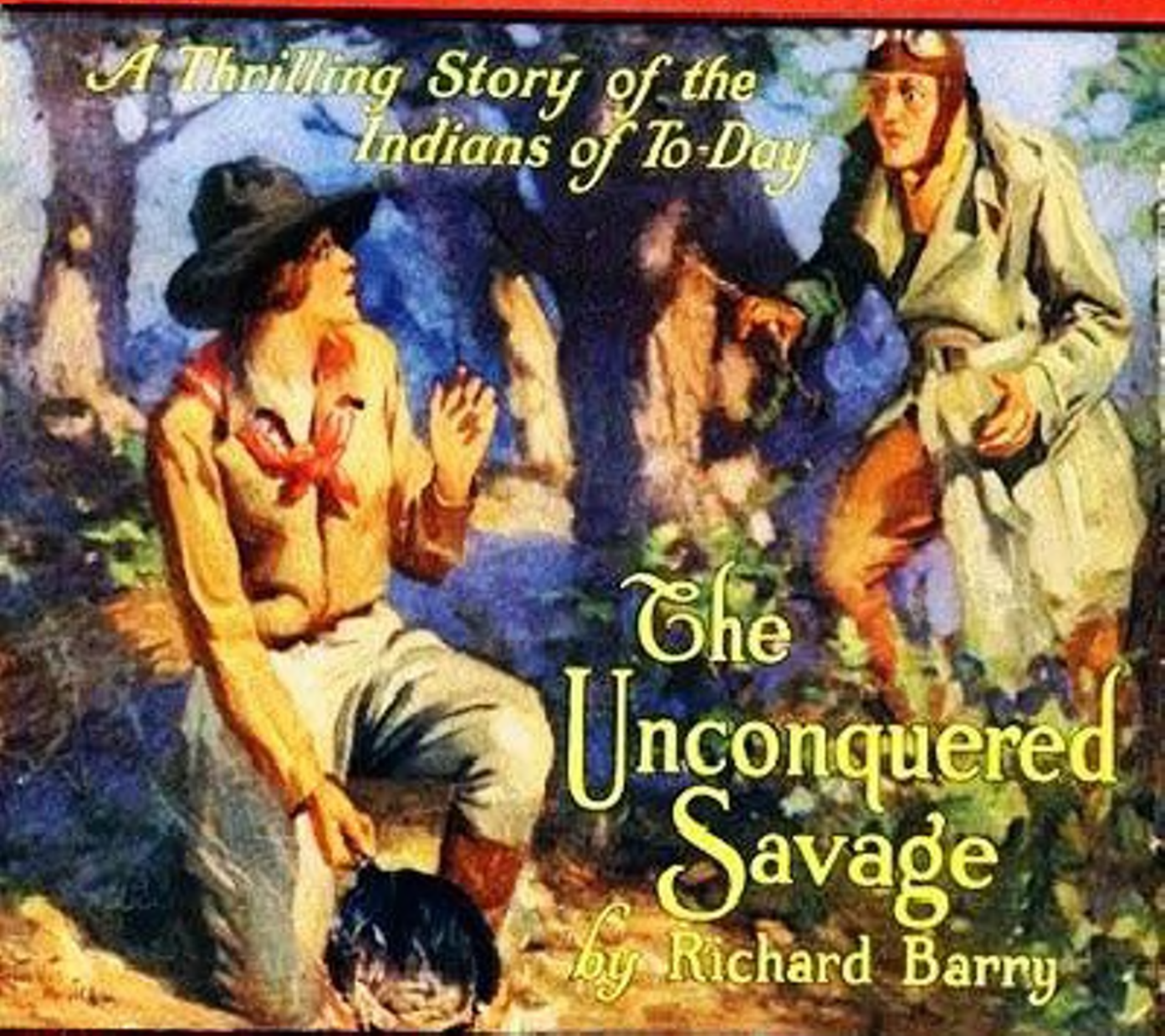
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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Send No Money
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An amazing new offer—absolutely no risk to you—you pay nothing until satisfied after trial—read every word of this offer:

Just send the coupon below—**don't enclose a penny** and we will send you on approval at our expense the solid gold ring shown above set with a genuine Lachnite gem, weighing about one carat. **Pay nothing to the postman when it arrives—no C. O. D.** Merely accept the ring and wear it wherever you go for a week, at our expense. Test it in every way. After a week, if you or any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, return it at our expense and that ends the matter. **You have risked nothing—made no deposit.** But if you decide to keep the ring, send us only $1.00 after the trial and then $2.50 a month until you have paid only $18.75—a mere fraction of what a diamond of equal size would cost.

Send Coupon

Already over 300,000 people have bought Lachnites. You can judge for yourself on this amazing offer. Only a limited number sent out on this absolutely free trial offer—so send coupon now. **Be sure to give your finger size.**

Harold Lachman Co. 204 S. Peoria Street Dept. 9275 Chicago

Send me, absolutely free and prepaid, for a week's free trial, the solid gold ladies' solitaire ring as advertised, set with a genuine Lachnite. I am to pay nothing when it arrives, no C. O. D. After a week, I will either return the ring at your expense and that will end the matter, or I will send you $1.00 and then $2.50 on the first of each month until $18.75 has been paid. **I enclose my finger size.**

*Age*_____ *Occupation*_____

*Name*_____

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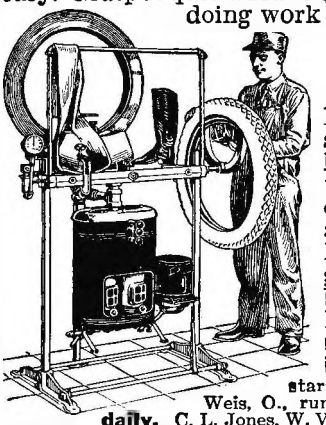
Make $1,000 Easy!
From Evening Work

Skidmore of Ohio started last Nov. Has made **$3000** to date! Greatest proposition of century. Grasp it quick! Make **$30** to **$50** a week doing work at home evenings.



Do Not Quit Your Job

Make big money on side. Turn spare hours into cash with my **new home outfit.** Vulcanize automobile tires. Mend tubes. Repair gum boots and rubber goods of all kinds. Do **thriving neighborhood business.** Many men started economically. L. D. Weis, O., running better than **$15 daily.** C. L. Jones, W. Va., averaging more than **$47 day** during past six weeks, and so on.

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Write me. Get my help. Begin **now.** Season **just opening.** Tire repair **work** galore **everywhere.** I furnish **everything,** including machine, tools, clamps, materials and directions. No experience needed. Everything **plain and easy.** All instructions **learned in one evening.** Can't go wrong. Marvelous proposition. Wm. Howe, Mo., says: "Biggest little machine I ever saw." Steve Marchand, Texas, writes: "Am having wonderful results with your machine." Others are making **extra money**—you can too!

Mail Postal To Me, Tonight!

Get full details. It's a proposition you can handle. Place machine anywhere—garage, shed, basement. Has **wonderful capacity.** Work is **easy, pleasant** and **fascinating.** Starts you in big paying business. Puts you on road to independence. Send quick for full information. Address me personally. M. Haywood, Pres.

Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.
828 Capitol Ave. Indianapolis, Ind.

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

Guaranteed 8000 Miles New First Cord Tires

Heavy, good looking Cord Tires that sell for less than fabrics—a real 8,000 mile guarantee and courteous treatment from a reliable house. Our customers are so pleased they tell their neighbors about us and our business is growing so rapidly that we can afford to discontinue selling dealers and give you the benefit of dealer discounts. Order your tires today. Don't pay list prices any longer.

THE PRICES BELOW INCLUDE A BRAND NEW TUBE

30x3 $ 8.75	31x4 $14.10	34x4 $18.60	34x4½ $23.20
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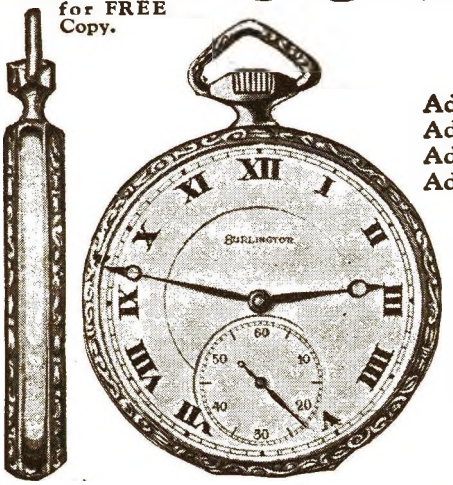
Send no money. Just write today and tell us the size of your tires and the number you want. Tires will be shipped C.O.D. with section unwrapped for inspection. All tires have non-skid tread.

CHARLES TIRE CORP., Dept. 502, **2824 Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.**

21 Jewel Burlington

Just Out
Latest Designs in Watch Cases beautifully illustrated in our booklet. Send for FREE Copy.



Adjusted to the Second
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21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels
25 Year Gold Strata Case
Your Choice of Dials
(Including Montgomery R. R. Dial)
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Only $1.00 Down

Only One Dollar Down will buy this masterpiece of watch manufacture. The balance you are allowed to pay in small, easy, monthly payments. The Burlington — a 21-Jewel Watch — is sold to you at a price much lower than that of other high-grade watches. Besides, you have the selection of the finest thin model designs and latest styles in watch cases. Don't delay! Write for the FREE Watch Book and our SPECIAL OFFER today.

Write While This Special Offer Lasts

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon. Find out about this great special offer which is being made for only a limited time. You will know a great deal more about watch buying when you read this book. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Remember, the Burlington is sent to you for only One Dollar down, balance in small monthly payments. Send the coupon for watch book and our special offer TODAY!

Burlington Watch Company
Dept. 1455, 19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Burlington Watch Company
Dept. 1455, 19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert St., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Please send me (without obligations and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your $1.00 down offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII CONTENTS FOR MAY 27, 1922 NUMBER 1

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

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

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

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

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1922

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

The Price You Pay

For dingy film on teeth

Let us show you by a ten-day test how combating film in this new way beautifies the teeth.

Now your teeth are coated with a viscous film. You can feel it with your tongue. It clings to teeth, enters crevices and stays. It forms the basis of fixed cloudy coats.

Keeps teeth dingy

Film absorbs stains, making the teeth look dingy. Film is the basis of tartar. It holds food substance which ferments and forms acids. It holds the acids in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

Millions of germs breed in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea. Thus most tooth troubles are now traced to film. And, despite the tooth brush, they have constantly increased.

Attack it daily

Careful people have this film removed twice yearly by their dentists. But the need is for a daily film combatant.

Now dental science, after long research, has found two ways to fight film. Able authorities have proved their efficiency. A new-type tooth paste has been perfected to comply with modern requirements. The name is Pepsodent. These two film combatants are embodied in it, to fight the film twice daily.

Two other effects

Pepsodent also multiplies the starch digestant in saliva. That is there to digest starch deposits which otherwise may cling and form acids.

It multiplies the alkalinity of the saliva. That is Nature's neutralizer for acids which cause decay.

Millions employ it

Millions of people now use Pepsodent, largely by dental advice. The results are seen everywhere — in glistening teeth.

Once see its effects and you will adopt it too. You will always want the whiter, cleaner, safer teeth you see. Make this test and watch the changes that it brings. Cut out the coupon now.

Pepsodent PAT. OFF. REG. U.S.

The New-Day Dentifrice

Endorsed by modern authorities and now advised by leading dentists nearly all the world over. All druggists supply the large tubes.

10-Day Tube Free 838

THE PEPSODENT COMPANY,
Dept. 980, 1104 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Mail 10-Day Tube of Pepsodent to

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ONLY ONE TUBE TO A FAMILY

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

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

Minimum space four lines.

July 1st Argosy-Allstory Forms Close June 3rd.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS, $8 A DAY TAKING ORDERS FOR INSYDE TYRES. Positively prevent punctures and blowouts. Guaranteed double tire mileage. Old worn out casings will give 3 to 5 thousand miles more service. No tools needed. Just slip inside casing before replacing tube. Will not heat or pinch. Katz made over $500 first month. Biggest thing on the market. Low priced. Write for territory. AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO., B-1001, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A TAILORING AGENT AND MAKE BIG MONEY. Our agents make $10.00 to $25.00 a day selling our made-to-measure clothes, big line of good sellers, at popular prices of $14.00 to $45.00 for complete three piece suits. Sample outfit free. Write A. HERMAN, SALES MANAGER, Dept. A, 1219 West Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS — BIG PROFITS $5 TO $15 DAILY introducing new style guaranteed hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. Your pay in advance. Steady income; repeat orders; experience unnecessary. You write orders; we deliver and collect. Outfit furnished. All colors and grades, including silks. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Desk 225, Cincinnati, Ohio.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—$75.00 to $150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. Mr. A. Ray Ames, Sales-Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago.

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

SELL HOLMES TIRES AND TUBES. No capital required. $100 weekly income. Price sells them, quality gets re-orders. HOLMES RUBBER CO., 1500 W. 15th, Dept. A, Chicago.

AGENTS—EASY, QUICK SALES. $60 to $100 weekly. Valuable free premium to every customer. You write orders. We deliver and collect. Commissions daily. No capital or experience. Wonderful new solid aluminum handle big cutlery set, sells itself. Best year round proposition. Sample outfit free. Also free Ford car offer. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20, Chicago.

$195 EARNED BY SCHLEICHER in FIRST TWELVE HOURS. Self-selling proposition establishes new money-making records. Automatic hot or cold running water bath equipment without plumbing or waterworks, only $7.50. Exclusive territory. Investigate. Send no money. Terms. Write today. ALLEN MFG. CO., 671 Allen Building, Toledo, Ohio.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 3,000,000 readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, N. Y.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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

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

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND OPPORTUNITY! 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts near hustling city in Michigan. $15 to $35 per acre, very easy terms. Write today for big FREE booklet giving full information. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245, First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn $30 to $35 **Extra Every Week,** taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples **today.** THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. E-104, Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkerboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book FREE. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, O.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

WE PAY $7 A DAY TAKING ORDERS FOR STAINLESS STEEL CUTLERY SET. Guaranteed. Aluminum handle. We deliver direct to your customer and pay you every day. Big demand. No capital or experience needed. Big money for spare time. Complete outfit to workers. PARKER MFG. CO., 206 Awl Street, Dayton, Ohio.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—MAKE $75.00 WEEKLY selling **Coffield Tire Protectors.** Prevents punctures and blowouts, doubles mileage. Easily applied; no cement or tools required. Absolute three-year guarantee. Liberal commissions paid weekly. Bewley made $1006 in two months. No capital required. Write quick. COFFIELD TIRE PROTECTOR CO., 242 Court, Dayton, Ohio.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., 200 Olive, St. Louis, Mo.

Sales Agents, Men or Women. $200 a month. Year round position. No layoffs. Take orders for Jennings New Style Hosiery. Written guarantee of satisfaction or new hose free. Write for outfit. Jennings Mfg. Co., Dept. 209, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS, $60 TO $200 A WEEK, Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431H N. Clark St., Chicago.

SALES AGENTS WANTED in every county to give all or spare time. Positions worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

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

SALES REPRESENTATIVE WANTED every county to give all or spare time. Position worth $1200 to $3000 yearly. No previous experience or capital necessary. Write for full particulars. A. E. SILVER-CHAMBERLIN COMPANY, Clayton, N. J.

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen, send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 140 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MEN—WOMEN. ENORMOUS PROFITS. $25 to $100 daily wholesale or retail. Manufacturing Polar Bars. Chocolate Coated Ice Cream Novelty. 10c Package costs 3c to make. Sensational seller. Complete outfit $17.50. INTERNATIONAL CHOCOLATE CO., 218 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

Rag Jass Piano, Saxophone, or Tenor Banjo in 20 lessons. Christensen Schools in most cities, or learn by mail. Write for Booklet or money-making teacher's opportunity. Christensen School, 441, 22 E. Jackson, Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Obtain this World Famed Player Piano *without additional strain or worry*

The Virtuolo may be obtained in various instruments, as follows:	
Home Companion Virtuolo	$495
Colonial Virtuolo in Conway Piano	595
Petite Virtuolo in Hallet & Davis (4 ft. 4 in. high)	685
Puritan Virtuolo in Hallet & Davis (full size)	750
The Reproducing Virtuolo in Hallet & Davis Grand, on which may be played exact reproductions of world famous artists	2250

Now $495 *for a Genuine* VIRTUOLO PLAYER PIANO

Remarkable new plan fostered by noted educators and authorities

WOULD you like to own a wonderful player-piano—a genuine Virtuolo, supreme in musical centers throughout the world?

