he wishes to, specify into which of the classifications his pictures should go. The Prize Contest Office reserves the right to change a classification for the benefit of the entrant. If not classified on the back by the entrant, the pictures will go into the classes in which they are most likely to win.

9 Each prize-winning picture, together with the negative, and the rights to the use thereof for advertising, publication, or exhibition in any manner, becomes the property of the Eastman Kodak Company.

10 No prints can be returned, except that entries in the Enlargement Competition will be returned upon request. All mailings are at owner's risk. Do not send negatives until they are requested.

11 The decision of the judges will be final. In the event of a tie, the advertised award will be paid to each of the tying contestants.

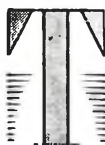
12 All pictures will be judged 60% on subject interest; 25% on composition and arrangement; 25% on photographic excellence (correctness of exposure, etc.).

13 Mail pictures to Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

14 An entrant may receive only one prize. In case the judges select any entrant for more than one award, he will receive the largest thereof. If he wins, for example, a \$100 state prize in the Child Picture Contest, and if either the same print or another of his prints in the General Contest wins an award larger than \$100, he will receive the larger amount. The Eastman Kodak Company will consider the purchase of desirable pictures even though not prize winners.

15 Winners of the state prizes in the Child Picture Contest for March will be notified as soon as possible after March 31, and for the April Contest as soon as possible after April 30, 1929; winners in the Special Enlargement Competition and all other classifications will be notified as soon as possible after May 31, 1929.

Grand Prize \$2,500 . . . 11 Prizes of \$500 each . . . 11 Prizes of \$250 each . . . 125 Prizes of \$100 each . . . 1,223 Money Prizes in All . . . for snapshots, time-exposures, enlargements . . . only strictly amateur photographers may compete . . . Every picture-taker has an equal chance to win!



THIS is a contest for *everyone*. It is easy to enter—and there are 1,223 money prizes. Perhaps you have not taken more than a half-dozen pictures in all your life—you may never before have held a camera in your hands—yet *your* entry may please the judges most. And regardless of the make of camera you use—from an inexpensive Kodak, Brownie or Hawk-Eye on up to a camera of the costliest kind—your chance to win is just as good.

This prize money will not be awarded for technical skill alone. You do not need to be an experienced picture maker to win. The bulk of this \$30,000 will go to those who send in the *most interesting pictures* in each of 10 different classifications. Now is the time to get your camera into action. The opportunity to win a cash prize of anywhere from \$2,500 down is knocking at your door.

Here is the way in which the \$30,000 prize money is to be distributed. You may enter for each and all of the classes. Send in as many entries as you like. The more pictures you submit in this contest the better is your chance of being numbered among the 1,223 fortunate ones to win.

GRAND PRIZE—For the Best Picture of Any Type—The best picture of all of those submitted in the following classifications will be awarded a grand prize of \$2,500.

STATE PRIZES—For Child and Baby Pictures—\$11,400 will be awarded for the pictures showing the most interesting children . . . in both March and April \$100 will be given for the best child picture from *each state* of the United States and *each province* of Canada,* making 114 prizes in all.

*District of Columbia counts as one state; Hawaii, Alaska, and all other U. S. dependencies combined count as one state; the Maritime provinces of Canada count as one province. British Columbia and the Yukon count as one province.

Snap as many youngsters as you want, from babies to boys and girls who are beginning to think of themselves as young men and women. Maybe there's a baby right in your own family that could help you win first prize by a big margin. Not necessarily a beautiful child, but one with personality, character, "IT"—in eyes and smile and dimples. Maybe there's such a youngster next door, or next street, but no matter whose baby it is, get the kind of picture that shows it at its best.

Every picture of children that you submit stands a chance of winning the Grand Prize; or any of the 103 prizes in each of four other awards. And even if you don't come in for a share of the prize money, you will, at least, have made an attractive picture to add to your collection. With a little patience, however, you can almost surely get a picture good enough to win. A striking

the Largest Prize Contest in Photographic History

in Cash Awards

for Amateur Picture-Takers Only

close-up of a boy or girl; a group at play; youngsters laughing, sleeping; in every-day clothes, rompers, overalls or fancy costume. Anything goes as long as it is a picture of children, and if it has the least spark of interest in it, don't fail to send it in. What looks to you like a "flop" may look like a "wow" to the judges.

This award gives you 106 chances to win: (1) You can enter the March contest for the best child picture from each state, (2) You can enter the April contest for the best child picture from each state, (3) The pictures that you have entered for the state contest during either of these months and pictures that reach Rochester during May are all eligible for the Grand Prize of \$2,500 or for any of the one hundred three prizes in Awards No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, or No. 10.

AWARD NO. 1—Scenics—For the best picture of any city or country outdoor scene . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each. Here's your chance to capitalize your ability to spot an interesting outdoor subject. Landscapes and marines, distant and nearby views, mountains and water, nearby bits of nature composition, travel subjects and street scenes.

AWARD NO. 2—Informal Portraits—Pictures made at from, say two to ten feet distance, for the purpose of showing a person's features . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 3—Story-Telling Pictures—For the pictures telling the most interesting story . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

Take a picture in which children, adults or animals do something—anything except looking at the camera. For instance, a puppy pulling at a baby's sleeve; children in any form of play; father proudly exhibiting the new car to a friend. There are any number of opportunities for you to take pictures like these.

AWARD NO. 4—Sport Pictures—For the best pictures of sports and games . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each. It may be skating or coasting or skiing—or baseball, tennis, golf. Hiking, too . . . and boating, archery, polo riding—all serve as opportunities to make prize winning pictures.