You can, regardless of how moderate your circumstances, or how carefully you must watch expenses.

An amazing new plan of pricing and financing which has just been perfected. A plan backed by a world-noted musical institution, and fostered by eminent authorities and educators in a nation-wide movement to place real music in every American home.

The coupon below brings confidential information by return mail. It marks a new era. An era which puts the family of moderate means on the footing formerly restricted to the financially prominent.

The Object Is This:

The plan is educational in purpose.

Its object is to give *all* children—rich and poor alike—the benefit of association with the refining influence of correctly rendered music. The invaluable association which means so much in later social and business life.

Also to provide home entertainment for the older children. For the growing boys and girls whom the dangerous influences of the outside world are constantly calling away from the refining influences of the home.

An Absolutely NEW Idea

The plan is new. It is propounded from a new idea. It embodies a unique plan of manufacturing and financing. And places the heretofore "unattainable" player-piano within the reach of every home.

It throws a new light entirely on the matter of obtaining musical environment. It has been carefully evolved by experts. It meets the *individual requirements* of every family of *every* status and condition. It is made possible only by the world spread manufacturing capacity, and powerful financial position of the Hallet & Davis Company.

All parents are urged to get the facts, without delay. They are confidential. They will amaze you. To obtain them quickly, detach and mail the coupon below.

THE VIRTUOLO
PLAYER PIANO
Made by
HALLET & DAVIS
Established 1839

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION COUPON

HALLET & DAVIS PIANO CO.,
146 Boylston St., Boston, Mass.

Send me confidential prices and terms of Virtuolo.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... *State*.....

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED—MALE

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

PATENT ATTORNEYS

SONG POEMS WANTED

WANTED—MISCELLANEOUS

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII SATURDAY, MAY 27, 1922 NUMBER 1

The Unconquered Savage

Part I

by Richard Barry

Author of "Petroleum Prince," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GOAL FROM THE FIELD.

"Zippy! Zippy!
Hoo! Rah! Rah!
Carlisle Indians;
Zip! Boom! Bah!"

THIS yell came forth in sturdy unison from a block of seats in the lower front of the grand stand. It was like any other college yell, though a careful critic might have said it seemed a bit more disciplined than others, a bit more mechanical.

All eyes turned toward this block. It contained several hundred persons all of whom seemed to be in superb health and all tanned a ruddy bronze, but among them was not one touch of the feminine, neither girl nor woman.

"The Indians!"

The cry came from all sides as onto the field from a door at the end trotted eleven warriors, clad in russet sweaters and leather leggings. Some donned headguards as they came on. Others adjusted knee pads.

However, this yell was only as one to two, when, a moment later, the door opened at the opposite end of the field and out trotted eleven prime athletes in crimson sweaters. As with one accord the thousands in the grand stand rose to their feet, waving flags, tooting horns, clashing bells, and shouting in fierce intensity:

"Ithaca! Ithaca!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
Cornell!"

The Indians had been far less savage, much more disciplined in their enthusiasm, than were the partisans of the paleface college. The block of bronzed males, in the lower grand stand, sat now stolidly, but with polite attention, while their antagonists tore the welkin.

From a box, down front on the Cornell side, halfway between the goal posts, a girl leaned frantically over the flag-draped

edge, joining fervently in the Ithaca yell. As the last man left the protection of the fence and appeared fair in the sunlight her face glowed even more expressively and she turned to her companion, a woman of matronly years.

"There he is, auntie!"

"Where, Philippa?"

"There! The very last one."

"What? That child!"

The girl gasped in protest. "Wait till you see him snap the ball. You'll not think he's a child, if he is the very tiniest *man* on the whole eleven."

She was waving her flag frantically toward the "child," and now he saw her and stretched his arm high in salute. She responded with a furious shaking of a handkerchief in one hand and the flag in the other.

The matron, Mrs. Ferndon, waited until the girl sank back, flushed but exhausted, on the nearest chair, while the rival elevens were assembling, one stretched across the field, five on each side of the tiny man in the center, and the other, the russet ones, deployed at gaping distances far away toward the opposite goal.

"So that's Ray Custer? To hear you talk any one would think he was big."

"He *is* big, auntie. Wait! Just wait! You'll think he's as big as two trained elephants soon as they blow that whistle."

"It's your eyes, my dear. They are as big as saucers."

"It's Ray, auntie." She blushed. "I mean Mr. Custer. Oh, stop your nonsense. You know I've only met him twice, but the whole school, co-eds and all, think he is the grandest thing. He's won three games for us now, just by his lonesome."

"Looks as if he had about ten to help him—ten full size men. Counting him, that makes ten and a half."

"They don't count. Wait! Wait! Just wait!" Philippa, partly in disgust with her teasing relative and partly in sheer anxiety for the decisive game to begin, was twisting her gloves and grinding the balls of her tiny feet in the rough boards.

"So you met him only twice," persisted Mrs. Ferndon. "I thought you told me this morning it was three times."

"The first didn't count."

"General introduction, I suppose."

"Of course. Just one of those 'glad to meet you,' 'how do you do' sort of sorority fudge parties. A silly place to meet a man, anyway."

"And that time didn't count?"

Philippa, absorbed in the final preparations for the game, pretended not to hear.

"But there were two times that did count," Mrs. Ferndon bantered.

"Oh, you know what I mean, auntie."

"You mean he has called to see you alone?"

"Well—he—he called once."

"And once you met him by appointment—eh? I thought that was not *au fait* in your sorority?"

Philippa tossed her silky head. "Not by appointment," she smiled. "By accident."

Mrs. Ferndon laughed. "When you two are together he must look like your baby brother."

"His chin is exactly level with mine," Philippa was betrayed into the declaration, and refused to go on with the conversation.

Events on the gridiron below assisted her in her absorption, for now the whistle blew and a pall of silence descended on the tense throng.

Ray Custer, the Ithaca quarterback kicked off, and the diminutive player was after it like a streak. Although his teammates started at the same time he easily distanced all of them.

The Indians deployed in front of their man who had picked up the ball on their forty-five yard line, but they had barely gotten started when Custer, leading his van, plunged in and tackled the warrior who held the ball.

"First down!" shrieked the umpire, and the whistle blew.

Twice the Indians plunged ahead for short gains. Then the ball was passed to their fullback, who lifted it on his toe with a superb kick and it sailed far down the field toward the Cornell goal.

"Teddy Surefoot! Teddy Surefoot! Eat 'em alive! Rah! Rah! Rah! Teddy Surefoot!" came from the Carlisle benches.

"What a magnificent Indian!" exclaimed

Mrs. Ferndon. " And he can kick twice as far as your diminutive hero."

" No, he can't," protested Philippa, " but he ought to, for he's twice as big. But look —look at Ray!"

Custer had the ball and was threading his way back toward the Indian posts. He slipped through the arms of one, dodged another, eluded a third and then went smack into the widespread arms of a fourth before he was downed.

The fourth was the redoubtable fullback from Carlisle.

As the game went on more than half the play seemed to be between those two—the slim little white quarter and the towering, lithe six-footer with bronzed cheeks and stolid eyes. Custer seemed to be a bit faster runner, but the Indian, with his excessive height and reach, had more power in his kick and could send the ball farther.

The two teams must have been rather well matched, for at the end of the third quarter of play the score was nothing to nothing. And five minutes before the end of the game it was still nothing to nothing. Cornell had just lost the ball after three terrific head-on drives in which she had battered her way to within eleven yards of the Indian goal. Then the Carlisleans had come back with two drives that had ended with only a ten-yard gain, although they had managed to bring the play from the edge to the middle of the field. Also a smart little breeze was blowing toward the Cornell goal.

Everyone realized that the Indians would kick now to make certain of getting the ball out of their dangerous territory, but hardly any one imagined it possible that they would try for a goal from the field. It was almost a hundred yards to the Cornell posts. Yet the placement was just right, the wind was right, and Teddy Surefoot was already recognized as the best punter developed in any eastern college that year.

As the Indians huddled about their ball for the signal, Custer, acting as captain for the Ithacans, displaced the right tackle and took the vacancy. This was the only " hole " in the Indian line, and he knew that he himself, as the smallest and quickest man on the team, would be the only one with a chance to get through.

" Four — twenty-eight — five—eleven—D," grunted the red captain. The ball was snapped and Ray sprang like an arrow between the tackle and guard, past the interfering half who saw him coming as he tried desperately to tackle, and full into the middle of the lank powerful fullback.

It was a very fine, snappy, well thought-out play, but it found the peppy quarter about ten seconds too late. The ball rose from the broad toe of the Indian with the lazy certainty of a mudlark climbing from the disturbed shade of a lily pad, described a lovely parabola in which the arc could not have been better measured with a compass, and then dropped easily, with ten inches to spare, right behind the Ithaca posts.

It was a goal from the field, and won the game, for in the few minutes left to play Cornell was helpless.

As the crowds left the stands Philippa turned to her aunt, with assertive calm. " Anyway," she said, unabashed, " if Cornell did lose Ray Custer was surely the best player on that field. Don't you think so?"

" Ye-es," hesitated Mrs. Ferndon, " if you want to leave out Mr. What's His Name—the surefooted man."

" Ugh! Just an Indian! He doesn't count."

" But his foot did!"

At the inevitable dance that night Philippa, though asked several times for every number, felt singularly deserted until a little before midnight a stir in the assembly indicated that the hero of the campus had arrived.

Ray Custer was accompanied by a tall stranger of dignified reserve. Immediately he sought Philippa and introduced his friend. " This is Mr. Jones," he said, " and I know he is too bashful to ask you for himself, but won't you give him a dance?"

Quite true, Mr. Jones did appear to be bashful, for his ruddy color grew even ruddier and instead of gazing directly at Miss Horton he looked at his feet.

It was not the request she wanted, but, before she could reply, Custer added, with an intensity which could not be mistaken, " And I hope you will save the one after for me."

" Why not?" She tried to speak lightly,

and Ray Custer probably thought the tone casual.

"Then that goes for both of us—eh?"

She nodded her head.

"I'll be around—after this dance," and he was gone, leaving her alone with the bulky bashful swain.

Providentially the music began at that moment, for it seemed that Mr. Jones was tongue-tied.

Philippa rose and started for the floor.

"I'm sorry, Miss—Miss Horton, but I don't dance."

She looked at him wonderingly. "Very well," she said, leading the way to the conservatory, "it's nicer to sit one out."

There was a long pause. Mr. Jones seemed unable to find anything to say, and what was still more strange, he seemed now to be quite at ease. Philippa was just a bit miffed. She did not know why, but there was something about Mr. Jones which did not conform to her ideas of courtesy. She was accustomed to a little more deference. He was not discourteous, but, on the other hand, he was not properly attentive. She pretended not to like flattery, but she was quite indignant when she did not receive it.

"Have you known Mr. Custer a long time?" she asked.

"Since this afternoon."

"Where could you meet him this afternoon? He was on the football field until twilight."

"I know. I met him there."

"But—how—"

A comprehension began to dawn on her. She looked at her *vis-à-vis* more carefully. Yes. The cheek bones were high and the lips a trifle full, and the eyes very piercing, the hair extremely black and straight.

"W-what is your name?" she asked, suddenly frightened to realize she was alone with this person, although the music could be heard in the adjoining room where the dancing was going on.

"Jones, Miss Horton. Theodore Jones."

She moved away from him a few inches.

"You're not Mr. Teddy Surefoot?' she gasped.

"Well," he shyly admitted, "some of the boys call me that."

She rose precipitately. "Let us go and find Mr. Custer. I have this next dance with him." She almost ran from the room.

Teddy Surefoot followed slowly, with the ghost of a smile on his dark face.

CHAPTER II.

A TRANSCONTINENTAL AIR FLIGHT.

THE Cornell-Carlisle game was in November. The following June Ray Custer graduated. An account of the intervening seven months is contained in two letters, written by a member of the same class, but in the woman's department of that great co-educational institution. The first was addressed to Mrs. Ferndon at the family home in Utica, and read:

DEAR AUNTIE:

Everything is just the same, and it seems I am to get my diploma, though how I got by in trig is beyond me. The batiste you sent is a dream, and the orchid taffeta with that darling buffon drape is the sweetest thing I ever saw. All I need now is a pair of white buck pumps—no one wears canvas for graduation—and some long—oh, very long—that's the way they all wear them in the senior class—white kids. And I don't see how I can get on without another blouse—something frilly, you know. The tan one is gone and the blue one is faded, and both the whites are just old-fashioned. You have been so good to me I don't know how I can let you do anything more. Good night. I must study. A heap of hugs, and many kisses.

Your loving niece,

PHILIPPA HORTON.

P. S.—You ask about your "child." Well, he is half an inch taller than I am—so there! And he graduates *cum laude*—so double there. Yes, I see him, but too seldom—hardly once a week.

The second was addressed to a girlhood playmate, as follows:

DEAR FLORENCE:

I do hope you can come for the commencement week. The weather is always good here then. You see, Cornell is an agricultural college and they know how to fix the weather for the spring crops. Seriously, you must come. I want you to meet the most interesting *man*. He's graduating this year, too, and he's not only near the head of his class, but he's our great football star. You have surely heard of him—Ray Custer. He has a friend

who rooms with him, and if you will come up the four of us can go around together. Yes, auntie will be here, and that is one reason I want you—I want *you* to be the chaperon.

Lovingly,

PHILIPPA.

Plans for that last gala week of the school year proceeded without a hitch. Mrs. Ferndon sent the kids and the bucks and not only one but two blouses, one of them extremely frilly, and a generous gold piece in addition, for a girl has but one commencement week in the course of her whole life, and Mrs. Ferndon had only one niece.

Florence, too, could come, and did, and that very evening there was to have been a party with two girls and two boys, one of them the quarterback of the last year's football team. Only a letter spoiled it. It is best to give the letter in full, superscription and all:

DARNELL, HAYES AND DARNELL,
Attorneys and Counsellors at Law.
Buffalo, N. Y., June 2, 1907.

RAY CUSTER, Esq., Senior Class, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

DEAR SIR:

We regret to inform you that your father died at his home here last night, and that in the absence of relatives and servants it is incumbent on us, as his attorneys of record, to notify you.

We realize that your presence is required at Ithaca for the graduation ceremonies this week, but earnestly request that you come to Buffalo for at least a day, if possible, as the condition of your father's estate requires your immediate attention.

Respectfully yours,

DARNELL, HAYES AND DARNELL.

It is hardly necessary to record that Ray Custer did not attend Philippa Horton's party that evening. Instead, he boarded the night train for the lake city to the north, and the following morning stood at the bedside of his late father. As he looked down on that impassive face, now forever silenced, he felt for the first time in his life a wave of tenderness for the man. His mother had died when he was an infant, and Jacob Custer had been an aloof father, though extremely exacting.

The chief ambition of the elder Custer in relation to his son was that Ray should become a second edition of himself and extend the business of electrical supplies in which he had made his modest fortune. However, Ray's mechanical turn did not run to business.

At twelve he wanted a bicycle, but he got it only by earning it himself in the sale of storage batteries.

At fifteen he wanted a motorcycle, and he got that only by working in the office during vacations. Doubtless the intent of the elder Custer was kindly, as he watched the boy's developing taste for motor vehicles impartially, insisting, however, that he finance his own purchases.

Ray was one of the first boys in America to own an automobile, and he improvised one by attaching a storage battery in the floor of an old buggy. He got six miles an hour and a vast amount of happiness out of that.

Soon after he entered college the Wright brothers invented the airplane. Instantly air machines became his chief interest in life. During his last year a study of aëronautics was added to the curriculum, and he was among the first to matriculate. He had just passed his examinations with flying colors.

Jacob Custer, however, had never approved. In the beginning he had been against the bicycle, though he had been converted to it when he saw that his boy could make quicker trips on his sales route. He had been against the automobile for years until the streets of his city were alive with them, and then he added an agency for a popular brand to his other activities. By that time, however, Ray was aloft, mentally, in an airplane. This the father had opposed as quixotic, quite forgetting his previous education with the bicycle and the automobile. Ray had not even informed him that he was taking the new course in addition to his other studies.

Now, however, as the boy stood confronting the body of the departed father he thought only of the years of faithfulness during which the elder Custer had ploddingly pursued his way, providing uncomplainingly for the education of his son. This had been the silent object of his life, and it had been achieved.

After the funeral, the following day, Ray went to the office of the attorneys. There

he faced his life squarely for the first time. He was the sole heir, it appeared. There was a will to that effect, and he knew of no one to contest it. The company of Jacob Custer & Co. had always been a business fiction. And now, Mr. Darnell explained, the assets just about equaled the liabilities.

In other words, the business was a slow-going concern, which required an active man to make it pay. Unless Ray, or some one, took hold of it vigorously, it would have to go to the bankruptcy courts very soon.

There remained, however, a life insurance policy. This had been Jacob Custer's one forethought for his son. It placed a neat sum of ready thousands in the young man's hands.

"So here is the situation for you to decide," said Mr. Darnell soberly. "You can take hold of your father's business yourself and perhaps put it on its feet, but you cannot delay. If you do not take hold of it, the only thing to do is to sell, and sell quickly, to save the financial reputation of Jacob Custer & Co. Fortunately I have a purchaser, one who is ready to offer you a fair sum for the good will. The offer is open for one week only. And that is why I sent for you. Will you sell?"

Ray paused. He was at the crossroads. There was the finger of fate pointing along two paths—the simple, commonplace, uneventful path so ploddingly and faithfully pursued by his father, and the unknown trail that led into the unseen, unguessed wilderness. Which should he choose?

"Take your time," said Mr. Darnell. "This offer is good for a week. Let me know within that time."

Ray thought it over just twenty-four hours. The following morning he was back in the attorney's office.

"Sell," he directed. "I am returning to Ithaca this afternoon, but I will be back here in a few days to sign the final papers."

Thus it was that Philippa's week was reduced to forty-eight hours. Still, much can be done in forty-eight hours, and she thought she would arrive at the point she had for some time been contemplating. That last night they walked in Lovers' Lane together.

"I am going West next week," he announced curtly.

"Oh! How nice!"

"Yes. California. There is an aviation school near San Diego. I am going to that school this summer."

For some occult reason she did not respond to this, but looked puzzled, if not disappointed. He was aglow with the prospect.

"Don't you like my idea?" he asked.

"Ye-es," she hesitated.

This caused him to launch eloquently into a picture of his situation. "I would have to go back to Buffalo and settle down into being a humdrum business man," he protested, "or get into this air work where my very heart and soul are."

"But isn't it dangerous?"

"Not if you understand it?"

"But who does understand it?"

"There are plenty of men—the Wrights and Curtis and Vimy and Stackpool and Murray. Why, I'm going to take lessons of Curtis himself."

She was silent. They were to part on the morrow, and as yet he had said nothing about seeing her after that. Suddenly he blurted out:

"If I went back to Buffalo there would be only settling down and getting married and—"

He stopped, blushing furiously.

Fortunately the darkness prevented her from seeing him clearly. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "That's it! You are afraid of marriage?"

"Not afraid," he protested, "but cautious, with the tiny capital I have, and not any business ability to speak of, and my whole soul wrapped up in the airplane."

Her hand rested gently on his arm.

"Haven't any aviators got wives?" she asked.

"I don't know. I only know none of them ought to have. It's not a marrying business."

They parted shortly after that. He said good night stiffly, and she had a crooked little smile as she bade him farewell and wished him luck.

A week later he was in San Diego. He had been operating out of the hangar but a short time when he was pronounced the most likely candidate they had seen. Light in weight, alert in movement, and with the quick thinking of a man who seemed almost insensible of the earth, he quickly won his instructors.

Ray Custer was soon known as one of the daredevils of the air. He learned the tail dive before he had been flying a week. The falling leaf and the barrel roll he added to his repertoire soon after.

Then one day he sought the head of the school. "I want to buy an airplane," he announced simply.

"What for?"

"I want to fly across the continent."

"You do—you daring little shrimp! Well, not in one of my planes—not yet."

"I said I wanted to *buy* a plane. I'm going in my own—not one of yours.

"Ah, that's a horse of a different color."

"Of course. How much?"

The price made Ray gasp. It would eat into his money. But he gritted his teeth. "All right," he said, "I'll go you." And he wrote a check.

The prospective trip was talked about for two weeks. The wary head of the institution who had parted with one of his well-tried planes for a very good profit advised caution.

"Why don't you go up the coast to Seattle first?" he suggested. "See how that works; then, if you want to take a try at breaking your neck in a hop over the mountains you'll feel a bit surer of your Bee."

They called Ray's new machine the Bee, though she had been christened the Humdinger.

Custer accepted the suggestion, and shortly after was off winging his way up the coast. Any one who was in California in those days will remember the sensation he caused as he crossed the Tehachapi, the first bird man to make it.

In forty-eight hours he had landed safely on the slopes of Mount Rainier. Three days later he wired San Diego:

> Start in the morning for New York. First stop Ogden.

When the chief by the blue bay in the southland read the message he remarked: "I hope that bird don't break his wings. He'll make a real flyer some day—if he lives."

CHAPTER III.

A HOLE IN THE ROCKIES.

IT seemed as if half the inhabitants of Tacoma and Seattle had journeyed to the slopes of Rainier to see the Bee make her start. In those days an airplane was a curiosity, and no one as yet had crossed the continent in one—nor even attempted it.

Ray Custer had been quick to accept the advice of his distinguished mentor in San Diego and start from the northwest, but his sole reason had not been so obvious as it appeared to be. In this way he well advertised the fact that the flight was his and not any one's else. It was certain that if he failed he would have to suffer the penalty, while if he came through and was the first across he wanted the sole credit.

Just as he stepped into the cockpit to cast off a messenger boy pushed his way through the crowd and handed him several telegrams. One was from his former professor in mathematics at Cornell, wishing him well. Two of his chums had also remembered. The fourth was on the same yellow paper, but its signature gave him a thrill he did not get from the others.

> The best of luck in the world to the most daring of men. PHILIPPA.

He glanced at the date line, expecting, of course, that it would be Utica, New York. It was Denver, Colorado. That was strange, but he had not time for further inquiry. He buckled the telegrams into his jacket pocket and called to the two runners who held the wings of the Bee: "Slip her off, boys!"

The reliable bird wavered, careened, narrowly escaped scraping her newly varnished canvas on the greensward, then caught the momentum of the air, her wheels gently rose from the ground, and her nose lifted toward the blue sky.

Thousands of handkerchiefs fluttered a farewell and a drowning buzz of vociferous good wishes floated aloft after the intrepid flyer. Ray heard them indistinctly, chiefly because the whiz of the motor filled his ears, but also because he had enough to do in watching the climbing speedometer and the veering compass.

In ten minutes he was out of sight. An hour later he was a mile high, headed east by southeast. Now, for the first time, he looked below. There was not in sight a sign of human habitation, for already he was well over the coast range mountains. He watched the declivities, which looked like purple shadows on a velvet pattern.

Before eleven o'clock he had crossed the coast range, and now he was sailing above cultivated fields and miles of orchards. He came down to an elevation of about three thousand feet, just so he could feel closer to his kind. He passed over a town, and heard the bells jangling a welcome. His passage had been advertised.

The Bee was going now over a hundred miles an hour. By three o'clock he was in the foothills again, and again he shot her nose up and sought the four-thousand-foot level. Just once he got a nasty buffet in the face and felt the trim machine tremble all over.

"Ugh!" he grumbled. "One of those air pockets Jimmy told me to look out for. Guess I'll go up another half mile."

Which he did, and then on, on proudly, serenely, like a giant eagle. By the middle of the afternoon he had traveled five or six hundred miles, and knew that if nothing intervened he would be in Ogden before dark, as he had planned.

His hand on the steady throttle of the motor, he looked down and suddenly realized his solitary grandeur. These were not coast peaks, but the jutting crags of the Rockies themselves, for among them gleamed at many convenient intervals glistening snowy caps. Those peaks must be over a mile high to be able to hold the snow there in midsummer. Yes—perhaps three thousand to four thousand feet, for his altameter told him he was six thousand feet up and the snowy caps seemed perilously near.

For a moment he was tempted to go higher, but refrained. He was a pioneer, and the lanes had not been charted. He felt confident he was all right where he was, but farther up, beyond the sight of the earth, he feared he might lose his way. It was a little too much to ask.

The day was perfectly clear. The air was delightfully balmy. He felt the pleasant warmth of the sun, and took a pull at his flask of coffee, while he munched one of the sandwiches stowed in the seat at his side.

Then, without the slightest warning, and as if with predetermined treachery, the stalwart Bee slipped from under him as if she had been a sentient animal suddenly perverse. He was almost jerked from his seat, but grasped the steering wheel in time to send her on into the execution of what was known at the proving grounds as a "ring dive." This was a straightforward moving somersault that looks very daring, but which is not so very dangerous.

As he came back to an even keel and the planes grasped the level stratum of air again, Ray looked about as if he half suspected that some malign human agency had waylaid him. He cut off his engine and slowed down his speed until he was going barely thirty miles an hour.

Then he looked about, and for the first time realized that he was in a huge lane, a great trough, as it were, formed by two mountain ranges. Nor were these ranges very far away; altogether too near for comfort, he concluded, for immediately he pointed her nose up again and started to climb.

But no sooner had he tried this than again he was seized by the nose, as it were, and twisted down and again down. This time he flatly refused to do a ring dive. Instead he battled with the current and fought for the upper levels.

"I'll not hang my hat on one of those rocky racks this night," he muttered to the throbbing sides of the plane. "I'd rather do business with a chop house in Ogden. Now sting that tail-buster, Bee!" And he opened the valve for the reserve gas.

But try as he could it was impossible to rise. The first time he elevated the Bee

the plane was twisted as if in a barrel roll, one of those spectacular feats performed by the new crew of circus stunt artists who were just then displaying their skill before wondering cities. He just managed to get her back again, but only by traveling well below the level of those commanding peaks on either side.

The worst of it was that the trough between these peaks extended due north and south, not, as he desired, east and west. Moreover he was headed north, which appeared to be an accident resulting from his last contact with the mysterious " current " which apparently dominated the upper level with impish glee.

Ray decided to take it easy for a few miles and then try again. When he did poke her nose up a second time he got a swat that really scared him, for it buckled his lower plane slightly and should have been a sufficient warning.

However, the airman has little to go on. When the day is clear it is almost impossible to tell where one current of air ceases and another commences, until you run into the other current. Then, if it is a " whorl " or an " eddy " or of an adverse velocity you had better be prepared for stunts.

For half an hour Ray held straight north on his course, well below the level of the outermost peaks, while he studied first his buckled plane and then the earth beneath. He feared the plane required attention. He figured he was more than halfway to his first goal, and he wondered if he could not descend and overhaul the machine before rising.

But as he looked down the prospect was not especially inviting. He could not be sure, but there appeared only forest. Not a level field in sight. Not a house. Not a habitation.

He decided to make another try. He would rise to the six thousand foot level and make a " Bee " line for Ogden. A glance at his clock forced this decision, for he saw it was not nearly four o'clock. He had barely four hours of daylight left, and he must land at his destination before dark.

Accordingly he crowded on the high gear and jammed her nose again at a forty-five degree angle toward the heavens. For ten minutes he sailed as smoothly as a yacht at anchor in a roadstead. Then, just as he felt he was rising above the level of the far peaks, that unknown and terrific force struck the Bee side-on and almost capsized her.

By dint of quick weaving and turning her down and under he escaped loss of control, but when he strove to right her and regain his original direction the steering wheel refused to obey. He gave it one determined wrench and something snapped.

Well, he was in for it now and would have to land. Luckily it was still daylight. The sky was clear and there was no storm. No one could have guessed by looking up that a fierce whirlpool mastered the air above those peaks any more than one could imagine what lay in the treacherous depths of the Colorado by looking down from the sides of the Grand Cañon.

Ray steered for the far side of the valley as it seemed that over there lay an open space. Everything on the near side was lush with trees. He shut off his engine and coasted.

As he looked over the side of the cockpit to find a safe landing spot he saw what he thought were tiny white clouds clinging near the earth. A moment later several of these appeared simultaneously in groups which seemed a quarter of a mile apart.

Then the *put-put* of an exhaust motor smote his ears. A few seconds later he realized that it was not a motor but rifle fire that he was running into.

" This is a fine picnic! " Ray muttered ,as he tugged vainly at the steering wheel. " Talk about buying into a lawsuit. Here I am flying into a jolly little shooting party. This West is wild enough for me all right—all right! "

He jammed his brakes, but it was useless. The wind above had done more to the old Bee than he realized. So, quickly adjusting the ropes of his parachute to his waist, he prepared to leap from the car.

His last thought aboard the Bee was not of the precious coffee flask and the sandwich box, but of his .45, which he grabbed from its holster under the seat and thrust in his belt just before he leaped.

As Ray Custer came down his parachute

gracefully caught the air and drifted lazily into the top of an oak tree, leaving him suspended twenty feet from the ground, but safe.

Fifty feet farther on the old Humdinger plunged into a cliff of solid rock with a detonating roar. As she struck the petrol tank burst and the plane was instantly a mass of flames. Ray, trussed like an unworthy fowl, kicked vainly at the mountain air.

At the same moment two shots rang out from a clump of bushes to the left, and one of them severed the rope that held him to the 'chute. He dropped to the ground like an over-ripe fruit.

What sort of country was this where aërial visitors were greeted with shooting? Ray did not stop to inquire. Rather, he felt grateful for the means which had liberated him from his undesirable tree, and rushed with all speed toward the burning plane.

He soon saw that a rescue was hopeless. The newly varnished and splendid wings, taut as a drum head and dry as tinder, flamed as though touched with fire in twenty places. He threw himself frantically at a sand pile near the base of the rock and strove desperately to quench the fire. His work was of no avail.

As he stood watching the vainglorious end of his patrimony, feeling keenly the ignominious climax of his Darius Green attempt, a voice from the bushes at his side brought him to a realization of the mysterious drama which he had so unexpectedly interrupted.

"Hello, friend!" came the voice of some one invisible.

"That's what I need—a friend," Ray answered, turning.

There was no one in sight. He peered into the bushes. "Hello!" he called.

"This way!"

He parted some underbrush where he heard a sound and saw a figure of a man crawling on the ground. Quickly he was at the man's side.

"Hurt?" he asked eagerly as he bent down.

"Winged."

"So am I!" Ray smiled dryly.

The other staggered to his feet and stood against a tree, while with a free arm he tried to examine the other which fell useless at his side, while blood dripped slowly along the fingers.

In an instant Ray was at his side, taking from his neck the handkerchief he wore and proceeding deftly to bind the wound.

Presently the first aid was properly applied.

"Thank you!" grunted the stranger, and then suddenly gave vent to a queer Indian expression which was incomprehensible as he gazed for the first time squarely in the aviator's eyes.

"Ray Custer!" The wounded man called the name clearly and without hesitation.

Ray answered look for look. He saw a six-foot, black-haired, straight, eagle-eyed young man, with features deeply bronzed and the telltale high cheek-bones, though dressed in blue flannel shirt, khaki trousers, woolen leggings and cowhide boots.

"Teddy Surefoot as I'm a foot high!" he cried and seized the other ecstatically.

The Cree smiled gravely. "Yes, you're more than a foot high," he answered, literally.

"But how came you here?" demanded the white man.

"I belong here. You are the one to answer questions." Surefoot turned into the brush.