AWARD NO. 5—Animal Pictures—For the best pictures of pets, live stock, wild animals either at large or in zoos . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 6—Nature Study Pictures—For the best pictures of flowers, birds, butterflies, leaves, rocks, spiderwebs, any nature subject . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 7—Buildings and Architectural Detail—For the best exteriors of homes, churches, schools, offices, libraries, other buildings, or portions thereof . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 8—Interior Pictures—For the best inside views of rooms, corridors, staircases, or other portions of homes or other buildings . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 9—Still Life Studies—For the best pictures of art objects, curios, cut flowers, any still-life subjects in artistic arrangement . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 10—Unusual Photographs—For the best pictures made at night; pictures of fires, lightning, storms, silhouettes; or any pictures that are unusual either as to topic or as to photographic

treatment . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

Special Prizes for Enlargements—\$1,350—Any picture is a better picture when enlarged. For the best enlargements from negatives made on or after March 1, 1929 . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 and 50 prizes of \$5 each. Your film dealer or photo-finisher will be glad to help you choose a picture likely to win. (See Conditions Nos. 2 and 4.)

Each of these big cash prizes will have to be won by somebody . . . why not you! Aim at the big money and you stand an excellent chance of winning it or of coming in for one of the smaller prizes. Don't miss this chance of winning a share of the big prize money. There is always the certainty of being rewarded with some excellent pictures you might otherwise fail to get.

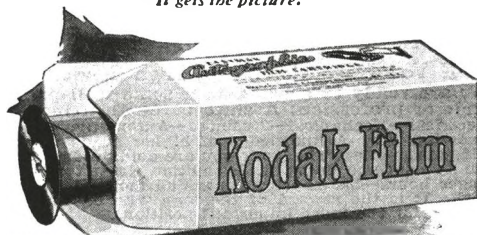
THESE ARE THE JUDGES. Observe how diversified are their interests and how broad are their viewpoints and experience. You must admit that no fairer Board of Judges could be assembled than that represented here:

Madame Galli-Curci, internationally known singer; Miss Ethel Barrymore, leading actress; Howard Chandler Christy, noted artist; Clare Briggs, famous cartoonist; James R. Quirk, publisher, Photoplay magazine; Rudolf Eickemeyer, distinguished photographer, Medalist Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; Hector Charlesworth, author, critic, editor "Toronto Saturday Night"; Kenneth Wilson Williams, editor "Kodakery" and photographic expert.

For the two Monthly Child Picture Contests, the following will be judges: James R. Quirk, Rudolf Eickemeyer, Kenneth Wilson Williams.

NOW—read the simple Contest Conditions and get your camera out!

Kodak Film in the familiar yellow box is dependably uniform. Reduces the danger of under- or over-exposure. It gets the picture.



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(Please Print)

Street Address.....

Town and State.....

Make of Camera..... Make of Film.....

Enclose this blank with your entry and mail to Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

Do not place your name on either the front or the back of any picture. Be sure that each entry in the State Child Picture Contest is so designated on the back.



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Charter. The School was chartered in 1897 as an educational institution.

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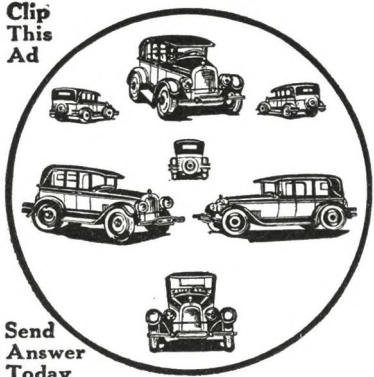
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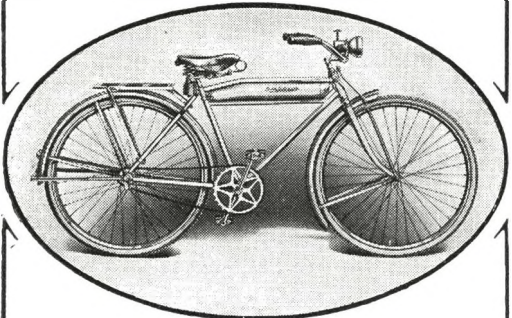
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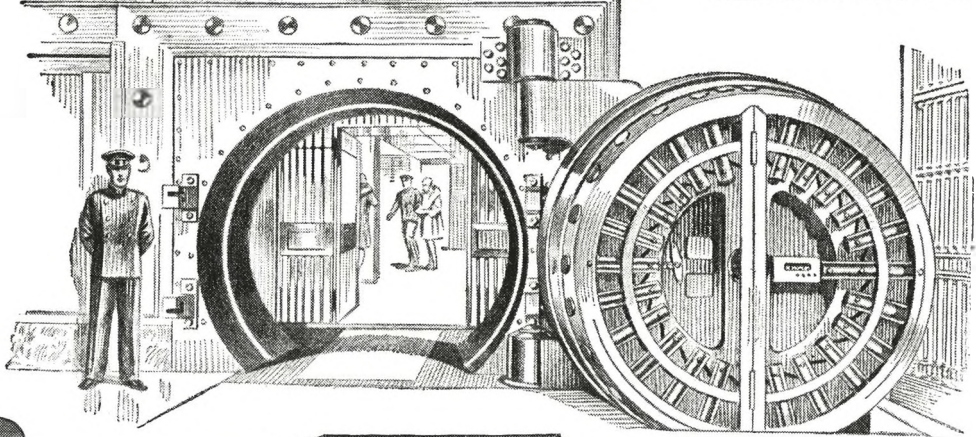
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