"Come," said he. "I think the other fellow is worse off than I am. Let's look!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CREE CAMP.

SUREFOOT penetrated the wilderness rapidly. Custer, following as best he could, thought he detected a wince now and then as the Indian struck his shoulder unavoidably against the bushes. A shot had entered the fleshy part of his upper arm and had severed an artery, but it was not a dangerous wound, and in a healthy man would heal quickly.

They were going in the direction from which had come the second group of smoke puffs that Ray had seen from the air, in a flash, as the Bee came whirling down. Sud-

denly the aviator felt an unnamed fear. It seemed somehow rash to go on this way so boldly. Besides, there was the Bee to be salvaged. What tribute was he paying to the dominating personality of the Indian.

" Hold on, Teddy," he called. " Aren't you taking a bit of a chance?"

" It's only a step farther."

" But I want you to help me with my plane."

" Gladly—in a minute."

The broad back was pushing on so swiftly that Custer, unaccustomed to the woods, although his slim figure should have permitted him to get along even more quickly than the other, could not keep up. For a moment Custer lost sight of his new found, old college friend and enemy.

Alone, he stopped and looked in trepidation at the wilderness. It was a hardwood forest. Enormous ash and oak trees stretched away illimitably. A thick underbrush choked passage. In places the fern brake stretched as high as a man's head.

" Hoo—Ooo!"

It was the voice of Surefoot floating from a clump of trees some rods to the right. Ray pushed his way in. In a moment he stood beside his friend and looked down on the body of the man who lay, face to the earth, fallen straight across a rifle.

With one prod of his foot, and as disdainfully as if he had been kicking a snake, Teddy turned the body over. Ray saw an Indian of similar build and appearance and similarly clothed. Instinctively he resented his friend's contemptuous manner, and knelt by the body to see if life were extinct. He felt of the pulse and listened for the heartbeat. Both were still.

" Dead!" he said as he rose looking quizzically at Surefoot.

" Good!"

With the single syllable and not another downward glance the Indian turned to retrace his steps:

" Hold on," Custer protested. " Are you going to leave him like this?"

" Yes." There was no hesitation, not a glance back.

" But who is he?" the white man demanded.

" One of the Black Panther's cubs."

" The Black Panther?"

" That's it."

" Who is the Black Panther?"

" A Cree, I am ashamed to say, though not a full-blood."

" And this is his son?"

" Not a son—just one of his gang."

Custer did not like this monosyllabic conversation.

" Well, tell me all about it. I saw the duel from above—up there— that is, I saw part of the smoke puffs, and somebody hit me in the parachute as I came down."

" Huh! Him."

" It was a good turn, at that. But tell me what was the row about?"

They were on the edge of the wood now and the smoldering frame of the Bee was visible across a level space.

" Some other time," said Surefoot. " Let us examine your airplane now."

They found the Bee a mass of twisted wires and charred sticks. A freak of the fire had left part of the cockpit untouched, and from this Ray rescued his thermos bottle and his license tag as an air pilot. He pointed to the latter as he remarked to Surefoot:

" Good thing I saved that. I'll need it when I get back—to use in some one else's machine. Do you think I'll be able to get a job after this?"

Whereupon he related to his former opponent on the football field his history of the previous summer, concluding with the investing of his small fortune in the machine and his wild adventure in this ill-starred effort to cross the continent.

Surefoot, after listening gravely, remarked with judicial insight: " Your experience will be of value. Somebody had to make a start. Your report will cause others to avoid those air pockets lying just within the level of the mountain tops."

This obvious remark greatly cheered Custer. His luck in alighting in the midst of the duel in which the Carlisle fullback was demonstrating that his hand was as sure as his foot added to his peace of mind. Already he had recovered his poise from the mishap, and was eager to be back.

" How far to the railroad?" he inquired.

" Some far," said the Indian.

"It can't be a great way."

"Several days."

"Days? I left Tacoma this morning."

"Ah! In the airplane. I speak of—on the foot—see?"

"But how many miles?"

"Many—several days."

There was something strangely noncommittal about these responses which puzzled Custer. "Haven't you a tin lizzie?" he smiled.

"No."

"A horse?"

"No."

"Do you mean to say I will have to walk out?"

"Yes—if you go at all."

"*If I go at all!* Why, I'm going to beat it this minute."

"Yes?"

There was a polite query merely in the uplift of the Indian's syllable, but it nettled Custer.

"Of course," he insisted. "Come. Show me the way."

"Very well."

They started, Surefoot in front, his long legs striking an easy pace, which, however, was too much for Custer, who was obliged to call on his friend to go slower. He noticed they were proceeding almost due north, and protested that he wanted to go south and east toward Ogden.

"This is the only way out," laconically replied the red man, pushing soberly on.

Ray could not avoid noting the difference between the land as it rose before him now and as it had appeared from a mile and more high in the air. Then it had rolled away like scenery in a distant river, or like the painted figment of a dream. Now it was a tangible reality, filled with rocks and uneven declivities.

There was no sign of a path or even of a trail. To all appearance this was a virgin wilderness and Surefoot and Custer the first pioneers.

Yet the Indian did not hesitate. He strode on as confidently as though a plain road had been marked by a highway association. At one point they came to a stream which was waist deep. In scrambling up the farther bank Ray grasped some soft rock which he crumbled in his hand. A glitter caught his eye. He rolled some of the sand between his fingers.

"Gold!" he cried, and Surefoot joined him silently.

"Isn't that gold?" Custer demanded, pointing to the yellow particles which glistened in his palm.

The Indian gazed stolidly. Then gravely he replied, "No gold—no gold here—none at all."

As he thought about it later Custer remembered that he was impressed with the repetition in Surefoot's reply. "No gold—no gold here—none at all."

Thrice he had denied—thrice for an Indian proverbially thrifty with words. Custer pocketed his yellow souvenir and went on silently.

It was in the late twilight that they rounded a bend in a rock and came suddenly on a group of tepees in an open space beside a stream. There was perhaps a dozen of them, made of worn canvas and gunny sacking, evidently government material.

"The Cree Camp," said Surefoot to Custer. Immediately afterward he shouted a few words in the Indian language. Soon there appeared from within the tepees or tents, for some of them were built in the manner of wall tents, and some round about a pole in the aboriginal fashion, the figures of a dozen or more brawny men.

Strangely there were no women or children. The men gathered about Surefoot, and Custer could easily see from their manner toward him that he was the chief. A few words were passed in the guttural Cree, but Surefoot's sole contribution to the conversation consisted of three or four words, which occasioned grunts of satisfaction. Custer believed he was announcing the death of the Black Panther's cub, and that it was pleasant news.

Then followed other questions from Surefoot and a quick scurrying of the men after an eager appraisal of Custer. They gathered about him, looked into the sky and then at his clothes, but without smiling.

Meanwhile, evidently at Surefoot's command, a tepee had been prepared, and Custer was presently led to it and told to make himself comfortable. Shortly Sure-

foot summoned him to the central fire over which was roasting half a sheep. In the coals were several score ears of corn in the husk.

The supper which followed Custer relished with a fierce appetite. The Indians ate silently and occasionally regarded him with what he took to be friendly curiosity. Surefoot, at his side, talked in English monosyllables.

The next morning, after a breakfast of fried mutton, coffee brewed from dried corn and a gruel formed of wheat and oats, Custer announced that he was ready to go on.

"All right," said Surefoot, "but some one will have to show you the way. It will take you several days to reach the nearest white man."

"Why don't you tell me where I am?"

"You're in the Cree country."

As he had repeatedly asked this same question the previous night and with the same response, Ray felt that somehow he was not being treated fairly by his friend of the eastern colleges.

"Look here, Teddy," he protested, "you know geography, you know all about white customs, you know me, and yet you are acting like—well, like one of these—these others." He had meant to say "Indian," but hesitated at the word itself.

Surefoot smiled. "It is true I have the education, as you call it, but that does not alter my status as a Cree. I have come back to work out my destiny with my people. I was born to them; I will die with them. Do not think it makes me unhappy. I am content."

"That is evident," Custer replied, "but I wish you would tell me where I am and how to get somewhere else. I like the country, but civilization is my long suit. Lead me to it."

"Very well."

Surefoot communicated some instructions to one of his men. In a few minutes they were provided with a pack of food, and with barely a "Thank you!" Ray departed from the camp.

Half an hour later the Indian volunteered: "That is the Cree outpost. I can not be gone long, but, before night, I can point you out the way, so you can go alone."

"The Cree outpost? Outpost of what?"

"Of the Cree nation."

"But isn't this a government reservation?"

"Yes—no. But it is Cree."

Ray tried several times during that forenoon as they strode along the mountain side to get more information from his friend, but, without appearing to be discourteous, and in the stolid, dignified way which only an Indian has, Surefoot remained as ever mysterious.

They stopped at noon to eat. Custer struck a match, but Surefoot instantly put it out, and rushed to a nearby lookout as he did so. They were on a ledge of a plateau below which, several miles away, another plateau extended in what appeared to be the only entrance and exit to the valley.

Surefoot crouched on the edge of this ledge, shaded his eyes with his hands and gazed earnestly at the lower ledge. After several minutes he slowly announced: "We must go back."

"Why?"

"Look!"

Slowly Custer accommodated his eyes to the long distance. At length he discerned figures moving along the trail and toward them, but miles away.

"The Black Panther's gang!" said Teddy. "There are too many for us alone. I will need my guard."

"Wait a minute. I think those are white men," Ray insisted.

Surefoot gazed and said nothing for a moment.

Ray, straining his eyes, finally blurted out: "I believe that is a woman on that mule. What do you think?"

"Perhaps—but I hope not," said Surefoot.

CHAPTER V.

THE WHITE GIRL.

"HOW far off are they?" asked Ray.

"Maybe three miles by the way they must come; maybe half a mile as the crow flies," responded Surefoot.

The Indian waited patiently for ten or fifteen minutes. Then he slowly brought

his rifle to sight, and aimed it deliberately at the leader of the party on the ledge below.

Custer seized his friend by the arm. "Teddy!" he cried, "it's deliberate murder."

"Wait!" responded the red man, "I will harm no one—not yet." Again he raised his rifle.

The party below was now near enough for Ray to see rather definitely its composition. It consisted of six persons. Five were walking in front and the last was bringing up the rear on a mule. Whether they were white or red he could not be sure at that distance. At least all were wearing the usual garb of the frontier.

"Crack!" It was Teddy's rifle speaking from his side. Ray gasped involuntarily, and before he could do anything two more shots rang out from the same spot.

Looking to the ledge below he could plainly see their effect. Each shot struck the earth a few inches in front of the leading three in the oncoming group, one shot for each.

Automatically the party halted. The men in the rear rushed to the mule and gathered around the one who was riding. The three in front put their heads together. After a slight delay they turned around and started back.

"Aha!" murmured Surefoot, "its the Panther's men, as I thought, and they know the signal."

"What signal?"

"Keep out!"

By this time the party on the lower ledge was retreating precipitately. Ray was very much excited.

"That is a girl on that mule!" he cried. "She is riding astride, but when they turned suddenly her hat blew off and I could see her long hair braided."

Surefoot apparently was not interested. "Come," said he; "we will return."

Ray, however, had no desire to return. He reiterated his determination to get back to civilization, and declared that he would go alone, if necessary.

"Very well, my friend. I am sorry I can go no farther with you, but my duty to the Cree nation requires that I return to my guard."

Ray became impatient.

"Teddy," said he, "why can't you trust me? You got the best there was in a pale-face college, and I wouldn't keep anything from you. Why can't you explain all this business to me? Treat me like a pal."

The Indian regarded him soberly. "You insist on returning?" he asked, Socratically.

"What else can I do?"

"Very well. Then you will overtake that outfit. You will tell them what I say."

"Not if you say no. I will respect any confidence you give me."

The Indian stolidly continued: "I will tell you, but not in confidence. You can repeat it when you meet them—those white people. I do not dislike them. When they are good, as you are, I ask only that they leave me to my own people and my own ways. I require only that they keep their agreements. I will keep mine. Do you understand?"

"Nothing could be clearer."

"I do not blame the whites so much as I blame my own miserable weak people who stand ready to betray their nation. As you know, I am an educated redskin. I am not such a fool as to think all whites are either good or bad, or that all Indians are either good or bad.

"The Crees are mostly very good Indians, but we have one bad man—a really bad man, the Black Panther. He is ready to sell his people for white man's gold. And it is my business to prevent him from doing it."

"But how?" Ray was sympathetic, but struggling still in darkness.

"As you have just seen—by bringing in white prospectors to spy out this land for gold and silver. Yesterday when I saw you first I killed one of the gang—spies locating mining country for the whites."

"Oh!" Ray whistled softly to himself as he surreptitiously felt the yellow sand he still kept in his pocket. "But if this is a government reservation for the Crees how can the whites get any of it? You don't have to kill. You have only to notify the government."

The Indian replied at first with merely a sarcastic glance. Then he elucidated.

"That may appear the right way to you,

but you evidently do not know the history of us Indians with your government. The white man makes an agreement with us to give us restricted lands, but the lands he restricts are usually those that appear worthless in his eyes. If he finds that the Indian lands are valuable he usually finds also some way to get them back from us, if not by outright seizure then by imposing on the weakness of some poor Indians who know no better.

" Now, I am not ignorant of the fact that the government in Washington means well by us, and that your people in general mean well by us, but there are always a robber few among the whites, and they get hold of the renegade few among the Indians. That is where the trouble comes. It's Black Panther and his like, and a lot of your unscrupulous prospectors.

" Some time ago the Cree nation resolved in its annual parliament—"

" Parliament? The Crees have a parliament?"

" Certainly. My ancestors were assembling in parliament long before yours were. Recently we decided to place outposts on our land and to keep off all prospectors. It was decided that if the prospector was Indian to kill him; if white merely to place him forcibly outside. We do not want any reports at large that we have mineral deposits. We want peace and our own land. That is all."

" And do all the Indians know of this?"

" Certainly. You saw how quickly my warning was heeded just now. That party is making tracks back now for the other side of the reservation."

" Then you do have gold in the Cree country?"

Surefoot looked his white friend clearly and straightly in the eyes. " No!" he said emphatically.

" But why don't you want to develop it?" Ray insisted.

" There is no gold here," Surefoot continued, placidly, as if answering the prattle of a child. " But prospectors are easily fooled. They are likely to become excited and spread foolish reports, and then mobs of the white fools crowd in. This is practically the only large tract of wilderness left on the North American continent. We Crees want it for ourselves in the ways of our ancestors. Nature has decreed that as a law, and you white men have wisely recognized it. That is what makes it necessary for the good Crees to join with the spirit of the good whites to keep the bad Crees from selling us out to the bad whites."

Custer was now thoroughly convinced. He thrust out his hand fervently. " Teddy," said he, " I am with you. You had me guessing yesterday and you halted me a bit to-day, but I see your point, and I believe you are right."

They shook hands as if in some close compact. " And now," continued Ray, " I'll be greatly obliged to you if you will tell me the way out. I like you and I like your country, but I want to be back in San Diego."

The Indian turned and pointed to the ledge whence the oncoming party had lately fled. " If you follow around this bend," he said, " you will shortly reach that spot where they turned back. From there on you can follow their trail. That, in time, will surely take you out."

" Of course. But again I ask you—how far is it?"

Surefoot smiled. " A long way," he said.

They shook hands again and parted quickly. The last act of the Indian was to give the package of meat and bread to Ray, who earnestly thanked him. He ran on then down the ledge, and Surefoot stood looking after him until he had disappeared. At length the Indian retraced his steps toward the Cree camp.

Just at dusk that night, about fifteen miles to the south and east, five figures were squatted around a camp fire, when a shout broke out of the bushes at their rear. Each reached for his weapon, but the call reassured them.

" Hello!" cried the voice. " Hello, friend!"

The five drew revolvers and rifles and covered the bushes whence came the appeal. " Advance, friend, with your hands up!" replied one of the men.

Ray Custer stepped into the light, smiling, his hands up.

A bearded man advanced to meet him.

"Howdy, stranger?" he said cordially, extending his hand. "How did you get here?"

"I flew in."

"Flew! Ha! Ha! I reckon that's the only way you could get in. Hear that, boys. He flew in. Ha! Ha!"

One of the others laughed heartily. The other three grunted.

"My name is Whipple, Dan Whipple," said the bearded one. "This here is my cousin, Harvey Wood, and these three are Joe, Sam and Dirtface."

The cousin, Harvey Wood, a man of middle years, thick set, offered his hand. The others nodded and grunted. Ray could see now that they were Indians, probably half-breeds. He wondered about the sixth he had seen that morning, but wisely determined to say nothing.

"Hunting, I suppose," he observed, as he dropped to a seat by the fire.

"Sure, hunting!" Whipple replied, exchanging a glance with Wood. Even as he spoke Custer leaned back and came in contact with a prospector's spade. Beyond lay a sieve for panning gold. Whipple saw the newcomer's eyes note the implements.

"Never travel without them," he said jovially. "Can't tell when you'll find gold or silver in this country. And when you do find it it pays better'n deer or bear. However, we did get a bear yesterday, and the steak's right good. Here, Joe, get Mr. Custer a fry off that rear haunch. And now, stranger, tell us all about yourself."

The tale of the Bee found astounded listeners. The party had been three weeks away from civilization and knew nothing of the announced attempt to fly across the continent. They plied Ray with questions, and he was frank about everything but his meeting with Surefoot. He omitted all mention of the Cree camp. He felt justified when, upon questioning his hosts, they made no mention of their change in route, of the shots that had turned them back that morning, or of the reason for the presence of the Cree guides.

They offered to take him as far as they were going and then to put him on a well-worn trail that would lead him to a white settlement.

Presently Ray took a blanket that was offered him and retired for the night. As he did so he noticed that a little pup tent was erected a rod or so from the fire, and that in the rear a mule was tethered. All through the evening he had been over eager to ask about the sixth member of the party whom he had so plainly seen from the upper ledge, but as he had not mentioned anything about the incident of the shooting he hardly knew how to ask pertinent questions. Thus he went to sleep uncertain whether or not his eyes had seen true.

Exhausted with the two days' excitement and unwonted exercise, and lulled with a sense of security, he slept soundly. He was wakened by the sun, more than an hour up, pouring into his eyes, while the refreshing odor of sizzling bacon assailed his nostrils.

Ray leaped to his feet and turned to greet his hosts. Only one was visible and his back was turned, for he was officiating with the frying pan at the fire. At first he thought it must be one of the half-breeds, for a braid of hair hung down his back, but, if this was an Indian, it was a slender and youthful one.

"Good morning," said Ray, advancing. "I am afraid I have overslept."

The one with the braid of hair turned, the skillet in hand. He gasped, for it was a girl. She gasped and dropped the skillet. They stared at one another. There was a long and tense pause. Then their hands clasped fervently.

"Philippa!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Lhassa of Chinatown

by Raymond Lester

Author of "Jungle Love," "None So Dumb," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

LHASSA, the ancient, central, and forbidden city of Tibet, was unique in that its priestly guardians had never allowed the foreign white devil to set foot within its sacred walls. Girdled by desert plains, towering rock mountains, and the Great Wall, Lhassa was the mystery of the world. Now Lhassa, the forbidden, has been torn from her setting of secrecy; but, less remote from civilization, other Lhassas have come into existence and passed away.

For purposes of sinister intent, men of criminal bent delight to burrow underground and hold council in some reeking cellar.

Over and over again coteries of more or less inefficient crooks have organized, held sway for a time, and have been dispersed—only to flock together again in some other hidden dungeon.

New York, Paris, London, San Francisco, Chicago, Melbourne, and other cities too numerous to catalogue, have all had their minor, Lhassalike warrens of iniquity. These haunts were but holes in the ground, sordid, dirty, and fitted only for the rats of the underworld.

Chi Fang, man of mystery, master of a legion to all of whom his word was law, planned magnificently and with incomparable cunning. He produced the Lhassa of Chinatown, strangest of all secret cities and strongest in its impenetrability and invulnerableness to the wiles of prowling spy or the efforts of squads and cordons of police.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Chi Fang planned his subterranean domain and made a dream come true. His brain devised the protective network girt around his pearl of secret palaces; and he, he alone, can say where it is. When Chi Fang retired to the *third chamber* he placed a bar upon investigation that may perhaps never be removed.

Even Genevieve Leblanc, alluring Jenny, star of the silver screen, whose white feet once were buried to the ankles in an Aladdin cascade of unset rubies and diamonds, tempted by the charm of Oriental luxury and magnificence, cannot return to her couch of beaten gold and its coverlet of iridescent kingfisher feathers.

The Lhassa of Tibet yielded to the stubborn persistence of alien explorers; the

Lhassa of Chinatown is closed. The gateways of the city are sealed.

CHAPTER I.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF CHINA.

INERT as a figure of tinted wax, Li Wang leaned on the shining handle of his devil dust-eater. Only a moment before he had been busily and dutifully in action; now he lapsed to muscular idleness and chewed the unsatisfactory cud of fruitless reflection. Hither and thither he cast the loop of lariat thought, but he could capture no idea that would clarify and safeguard the future of one whom he worshiped in silent, all-giving devotion.

In the goblet of to-day are the secret potentialities, the unexpected surprises, and the bitter dregs of to-morrow. Fear of the future was in the marrow of Li Wang's bones, and it was his earnest desire to find the answer to a riddle that had been puzzling him for more than five years. Except for his stillness, Li Wang showed no sign of the emotions, the longings, that stirred and milled within him. His lean face was impassively buddhistic.

The rise and fall of the loose, blue silk smock over his narrow chest was scarcely perceptible; the thin fingers clasped and interplaced on the nickeled controls of the dust eater were lax and untensed. Yet, if one knew nothing about the inner Li Wang, if one had no suspicion of the soul that dwelt behind those pensively cryptic, slotted eyes, there was still cause for interest in the contrast offered by the person of Li Wang with his surroundings.

Magnified to about ten times the size of the painted prototype, he might have been copied and cast from some old Chinese print. The dormant virility of him was antique; his years seemed to date back. A hundred, maybe two hundred years ago, he was fifty or sixty. Now, as nearly as a Western eye can see, he is still about two-score years and ten; and he stands in the center of a room that is the last expression in modern furnishings.

The object he leans upon is a vacuum cleaner. It is the latest of its kind, efficient, expensive; but what sympathy can Li Wang have with an apparatus that exists only by nature's abhorrence of a void? What fitness can he find in harnessing his honorable body to a devil whose stomach is an elongated, greedy, and ugly rubber bag, and whose food is dust?

Questions to shrug one's shoulder over are these, so we will pass on to one of those minor, seriocomic tragedies that count as an incident and lighten the path of dull observation.

For the time being Li Wang gave up his pursuit of the solution to a problem that now, as always, consistently avoided him. He stooped, and, touching a switch, set the squat devourer humming its mealtime song. The vacuum cleaner was ready for work, but chance, no less playful with things inanimate than with helpless man, set a trap: the cord plugged to the wall trailed serpentwise across Li Wang's foot. On well-oiled ball bearings, the cleaner swung round and its maw came within reach of a neatly tied bow of silk ribbon. The bow fluttered and disappeared within the aluminium mouthpiece.

A second later Li Wang felt a sharp tug at the back of his head. He jerked erect, and the devil that had swallowed his ribbon and a good twelve inches of his pigtail swung clear of the floor, and added injury to insult by collision with Li Wang's thin shanks. But although he suffered grievous pain and nearly lost his valued cue, Li Wang kept his head. He pounced on the switch, cut off the vital force, and the devil disgorged its prey.

With stoic dignity Li Wang smoothed out the crumpled ribbon and plodded across the big room. He needed a vacation from the wiles and ways of things Western.

At the touch of his hand on a tasseled cord a pair of heavy curtains parted in the center, and in the passing of that velvety barrier the old Chinaman reached the quietude and atmosphere of his native land. In one step he went from the ultimate in environment of white man's civilization to the brooding solemnity of gorgeous, ancient China.

When the curtains dropped behind Li Wang the white light of day flooding the

first half of the room was shut out, and he stood in soft, colorful twilight. The frontier 'twixt East and West was only a pliant wall of woven stuff, yet these curtains were consistent and thoroughly in character. They were lined, and, on one side, faced with material from the looms of Paterson, New Jersey, and on the other with silk woven in Soochow, China.

Latticed frames hung with painted silk screened the windows, and the result was one of restful harmony. Here and there in the semiobscurity gleamed the dully burnished, hand-worn, rounded contours of bronze pedestals and ornaments.

Cool greens of jade and warm vermilions of lacquer nursed visions to placid enjoyment. There were no glaring spots of color, no sharply defined high lights, no abruptly edged blocks of shadow. The inanimate were courteous in blended relationship and happy companionableness.

A few chairs, chests, and tables of carved and inlaid teak, and cabinets in ivory and gold and silver inlay, were variously placed on a rug that once carpeted the audience hall of a Manchu emperor. On a stepped throne presided a massive, benign Buddha. Grotesque, but of a kindlier fellowship than the gods of Mammon and temporal power. The place was a temple, a chamber for retirement and solace of Orient mentality. In it the masterly work produced by hands of long-buried, patient craftsmen was forceful in influence upon a mind imbued with hopes and beliefs rooted in a wisdom that was honored in the dim ages before intolerant, materialistic Christianity and its sects began to fight with sword and book for domination.

With a contented sigh, Li Wang sat with folded hands, gazing up at the drowsy lidded eyes of the bronze god. Thoughts of the busy, bustling street, of throbbing engines, of humming wires and buzzing bells, dwindled away from him. The world of men, pulsing and energized by ambitions great and mean, receded from his perceptions. The medley of sounds filtering through the thick curtains became, by the magic of associative ideas, the lulling murmur of rush-fringed, limpid waters. A beatific smile stole over Li Wang's face, and presently he went to a carven chest, and an expression of anticipation lurked in his eyes when he raised the bronze-hinged lid.

He was in no haste to arrive at the thing he sought. Robe after robe, hand embroidered in purple and gold, silver and royal blue, delicate of fabric and rich in design, he lifted from the chest and laid carefully aside; but although he had an innate sense of appreciation for the beautiful, these marvels of needlework did not claim his attention.

Exactly where he knew it would be, tucked away at the bottom of the chest, he came upon the treasure he desired to behold. Its value in cash could have been expressed in a few cents, but to Li Wang the three sections of bamboo represented ten thousand golden hours.

This valued thing was—a fishing rod.

A tremor shook the old man's wiry frame. In common with the majority of his countrymen, Li Wang had not escaped the disease of the exiled Celestial, and now the sight of his old fishing rod partnered pleasant memories with the exquisite, searching sadness of nostalgia. A wave of homesickness surged over him, and an indistinguishable, crooning murmur of lament came from his close-pressed lips as he ran the tips of his fingers over the smooth, familiar joints and grooves of bamboo.

Was it written in the book of the future that he and his master should forsake the towns of towering steel and concrete and return—home?

To sit at the feet of the Buddha and recall half-forgotten scenes was Li Wang's intent, but the curtains divided and his spell of retrospective musing was broken. With shamefaced haste Li Wang dropped his rod back in the chest and thrust his hands into his wide sleeves.

"Master," he murmured, and it was pleasing to note that, although the termination of the word was softly blurred in intonation, the brand of singsong, pidgin English did not mar the old man's accent.

After he had spoken Li Wang waited with bowed but unservile head. The young man who had parted the curtains unheard stood smiling with friendly indulgence.

" Seeking again the beckoning of the old love?" asked Sun Su.

Li Wang nodded in grave accent. Words were unnecessary. He had been discovered in a moment when he was off his guard; but it was not meet that a servant should burden his master with the tale of his private woes. He stood quietly waiting his orders, but his eyes were watchfully intent. Uppermost in Li Wang's thoughts was a curious question: Would his master enter or retreat? By all the dictates of custom, Sun Su was already transgressing a quaint, unwritten law. He was in white man's attire and had no place in the harmony of the Chinese room.

Truth to tell, and apart from Li Wang's sentiments both superstitious and insular, Sun Su was an anachronism. Like unto the old man, but of a more aristocratic strain, Sun Su was pure Chinese; but at a casual glance he would have passed for a wealthy young collegian of Western birth. His dark eyes showed no greatly emphasized upward slant, and his clean-cut, refined features were far more mobile than is usual with an Oriental.

His ease of manner and cultured accent suggested Harrow and Oxford. Altogether, Sun Su presented a pleasing, engaging personality, and he was dressed with fitting good taste. Herein lay the rub and the direct cause of Li Wang's watchfulness—it was a dangerous offense to appear before the bronze god in Western attire.

While Sun Su stood by the curtains Li Wang did not move, but directly his master advanced one custom-made brown shoe a step nearer to the Buddha the old man glided forward. Before Sun Su could offer protest an all-enveloping, wide-sleeved robe was cast over his shoulders and with apologetic gesture Li Wang retreated.

For a moment the Western habits of Sun Su did impulsive battle with his natural instincts. His arms moved upward as if to fling off the silk-emblazoned robe, then the blood grip of the East claimed him, and there stole over his face that look of fatalistic calm distinguishing the Oriental. It is an expression that masks expressiveness. The passions are there, but the stoicism of the race bids the outer man conceal. The fires of love and hate may burn, the cold hand of death may chill, but of visible, involuntary signs there are none.

A rapid flow of words, recitative and uninterrupted, came from Sun Su. He spoke in Chinese and as one who has meditated and decided upon a given course of action. Li Wang understood his orders, but he could not comprehend their purpose. Sun Su's last words were oddly disconcerting.

" Buy them," he said, " small and with golden hair."

" I go," said Li Wang when he backed through the curtains; but although his brief unquestioning assent implied implicit obedience, Li Wang was amazed and puzzled by the commission he was to undertake.

After Li Wang had gone Sun Su's gaze settled on the Buddha. In wordless communion he appeared to seek approval and good counsel from the bronze confidant of the faithful; and out of the past Sun Su heard the echoes of a well-loved and remembered voice:

" My whitening hairs would make a long, long rope, yet would not fathom all my depth of woe."

Sun Su's dark eyes burned.

" Shall a betrayer, a false friend, escape just punishment?" he asked.

But as the question was put to the Buddha, there was no reply. The massive, heavy jowls of the god remained as they had been cast from their matrix; yet, because one can generally find what one seeks, Sun Su thought there was a hint of malice in that plump image of benignity.

CHAPTER II.

" PLETTY GIRLS."

AS a result of the strange order given him by his master, Li Wang steered his honorable person through the busiest street in the city. He hated crowds and detested being jostled, and although he skipped from side to side to avoid business-driven men and window-gazing women, his method of progression was more effective than if he had used his elbows instead of his agile feet.

He stepped in front of a store specializ-

ing in the sale of photographs of celebrities. Clipped to wires strung across the plate glass were pictures of the famous and notorious. The merely good or indifferently bad were not there represented. A place on one of those lines was evidence that the original had distinguished himself or herself by some exceptional skill or villainy, beauty or brute strength of muscle, or money.

Long-haired pianists, pugilists, painters, philanthropists, politicians and preachers, show girls, stage stars, movie favorites, ladies of leisure and gentlemen of sporty reputation, were up for sale. Some were a dollar—others could be bought for thirty cents.

Humbleness of the wise-minded was Li Wang's chief characteristic, and when he entered the store he met his antithesis. A clerk, grown pitiably supercilious by familiar association with the great, came forward with languid disdain expressed in weak mouth and watery, blue eys. It was a great indignity for his muttship to have to wait upon a heathen Chink.

"Whaddery'u want?" he asked.

"Pictures, please," answered Li Wang, and hesitated. The rolling, rasping "r" was sometimes a check on his speech.

"What sort?" snapped the clerk. "We don't keep no yellow mandarins here."

"White puppy and misbegotten son of ignorance," said Li Wang softly, "I come with peaceful intentions. Show me the faces of the young ladies who play in the motion pictures. I want"—again the old man paused and lost the "r" he wanted to pin—"I want—pletty girls."

The clerk gulped. Presently he sniggered, but—he was ten feet away and behind a showcase when he did it. Somehow he did not like the horribly gentle way this placid old Chinaman apostrophised him.

Indifferent and seemingly unaware of the doubtful glances cast at him by the clerk, Li Wang put on a pair of spectacles and gazed critically at the photograph shoved at him across the counter. The dumb-show actress was of the Amazonian type, tall and of magnificent adiposity; but her charming simper was wasted.

"Much fat," said the old man. "I want —prr-etty girls, small, gold hair."

The clerk leered, and then with an air of one pandering to the whim of an irresponsible old collector of feminine beauty on pasteboard, he rattled off a list of names of reigning favorites.

"Any of them do f'r you?" he asked.

Li Wang shook his head. "That I do not know," he said. "Show me."

Six photographs were brought, and after selecting two the old man asked for more. In batches ranging from six to a dozen the clerk brought some more stars. The stock of chosen pictures set aside by Li Wang grew larger and larger.

"They're a dollar each," hinted the clerk.

"Bring more," said Li Wang.

When at last the clerk declared he had no more photographs of small, golden-haired girls, Li Wang pulled out a roll of bank notes and counted off a hundred and seven dollars.

The clerk checked off the number and found there was exactly one hundred and seven selected pictures.

"Fly old bird, that," he confided to the cashier when Li Wang went off with his packet of beauties. "You'd never have known he was keeping count. Ugh! I don't like Chinks—they give me the shivers. They're the ignorantest. Wish I had half of his wad, though. I wonder—"

For the rest of that day and the next the clerk wasted much valuable time and energy in wondering; but wild as were his theories concerning his Chinese customer, he never came within guessing distance of the truth about the purpose connected with those photographs. But, then, our amiable vendor of notabilities had not, and could not have, any private knowledge of James Horry and the Lhassa of Chinatown.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN BEHIND THE DOOR.

FEAR, once allowed to become an obsession, has much the same weakening and destructive effect on a man's nerve as vitriol would have on the wiring of a

coil. The filaments of courage and resourcefulness corrode and crumble; foresight and judgment of probabilities are disconnected from the seat of reason; diseased mentality takes the place of balanced, courageous sanity.

"He has money to burn," said the gardener on the Horry estate when an orchid, no larger or prettier than a wayside weed, arrived from Borneo. "Fifty thousand dollars is what this set him back. It may wither in a week, but he should worry."

"The boss paid twenty-five thousand bucks for his new car," said the head chauffeur at the Horry town garage. "She'll only run fifteen miles to the gallon, and her shoes cost a hundred and fifty apiece; but what's the dif? Jimmy's got all the dough there is in this burg."

So it went, from the Horry kitchens to the Horry stables; from the Paris bourse to the New York and London stock exchanges. Everybody, brokers, servants, and the newspaper enlightened public, were all convinced that James Horry could do anything he darned well pleased. Why not? He had money to burn!

Then came a day when James Horry did not spend any more money, and therefore displeased everybody.

For no fathomable cause, the order came to close up the ornate mansion overlooking the bay. A small army of idle servants discontentedly sought other sinecures. The twenty-five thousand dollar car stood untouched in the locked garage, the James Horry accounts in a hundred stores were paid and closed.

The surprise was perfect, the debacle complete; but in the nine days or thereabouts, people ceased saying: "Have you heard about James Horry? He's broke. Hasn't got a cent. He's shut up everything and beat it."

The truth of the matter was, James Horry had more money than ever before; but he had given up entertaining, retired from public life and no longer supported an extravagant tribe of useless, needless servants.

The day following the departure of the chef, the butler, the footman and the rest of the bunch of sleek hirelings in the town house, the windows were boarded up, a carpenter sawed a rectangular hole in a door, screwed thereto a boxlike closet with sliding panels; and, being paid for silence, kept his mouth tightly shut on the subject of what he had done.

Then Dave Burgess took charge. Bull-necked, barrel-chested, stolid but moderately crafty, he was a dependable watchdog. Decoratively speaking all he lacked was a collar and chain. Given the order to keep guard over a certain spot, Dave would sit for hours on end, and nothing short of fire, deluge or a charge of dynamite could move him. He had a single track mind and could be depended upon implicity to obey a simple, straightforward order, and his duties in the Horry house were of this class. All Dave had to do was to guard the front entrance and go, whenever he was summoned by a buzzer, to the door with the sliding panels.

Following a searching and meticulous scrutiny of Dave's references, the lawyer who had engaged him made it very clear that all Dave had to do was to obey orders, ask no questions, tell no tales and draw down two hundred and fifty dollars a month.

"H-huh!" said Dave. "I gotcha," and bought himself a two-ounce plug and a seven gun. When there was nothing doing, he could chew tobacco. If any intruders came along he would plug them with nickel-tipped bullets. For Dave, the problem of existence was agreeably easy. To the limits of his intelligence he was a watchdog par excellence; a stubble-chinned machine, happy and content that each day and night should be of the same unvarying monotony. He knew he was in the James Horry house; but whether the person living behind the closed door of the sliding panel was Bill Hohenzollern, the Shah of Persia or Horry himself, Dave could not say.

Within fifteen minutes of his arrival at the Horry house, the buzzer gave a prolonged, waspish call, and Dave had his first interview with his employer. It was a crazy, cranky proceeding; but Dave Burgess accepted the situation without any particular quiver of curiosity or wonder. He was paid to be an automaton and he started in right.

Fastened to the side of the door the carpenter had mutilated and adapted to certain

needs, was a speaking tube. Beside it hung a pencil and tear-off writing pad. Dave held the vulcanite funnel to his ear and grunted at the right place and moment.

Over the door and directly above Dave's close-cropped, short-necked head, was a queer looking affair that had semblance to a camera and a reflector; but which was neither. It was a domesticated form of periscope. Dave barely gave it a second glance.

His first instructions were oddly commonplace. The voice somewhere at the other end of the speaking tube bade him write out an order; a grocery order. Dave was willing; but his caligraphy was not of the dashing type, and the names of six articles had been rattled off before he managed to write down one.

" Stop," snapped the voice. " Tear that up. You'll be all day. Wait. I'll give you the complete list and you can then telephone from the hall."

After a short interval, there was a sharp, metallic click. The movable panel slid to one side disclosing the interior of a closet-like space. It was completely boxed in, and there was nothing to be seen either of the room beyond, or the person operating the simple but effective mechanism.

In dead silence Dave took the sheet of paper that lay on the bottom of the box, and the panel slipped back into place.

" Telephone that order," said the voice issuing from the speaking tube, " and return that list at once."

For seven weeks this was the broadly typical outline of each day's proceedings, and Dave Burgess was just as much a prisoner as the one who paid his salary and whose bidding he did.

The initial cause of all this mystery and inexplicable precautions was an exquisitely carved bowl of jade. In itself, it was a beautiful little piece of skillful workmanship. Yet, in the opinion of one man, it had conjured up thoughts of sinister and terrifying import.

Out of the inanimate do we sometimes construct reflections that torture or gladden. Apart from the flummery of superstition, certain things call up disquieting or cheerful thoughts. Over a bit of lace or an old forgotten memento, associative ideas get to work; and a trifle, in itself neutral, becomes a power for passing, or permanent good or bad influence.

A connoisseur of Chinese art would have raved enthusiastically over the jade. To the man behind the door with the sliding panel, the little carved bowl was a thing of loathing. He did not know who had sent it to him, or why. No threat of violence, no written word accompanied the bowl; but beyond all question of doubt James Horry felt certain it was a token of disaster and was partly sure he had seen it before.

" You shall rise to the pinnacle of wealth and power, and, at the zenith of your career you shall meet your doom."

These words had been uttered by one long since immured in an honored grave, yet the sight of the jade bowl called him clearly to memory, and drove the man who had " money to burn " to distraction and panic.

For years there had been no sign. Then, one morning James Horry had found that jade on his desk. It had come by parcel post and had been unpacked by one of his secretaries, and distrusting the effectiveness of his enormous fortune to buy him protection, he had given orders to close up everything and sought safety behind the door.

There, only one gifted with the power to read the innermost thoughts of the conscience-ridden, could tell of the horror and dread that abided with Horry all his waking hours and haunted his sleep.

Six weeks following his self effacement from the world where he had occupied so central a position, Horry received another gift. Dave Burgess had found it on the doorstep. It was a long, narrow parcel, light as a feather and addressed: " James Horry." There was no postmark.

Dave placed the parcel in the door-closet, and that was the last of it so far as he was concerned; but had he known what was in the parcel, even his stodgy imagination would have been stirred to some degree of activity. He would have built up some near approach to a love affair and—grinned, and—been entirely wrong in his mental flight.

It was a flower; a single narcissus that Horry's shaking fingers tore from its wrappings; but it spoke to him of no scene he

wished to recall. The receipt of the flower only enabled him to take a step further in remembering where he had seen the jade bowl and plunged him deeper into the quagmire of suspense. Then had come a third present. When it reached the man behind the door, Horry found himself in possession of a jade bowl, a narcissus and—a carved ebony base. The combination was complete. All he had to do in order to decorate his retreat with a pretty arrangement was to place the flower in the bowl and stand it on the ebony base. James Horry did no such thing. He cursed and crushed the half wilted flower under his heel. Then he resorted to the only means he had of communicating with the outer world. Dispensing with Dave as an intermediary, he telephoned, and thinking only to start a little fire of reprisal, he unwittingly committed himself to a destroying barrage of hatred.

Disdaining the help of private detectives, and having no legal right of protection from the police, no complaint or substantiated threat of violence to register, Horry sought the services of a low caste Chinaman who had once been in his employ. His call was heard; but unknown to him, reached others.

From number to number, Horry's message was passed on. Finally it came to the one who ruled over a kingdom of impregnable secrecy and far reaching power.

Chi Fang, ruler of the Lhassa of Chinatown, received Horry's message with a smile of contempt. Then he quietly sent an order to the man Horry had summoned, and burned a paper prayer in thanksgiving.

"The god of circumstance does oddly shape events to the end I desire," he said softly. "The plum was ripe and nearly ready for me to pluck. Now, another hand is shaking the tree and hastening the harvest. I must know more."

CHAPTER IV.

GENEVIEVE LEBLANC.

IT was the Westernized Sun Su whom Li Wang found waiting for him when he arrived home with his parcel of ladies, small and fair. The curtains concealing the Chinese room were closely drawn.

"You have brought plenty of them to choose from," observed the young man as he cut the string. "It is to be hoped I can find the one I need. I suspect you are speculating regarding my sanity and good intention."

"My master can think no bad thoughts, say no evil, or do no harm," replied the old man gravely.

"N-no!"

Sun Su's emphasis on the word gave it a doubtful quality. "The gods weigh causes," he went on; "man seldom goes further than results. In the judgment of the gods I may be held guilty; but tried in the justice courts of man I would doubtless be found innocent. Does that set your mind at rest?"

"I hear, yet cannot understand," murmured Li Wang. "Is not the frown of Buddha less desirable than man's smile?"

"No doubt. Yet—no matter. What is written, will be. Sometimes I think that our future plans are as irrevocably fixed as our past deeds are beyond being wiped out."

Sun Su picked up the first photograph, glanced at it and dropped it. Ten, twenty, thirty or so he passed over in as many seconds, then he came to a pause.

"This one will do," he said with quiet finality as he looked at the name printed below the photograph. "There is no need to look at any more. Take them all away and bring me the telephone book. I want to call up this young lady. Genevieve Leblanc! The name is familiar enough, yet never until this moment have I seen her."

While the old man gathered up the scattered photographs, Sun Su studied more closely the features of the girl he had chosen. It was a charming face that smiled at him; the expression was both artless, vivacious and daring; but it was not the girl's beauty that had attracted Sun Su. Neither was it because she was a star in the moving picture world. It was solely Genevieve's striking resemblance to another girl that had decided the young man and filled him with an elation that he took pains to conceal. Li Wang was to be trusted, but the plan Sun Su wanted to carry out was too subtly ingenious for the old man's comprehension. Then too, there was the extreme probability that

Li Wang's devotion would lead him to assume the responsibility and penalties of some desperate deed. He would take a life and give up his own, and a solemn vow would be broken.

" Mine is the better way," thought Sun Su as he laid down the photograph of Genevieve, " slower—but surer and—more punishing. The thrust of a knife, the loop of the garrote is too easy a way out for a rascal who dishonors the bond of friendship. With the help of the beautiful Miss Genevieve, my duty shall be performed."

Sun Su's expressed intention " to call up " Genevieve Leblanc was not immediately fulfilled, for the famous have learned that the convenient telephone is liable to abuse by triflers and time wasters, and many people are compelled to seek protection by withholding their private numbers from all except business associates and close friends. But Sun Su was both persistent and persuasive and he at last succeeded in being connected with the screen favorite's dressing room at the studio.

Perhaps it was the unusualness of his name, or possibly it was the cultured courtesy with which the young man expressed himself, or maybe it was the fact that he suggested he had a proposition of financial attractiveness to place before Miss Genevieve; but whether it was one or the other, or a combination of all three influences, Sun Su obtained the young lady's permission to call within the hour.

" Hal!" exclaimed Genevieve when she hung up the receiver, " I have a real, live Chinaman coming to see me."

The blond, good looking young man who lounged in the most comfortable chair in the room, raised a pair of nicely penciled eyebrows.

" What for, Jenny?" he asked.

Genevieve wrinkled her brows. " I don't quite know," she said, " but he has the loveliest voice you ever heard. Soothing, y'know. Something like Bernhardt's and Carmen Sylva's. Only deeper, y'know."

" Piffle, y'know," said Hal rudely. " Look out he doesn't soothe some of your jewelry out of sight and reach."

" Fade," retorted Jenny. " I have to change and do that dying-by-inches scene before he comes. Marie! Show Mr. Harold Marshall the way out. Handle him tenderly, treat him with care, but—get rid of him."

Hal, hero of many a balcony scene and love-in-the-twilight finale, scowled, but yielded to the bustling advance of Genevieve's maid. Marie was from Brittany; rosy cheeked, buxom, strong as a mule and colloqually free-spoken.

" You get out. No? Yes?" she stated, and the idol of sentimental feminine fans of the afternoon performances went—without delay.

CHAPTER V.

SECRET " SHADOWS."

BEFORE Sun Su left to keep his appointment with Genevieve Leblanc, he took from his desk drawer a plainly wrapped parcel about the size of a packet of cigarettes.

" Take this presently," he said, " and deliver it as before; but be careful you are not watched or followed back here."

" It shall be so," replied Li Wang calmly, but when his master had gone, the old man felt again the familiar doubts and misgivings. He had never been able to understand why his master had remained so long exiled from his native land; why he had acquired a European education and adopted so many of the customs and habits of white people.

In Li Wang's opinion the young man had not benefited by the change. Polite and considerate as he was, his manner was more abrupt and curt than became a Chinese gentleman of noble descent. But the old man exaggerated the difference in Sun Su. In reality, the young man was the same under the veneer of adopted characteristics. He spoke the language of the college trained youth, and behaved with the self possession of a traveled man of the world; but beneath the surface, Sun Su was the same poetic boy who had sat for hours in dreamy ecstatic contemplation of an unfolding flower.

Had Sun Su left China with some preconceived, definite plan? Had his apparently sudden interest in a moving picture actress

any connection with the packet Li Wang was to deliver at the big, deserted looking house? Was it not logical to suppose that where there is intrigue, there is danger?

"I have need to be watchful and wary as a fox," thought the old man, and when he went out to deliver the parcel, he started off in a direction opposite to the way he would eventually take in order to reach the house guarded by Dave Burgess.

"Be careful you are not followed," had said Sun Su, and it was he himself who was the object of observation from the moment he started for the studio. Hidden, unsuspected eyes watched his every move. The spies on his trail worked in relays, and even if Sun Su had been suspicious, he would not have discovered any proof that he was being followed.

When the young man changed trains in the subway, a peculiar and extraordinary happening took place. Yet Sun Su knew nothing of the affair, and a woman whose reputation for sanity and veracity had never been doubted, became an object of jest and teasing ridicule.

Connecting the stations of the trains going south and east was a long, brilliantly lighted, white tiled tunnel. It was almost painfully bare and clean. A mouse could not have scampered across the cemented, ten-foot width of it without being plainly seen. About a hundred feet long, the whole length of its curved sides and roof, were, excepting for the electric bulbs, an unbroken plane of vitrified brickwork.

When Sun Su left the train, he stopped at the book stall to buy a magazine. Consequently, when he entered the white tunnel, the other passengers had reached the platform for the eastbound trains, and he was alone.

A staidly dressed, middle aged woman watched him as he went by. There was no particular interest in her glance, but the thought, "he looks smart and clean," passed through her mind, and having nothing better to do, her eyes followed Sun Su with motherly approval. When he had gone about ten paces into the tunnel, another man came along. He walked directly behind Sun Su. His gait was slouchy, his attire slovenly. Somehow, he suggested a furtive, slinking animal. Now and again he gave a quick look over his shoulder. When Sun Su reached the middle of the tunnel, the man behind him stopped to light a cigarette. This was his ostensible purpose; but he had another, more urgent reason for his halt. Cupped in the hand he held to his face was a miniature mirror. In it, this man could see all that went on behind him. Almost as he stopped, the woman turned to look at the clock over the ticket office. For not more than three seconds were her eyes off the man. When she again looked along the tunnel, Sun Su was still in sight, but the man who had stopped midway had vanished. It was a physical impossibility for him to have retraced his steps, or reached the other end of the tunnel. To all intents and purposes he had been standing in a pipe of solid masonry; he could not have reached either end—yet—he had gone.

The woman shivered. The occurrence savored of the unpleasant and uncanny. She could see there was no opening or door in the white tiled wall, but to satisfy herself she walked the whole length of the tunnel. While she was inspecting the cemented brickwork, a man, as practical looking and sensible as herself hurried to her side. He was a husband in a hurry.

"What in the name of goodness are you doing?" he asked. "Didn't I say I would meet you by the ticket office? What's the matter with you? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

"He was no ghost. I could have touched him as he went by."

"Who?"

"The man who stopped just here and then—disappeared! He went away, vanished like a puff of smoke. I was looking for a door."

"You're crazy," said the man with marital frankness. "Come on. There's no door in this tunnel. Behind these bricks is a solid iron tube and tons of earth. You've been dreaming. It isn't like you to be foolish. I guess you need a cup of tea or something to brace you up."

"But I tell you I saw him!" exclaimed the woman. "He stood right here. I looked at the clock and just while my head was turned, he—"

"All I can say," interrupted her husband with a laugh, "is that your head is still turned. That's it. You're suffering from delusions."

The discussion which followed came near to breaking twenty years of connubial peace, and before the mystery was solved and the lady cleared of all doubt concerning her reliability, the affair of the subway came up repeatedly for tart and lively discoussion.

CHAPTER VI.

REGARDLESS OF COST.

MARIE'S big brown eyes were round and appraisingly critical when she ushered Sun Su into the scented privacy of Genevieve Leblanc's dressing room. The maid's expression held also a shade of disappointment; for many a grease paint Chinaman had Marie seen in the studio, and not one resembled Sun Su. In Marie's own words, the actors looked "more Chinesy than this gentleman."

Murmuring that "Mad'moiselle" would be with him in a little moment, Marie slowly retreated with ever a backward glance at the composed and polite Sun Su.

Unlike Hal Marshall, Sun Su chose a straight backed chair and carefully placing his hat, cane and gloves on a small table, took survey of his unaccustomed surroundings.

From walls and dressing tables, the bewilderingly pretty and vivacious face of Genevieve greeted him. There were a smiling host of them. In some of the various poses Jenny's resemblance to the girl of the past was even more striking than in the picture purchased by Li Wang. Sun Su nodded in self approval of his own thought: This bright faced, clear eyed girl could, he felt sure, aid and fully serve his purpose. Question was, would she?

Theatrical people have the knack of making their surroundings attractively different, and while he waited, Sun Su found much of interest in the daintily appointed room, and his first impression on meeting Genevieve tallied with his preconceived opinion of her.

With frank curiosity expressed on her frank face, Miss Leblanc entered. She could act, do stunts, or play the coy ingénue; but outside the range of the camera there was none of the poseur tricks about Jenny.

"You came for—" she asked tentatively.

"To ask a favor," said Sun Su, and stated his business with brief directness.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to do what you wish," said the girl when her visitor had finished.

"Then I must abandon the thing I have set out to do," said Sun Su, and although he was considerate enough not to intrude his personal feelings on a stranger, Jenny was aware he was keenly disappointed.

"Couldn't you use someone else?" she suggested. "There are a number of young actresses whose managers are not so jealously exacting. I am sure you can find some clever girl to play the part."

"Pardon," said the young man, "but I must differ. There is only one Genevieve Leblanc, and she alone can impersonate to the life, the character I want represented."

"Then, your character is not fictional?"

"No. It is one who lived—in great sorrow that I sought to duplicate. I have no photograph or picture of her; but your features and stature are almost the same, and you are ready and made up for the part, as it were. That is why I so particularly needed you. However—"

Sun Su reached for his hat and gloves.

"I am sorry," murmured Miss Leblanc. "If I were not under contract not to play for any other company—"

"But I am not a company!" exclaimed the young man. "I should have made it clear that the one act play, or scene rather, is solely for a private purpose. Only one film need be made, and it probably will only be shown once."

Jenny made no comment on the strangeness of Sun Su's statement.

"That may render the impossible probable," she said. "My company might agree to spare my valuable services; but you will excuse me if I ask you a question?"

"Most assuredly."

"Have you considered the cost of producing even a few hundred feet of film?"

"I am prepared, if need be, to spend a hundred thousand dollars," said Sun Su with unwonted display of energy. "The expense of the production is of no consideration."

Jenny was accustomed to thinking in large sums; but one tenth of a million for a few feet of film destined to be shown only once, and that, in private, seemed to her pretty near the acme of extravagance. What could be the reason prompting this young man's readiness for such reckless expenditure?

"Perhaps," suggested Sun Su rising, "you will think the matter over, and if it appeals agreeably to you, place the matter before your chief and let me know the result in a day or two. If everything is all right I will send you a brief outline of the scene."

On his way home Sun Su was too utterly immersed in thoughts of the prospect of realizing his hopes, to observe that he was again trailed by a succession of "shadows."

When he entered his own room, he received his first intimation that there were enemies afoot.

"After I delivered the little parcel," said Li Wang, "I saw two men. They watch and follow me."

"What were they?" ask Sun Su sharply.

"Chinese. *From the Lhassa!* The Lhassa of Chinatown."

CHAPTER VII.

SUN SU'S LITTLE "PLAY."

"THE Lhassa?" repeated Sun Su. "What do you mean by that? What is it?"

Li Wang spread his hands deprecatingly.

"I do not know. Before I come back I go to a friend of mine who keeps a Chinese store. I show him the men outside and he tell me they belong to the Lhassa. I ask him to tell what it is and he said he cannot. I fear danger. Not for me. I am old and poor. You are rich. Master, there is peril!"

"Maybe there is," said Sun Su indifferently, "but I have no quarrel with any secret society or tong, so I have nothing to fear. My affair can have no connection whatsoever to do with any hide-in-the-hole society."

In this Sun Su was greatly mistaken, for in the rashness of inexperience he overlooked the fact that it was possible that circumstances and conditions beyond his knowledge and control were weaving events beyond the radius of his ken to closer and closer contact with himself.

At the moment he was talking with Li Wang, a stranger was gossiping with the janitor in the basement; probing and prompting for information about Sun Su. Other agents were at work following up the slenderest clew that might reveal some detail in the past history of the young man. Still others, those "shadows" who had followed Sun Su almost to the door of Jenny's dressing room, were sending in their reports to Chi Fang.

These parasitic investigators did not know the source of the money that came to them in reward for their spying, they never saw the man who employed them; but they were loyal because they were afraid to be otherwise.

Whatever the order, the master of the Lhassa of Chinatown was implicitly obeyed.

"I would rest," said Sun Su after he had vainly endeavored to obtain information of any explicit nature from Li Wang; but although he sat for hours in the undisturbed silence of the Chinese room, Sun Su could not fathom the reason for Li Wang being followed by men of his own race. When he had warned Li Wang of being watched, Sun Su had thought only of the possibility of espionage by legitimate detectives. What would be the outcome of the interest taken in Li Wang's errand by some members of a secret society? The Lhassa of Chinatown! What was this mysterious organization? If it existed, where was it, and who was its head?

Sun Su had spoken truly enough when he had said that he had nothing to fear. He was breaking no law; yet, was it not necessary for the success of his scheme that he should remain unknown to the recipient of the gifts carried by Li Wang?

"Whoever they are," he thought, "they will have difficulty of discovering who I

am; but in case of accident, there is need for haste."

To this end, circumstances favored Sun Su. Within twenty-four hours of his interview with Genevieve Leblanc, he was called up by the moving picture company. Present at the conference which followed was the president of the company, a director of world-wide reputation, a staff scenario writer and Genevieve herself.

In two hours all details, such as cost of production, scenery and cast needed, and the action of the scene were settled. Sun Su's signature to a document binding him not to exhibit the film in public, *and* a check calling for payment of thirty thousand dollars to the company, completed the transaction.

"A remarkable piece of business," observed the president when Sun Su had gone. "That young man looks and talks like a level-headed, sensible chap. What in the world, though, can he want to put over a freakish thing like this for? There's some devilishness going on, but he's paying the piper and can call the tune."

This was the president's opinion and freely given, and fair enough under the circumstances. Hal Marshall, suffering from a personal bias against any man who came near Jenny, was neither charitable or just.

"I don't see what you want to have anything to do with that Chink for," he grumbled.

"Maybe you would if you were getting the honorarium I am," retorted Jenny. "Your judgment is warped, Hal. You can't see anything but the lovey-dovey stuff. This is likely to be interesting. I love a costume play with all the Oriental stuff. There's not much action, but it'll be a change."

"Hope you get all the change you're after," said Hal resentfully, and later—regretted his words.

It is likely that Jenny herself, with all her natural endowments of pluck and grit, would have hesitated to take part in Sun Su's play if she had known into what strange places and dangerous situations it was to lead her. But there is no telling. Debarred from the activities and demands of her profession, she would have died of boredom and ennui. Excitement and peril were necessary to her restive spirit.

CHAPTER VIII.

MASTER OF THE LHASSA.

WHILE the Sun Su play was being rehearsed in the privacy of a boarded off portion of the enormous studio building, and until it went beyond the point of perfection where the cameras began to click, the man behind the door stayed undisturbed. He was not, could not be at peace; for spectral suspense was his continual companion; but no new gifts came to lash his memory to morbid dwelling on the past and dread of every future moment. Days passed and still the man he had summoned by telephone did not come. A week, ten days went by. Then, when the work Chi Fang had ordered done, and everything was to the master's liking, the man received permission to visit the Horry house.

Oblivious of the fact that he was himself a primitive specimen of the genus homo, Dave Burgess showed the visitor scant ceremony when late one night he opened the front door and gloweringly allowed "the heathen furriner" to sidle in.

"So, you've come at last," he said sourly; "'bout time, too. Th' boss has been asking me every day if anybody's been. Say, what's y'r name?"

"Yen Foo, please."

The reply was given mildly; but a look such as a sleepy rattler might bestow upon a yapping, too noisy cur came into the Chinaman's coldly critical eyes. Yen Foo was sleekly fat, his face and hands looked soft and flabby, yet somehow, he did not seem to be at all awed by the gorilla-like build of Dave. It was the latter's eyes that first shifted.

"C'm on then," he said and led the way to the door. Before his stubby forefinger could touch the bell button set in the wall, the periscope swung around, and a few seconds after it stopped a voice came jerkily from the speaking tube. Yen Foo stood watchful, but composed.

"This is the man. Go back to the hall and wait until I send for you."

Without waiting to be told what to do, Yen Foo picked up the speaking tube.

"Taken velly sick," he said anticipating the first question that would be put to him. "I want to come before, but I not able."

"You may be lying, or you may be telling the truth," said the voice. "Either way it doesn't matter now. You're here. How long is it since you saw Chi Fang?"

Not a muscle of Foo's face moved. He looked up at the periscope.

"I do not know him," he said and gaged the expression of his voice with the skill of an accomplished liar. There was just the right degree of surprise in the way he spoke.

"But you have heard of him?"

"Yes. He velly big man."

"Can you find him?"

"I not know where to look."

"Does this help you?"

The panel slid aside and Yen Foo saw an inviting pile of bank notes. On the outer edge of the heap lay a sheaf bearing the paper band as it had come from the bank. Printed in big, red numerals was the amount inclosed within the band.

"Five hundred dollars!" murmured Yen Foo, and his hand shot out. Quick as he was, the eyes watching him by means of the mirrors in the periscope anticipated his move. A grating, jeering laugh, with no quality of mirth in it, vibrated in the tube.

"First earn your reward," said the voice. "I have reason to believe that Chi Fang is somewhere in the city. Find him, and the day you bring him here, you shall have not five hundred, but five thousand dollars—cash. You can go now."

Yen Foo shook his head despondently.

"I try," he said, "but I think maybe he too big for me."

No further word came from the speaking tube, and Yen Foo moved away. Half an hour after he left the Horry house, this fat Chinaman was busy with his brush. Before him were sheets of paper covered with those characters so bizarre to eyes accustomed to the written characters of the white man. Yen Foo was inditing a complete account of his conversation with the man behind the door. Before midnight that report was in the hands of Chi Fang.

Chi Fang, the man who, notwithstanding the constitution and the freedom of action accorded to every alien coming to the United States, practically ruled every Chinaman in the city. In the homes of his subjects, the name of Chi Fang stood representative of a power that must be obeyed. Yet, few had ever seen him, and although the authorities were vaguely aware of his existence, they could never pick up any trail that would lead them to his headquarters. In cleverness he was above their reach, and in person he was literally below their grasp.

Tall, of a saturnine-handsome type, the ruler of the Lhassa of Chinatown looked the part. His eyes were bright and piercing, his nose aquiline and masterful, his chin was long, lean and indicative of shrewd mental pugnacity. Categorically, this describes Chi Fang; but like all catalogues of stuffs and virtues, the bald statement of surface qualities lacks conviction. Chi Fang was something more than a man of arresting appearance. Even in repose, he radiated a dynamic, despotic personality and this cannot be described in words. It speaks only in deeds and actions.

The room where Chi Fang sat reading the report from Yen Foo was filled with the golden glow of sunlight, and the air was fresh and pure. Yet the sunny effect was an illusion brought about by a skillfully planned system of electric lighting, and the bracing quality of the air was due to an elaborate installation of suction pumps, filters and controls of humidity.

Above his head roared the Elevated trains, the bells of trolley cars jangled, and ponderous cars and trucks rolled ceaselessly by; but never a murmur reached the ears of Chi Fang. The ceiling of his room, decorated with a design in gold and aquamarine, was sound proof. One hundred feet of earth, topped with a layer of concrete and asphalt, insulated Chi Fang from all sounds going on above him.

All above the foundation lines of their buildings belonged to the people of the city. All below, in solid vastness, belonged to Chi Fang. He was rent free, tax free and undisputed owner of all the space he could excavate. In his safe were plans of the city's system of conduits and drainage

pipes. Whenever he wished to enlarge his domain, a sloping tunnel was driven upward to one of the main pipes, a chamber was hollowed out, shored with heavy timbers; the top of the pipe was tapped, and in quantities scrupulously calculated not to block the flow of water, the earth being excavated below was hoisted, dumped and carried away free of cost and further labor. When the enlargement was finished the pipe was sealed, the shoring removed, the earth replaced and tamped hard and the tunnel refilled.

Patience and engineering ability accomplished greater marvels of construction below earth than towered on its surface; artistry did the rest.

In the center of Chi Fang's room was a marble fountain. Miniature trees grew around the edge of the basin. Red goldfish darted beneath bridges of painted ware or hung motionless in the limpid pool. To the silvery tinkle of the water was the accompaniment of the distant notes of a softly played stringed instrument. Now and again, as Chi Fang rustled his papers, a jet black bird swinging in a cage of carved ivory, gave voice to pianissimo, warbling song.

Whatever may have been the mental obliqueness behind those slant eyes of Chi Fang, he had no tolerance for the unbeautiful and sordid. Born in the days of olden China, he would have been a poet, parasitic perhaps, and a seeker of favors, but enjoying the luxury of an emperor's court. Now —call him what you will, he was picturesque. A pirate of unique trend of mind and stupendously daring ambition. An outlaw, but removed from the stigma of being a common, cast-to-pattern crook.

Much had Chi Fang accomplished; he had actually bored the Lhassa of Chinatown out of the ground, and pledged his followers by bonds of unbreakable loyalty. Now, as he read the report of Yen Foo, he considered a problem of many facets and weighed a coup that would transcend all that he had achieved.

Hitherto, since one isolated, never-forgotten occasion when he had been bested by one craftier than himself, Chi Fang had been the architect of his own affairs. Now, if the signs were not false, if the dossier his agents had put together concerning Sun Su was to be accepted at its full value, opportunity, rare and rich in inviting potential profit, was dovetailing with the policy that had carried him steadily to a position where ruthlessness would bear no boomerang penalties. He could strike and retire unscathed.

For the space of time that it took him to inhale the fragrance of a cigarette worthy of the discriminating taste of a sultan, the master of the Lhassa reviewed the situation in all its aspects. He hesitated to make final the decision that was urging him to act; but it was caution, the wisdom of the wily tactician, not timidity, that held him poised on the thin line dividing intention from action.

Seldom does a good general lead in person his forces into the field. He stays behind the lines pressing buttons and feeding his soldiers into the common hopper of offensive and defensive destruction. When the chief of an army steps from his office into the arena, he is about to lead a forlorn hope and seeks to remedy a mistake.

With Chi Fang the case was different. So far he had made no slip in his calculations; yet, he was inclined to break a rule that had proved its worth in unspectacular but sound practice. Did the soulless calculating master seek to wear a wreath of gratified vanity and pride, or did the barbarian in him hunger for the sweets of revenge?

CHAPTER IX.

A BONE FOR EVERY DOG.

WHEN an obstacle blocks the path of a strong, pitiless man, he kicks it aside. In relationship to Chi Fang, Dave Burgess occupied the rôle of being a nuisance. Not only did Yen Foo's report contain reference to the Horry house watchdog, but all the other statements of the master's investigators tallied on one particular: Dave was mentioned as a guard to be reckoned with by anyone attempting to enter the house. During the night Dave patrolled his round. His habits, although

irregular, were consistent with the duties of an efficient watchdog. There was no forecasting of his whereabouts at a given hour to be made. At ten on Monday he might be sitting in the front hall; at the same time on Tuesday he was as likely to be flashing his torch over the fastenings of the back door as examining the shuttered windows. He had no cut and dried schedule. Also, Dan carried an automatic, and there was proof that he would shoot without warning and with killing markmanship.

Previous to Dave's employment as guard over the Horry place, three burglars had attempted to loot the bank he had under his protection. Anteceding this episode was the occasion when Dave had kept watch and ward over the art treasures of a millionaire hobbyist. Here also, an attempt was made to "put one over" on Dave; but as in the case of the bank, the affair, so far as the burglars were concerned, was a dismal fizzle; they never came up for trial, for Dave's ready aim had put them all beyond the protective jurisdiction of human courts.

Dave was a dumb-head, a creature of small intelligence and no intellectuality, but he was a killer, and that accounted for him being chosen for the Horry job.

Chi Fang had made up his mind to visit the Horry house unknown to Dave; therefore, since Dave was not to be bought, and not to be got around, he must be reasoned with. Contemplation of talking over a man like Dave Burgess and not getting cornered, suggested suicide or murder; but as foolishness and crime calling for needless bloodshed were not in the catalogue of the master's methods for getting what he wanted, he began to think about Dave's peculiarities.

"He does not drink. Is he to be bribed? The only thing he does regularly and all the time is to chew."

When this summarized thought passed through Chi Fang's mind, a gleam shone in his black eyes. After all, it should not be so very difficult to step over Dave.

"There is a bone that will tempt every dog," he said. "I will call on my anxious, nervous friend Horry within forty-eight hours."

Forty-three hours later the periscope over the door that guarded a broken-spirited coward from the world swung round sharply and stopped with a jerk.

For the space of three minutes it remained motionless, and there was silence; a silence of the kind that is a breathless wait pregnant with quick question.

The invited guest had come unexpectedly and—unannounced. In outward evidence of a state of mind that tended to cruel, sardonic amusement, Chi Fang stood with uplifted chin gazing up at the mechanical eyes. His smile was a taunt; confident, cryptic. He could see nothing of the person whom he knew was watching him; but it pleased him to picture the amazement, consternation and fear that he knew must be gripping the man behind the door.

A whispering voice came from the speaking tube:

"How did you get here?"

Chi Fang made gesture indicative of dismissal of all discussion of ways and means.

"You sent for me. I am here," he stated.

"Where is Dave Burgess?"

"Off duty."

"Gone!"

"Only for an hour. I bought him."

"Impossible."

"Not at all," said Chi Fang quietly, and added with a hint of drawling sarcasm in his voice: "You must not blame him. I paid high and commanded his absence, therefore—"

The last word, the implied futility of attempting to thwart him in anything he undertook, indicated by his incompleted sentence, was apparently accepted by he who listened yet dared not show his face.

Another period of silence ensued.

"My time is valuable," suggested Chi Fang at last. "Why not drop this foolish in-camera business and come out in the open. You always were a poltroon, Horry, but never as bad as this."

"I don't trust a blackmailer," snarled the voice. "What is your price?"

Aware that every shade of expression on his face was visible to James Horry, the master of the Lhassa did not allow a flicker of an eyelid to betray him; but all the same, he was mightily surprised and inter-

ested to know what was prompting the hidden man to talk in this vein.

"I thought he sent for me to buy my help," reflected Chi Fang. "Now, it seems that he believes I am the one who swings the sword of Damocles. The poor fool is deliberately asking me to take now the price I intended to collect later. I will oblige."

Chi Fang knew much, his agents had accumulated a mass of information concerning Sun Su, but not until this moment had he hit on the facts as they appeared to James Horry. In affairs requiring delicate manipulation, it is the other fellow's point of view that really matters, and the diplomatist who is going to win the game is the one who reads the intention so often concealed by words and scraps of paper. One thing was clear: James Horry was not even aware of the existence of Sun Su. At the first hint of danger, he had thrown up the sponge and barricaded himself. To one who intended to profit, Horry's mistake was a valuable asset.

"My price," said Chi Fang, "is dependant entirely upon what you expect me to do. According to strict accounting, one half of all you possess should be mine."

"I could kill you where you stand!"

The words issuing from the speaking tube were vicious, but born of a wish rather than real intent.

"You think you could, but you will not," replied Chi Fang calmly and showed no more concern than if he were talking to a boastful child.

"I will give you fifty thousand dollars."

"What for? That is not enough for any great return. Be serious."

"A hundred thousand, then."

"Pin money! You are worth over seven million dollars in realizable securities. That is to-day. To-morrow, if you live, your fortune may treble and quadruple. Not one tenth of the land you secured has been developed. You succeeded in cheating me once. The trickster pays a high rate of interest when he tries to buy back his right to breathe freely; but I will be liberal and generous. State what you expect from me in return and I will set a figure that you can pay without strain."

"I want you to leave me alone; to cease from threatening me."

"I have made no threat other than the suggestion respecting recompense."

"You sent the jade bowl."

Chi Fang let the statement stand uncontradicted. He could have laughed aloud and with abandon to his appreciation of the joke, but he maintained his air of dignity and kept silent. James Horry, better than any one else, could weave the rope that was to hang him.

The thing that one believes, is for all practical purposes the influence that governs every thought and action. The fixed idea fetters and debars a possible change of opinion, and although James Horry had no proof that Chi Fang had sent him the succession of parcels following the jade bowl, and had not even known that the Chinaman was in the city, he had jumped to the conclusion that he, and he only could have been the anonymous donor of those tormenting presents. As may naturally be supposed, there was a reason why Horry clung to the belief that he was being victimized and subtly threatened by Chi Fang. The cause was linked to that time when one, more woefully deceived than Chi Fang, had made the prophecy Horry could never forget. In all the years that had gone since the man behind the door had cemented the foundation of his stupendous fortune with base treachery, not twelve consecutive hours had passed without recollection of that phrase: " . . . *at the zenith of your career you shall meet your doom.*"

Now, James Horry was making the grievous mistake of ignorance. He knew nothing of the Lhassa of Chinatown and the far reaching power of the master. He cringed to Chi Fang, yet underestimated his cleverness and strength.

"You sent that bowl and other things," went on Horry accusingly. "You plan some devilment in revenge, and that is your way of tormenting me. I tell you I won't stand for it. Will two hundred thousand satisfy you? If not—"

"What then?" asked Chi Fang.

"I'll fire through the door."

"Then," said the master quickly, "I'll

accept your offer of two hundred thousand dollars."

"Supposing I refuse to give you more than half that amount?"

"Then, I'll take that."

"But what guarantee have I that you will not come back for more?" asked Horry in suspicious haste.

"None, O foolish and tricky one. Listen to man's talk. I said I would take a hundred thousand, so I will; but each week I shall come or send for a like amount until the half of your fortune is in my possession. You will pay in cash; a thing that would be impossible, if I insisted upon having my millions in one lump. By the way, take a look at your cartridge clip before you waste further time in threatening me."

Some seconds went by before Horry spoke again. When he did the alarm in his voice was all craven. His terror made his speech a jumble of incoherence, but Chi Fang knew full well what the terrified man was trying to say.

"It is useless to rave," he said with contempt. "Your fort may secure you from some; but to me it is a house of cards. One does not play with a poison snake without first rendering him harmless. I gave orders that the little matter of your weapon be attended to before I came. These modern firearms are dangerous in the hands of a timid man. Let the farce now conclude."

"What shall I do?" asked Horry.

"Pay me. You have upward of fifty thousand in cash now in your possession. I will take that and a check for the balance. See that you have the second payment ready in full next week."

A torrent of protest and questions came from the speaking tube. Chi Fang became imperiously impatient.

"Do not trifle," he said shortly, and almost immediately the door panel opened. The ink was still wet on the signature to the check.

"I am free now to leave this place without fear of molestation?" asked Horry.

"On the contrary," replied Chi Fang as he fanned the check; "you are safer where you are. Indeed, I cannot promise you protection if you venture to leave your retreat."

"Protection!" exclaimed Horry shrilly. "What do you mean by that?"

"You do not know?" asked Chi Fang in assumed surprise. "I should have perhaps explained earlier; but the truth is, you have another enemy. I had nothing whatsoever to do with the jade bowl. Possibly the one who sent it may demand blood instead of money. It is better for you to stay where you are."

CHAPTER X.

"THE PLAY'S THE THING."

"SO it is finished at last!" exclaimed Genevieve Leblanc. "I am not sorry. As a gentleman, Mr. Mandarin, you are a complete success, the finished, polished article; but as a director—well, all I can say is: I am glad I do not have to work with you all the time. You certainly do go the limit when it comes to getting things just so."

Jenny sat on the framework of a partly dismantled pagoda. All about her the business of demolishment was going on. The work of removing the setting for Sun Su's play had started immediately the camera had taken record of the last foot of action. In one corner, the carpenters were already erecting another setting. Floor space and time are not allowed to remain unproductive in movie studios.

"I am sorry if I tried your patience," said Sun Su, "but I wanted that last bit to ring true. To be, in fact, a replica of the actual, real scene. You did splendidly. It is regretful that I was too exacting."

"You don't have to make any apologies, I was not really grumbling. It doesn't matter how much bother it was so long as the picture comes out right; but—"

"What were you going to say?" asked Sun Su, as the girl paused.

"You'll think I am very inquisitive, but I cannot help wondering why you have gone to all this trouble and expense. It seems such a—a—"

"A what?"

"A waste."

"Of your talent?" asked Sun Su with smiling raillery.

"Yes, I'll say it is partly that. Under the able direction of director Sun Su I have put in some good work. Why, if you'd only write a beginning and an end to this main scene, I believe the company would jump at the chance to buy it. Instead of being out of pocket, you'd make money."

"Mercenary one," chided Sun Su.

"Not a bit of it," objected Jenny. "I'm just businesslike. There's no sense at all in throwing a good opportunity away."

"Ordinarily speaking, there is not," agreed Sun Su. "I appreciate your thoughtfulness and good intentions; but if you knew why I have had this picture made, you would understand why I could not countenance it being shown in public. It is to fulfill a purpose settled in my mind, and then—I shall feel happier and shall in a measure—forget."

"Both love and hate are feelings one does not lightly dismiss," observed Jenny shrewdly.

"You speak as one wise in experience," replied Sun Su, "and you play as one who has sounded the depths of emotion. By some uncanny gift of sympathy, you exactly recreated the girl I wanted you to impersonate. You played the part of one who has suffered the greatest indignities possible for a woman to suffer. Yet you are only a girl. Apart from all else, I am benefited by having met one so charming and understanding. You are a great actress, and that I may have still pleasanter memories of our last meeting, I want you to do me the honor of dining with me at my apartment this evening. You and Hal Marshall. In addition to the gastronomic efforts of Li Wang, that are really first class, I have a little surprise for you."

The sincerity of Sun Su's compliments brought a flush to Jenny's cheeks. The genuine actor or actress never in their pay envelope lose their joy of being admired. Monetary reward alone does not satisfy. If it did, the professions would sink to the level of petty huckstering.

"I love surprises," cried the girl, "but do tell me what it is."

Sun Su shook his head. "It is only a small thing," he said, "but its chief value to me lays in the circumstance that you do not know what it is. Your expectancy assures me that you will not fail to come."

"I would anyway," said Jenny; adding frankly: "You interest me. There's something different about you."

"I am Chinese," said Sun Su. "May your regard never grow less."

CHAPTER XI.

A WEAK MAN'S REASONING.

SHORTLY after his departure from the Horry house, Chi Fang closed tighter the net restricting James Horry to helpless submission.

"Let the good work of friend Sun Su continue its influence," he thought. "Its strength lays in its threatlessness. The certainty that he was to be shot, knifed, struck down by some stated form of violence would give Horry something definite to fight. It is the uncertainty that has turned Horry's thin blood to water and made him a quaking, nervous wreck. Mentally and physically I must keep him where he is. If he is driven too far, he is capable of going beyond a door that even I cannot open. What is Sun Su doing at that moving picture studio? Has it any connection with his campaign against Horry? My enterprising young friend must not be allowed to drive James too far. My golden goose is a precious bird."

Any order given by the master of the Lhassa had always been carried out without waste of time. Never had there ever been a complete failure. Yet, simple and easy of achievement as it might appear, Chi Fang's agents failed to get any hint of the nature of the picture that was being filmed. In vain did some hang around the studio and endeavor to get taken on as supers; while others were prepared to commit burglary or arson if there offered a chance of success following desperate measures.

Until rehearsals were over, no one except the principals were permitted to pass the stout barrier of boards. Behind a high wall of tongue and groove pine, the scene was set up. Not even the top of a make-believe building could be seen, nothing was heard but the occasional murmur of voices

When all was set, the picture was taken in less than an hour. Word came to Chi Fang that immediately the film had been developed it was boxed, sealed and placed in the company's vault.

Given the certainty that the film would remain in the vault for a few hours, Chi Fang would have cracked that steel and concrete chamber without scruple or fear; but not being sure that it would remain in the safe for even one night, he concentrated on getting hold of it when he left the studio.

At the Horry house, things went on without apparent change, the same as before the coming of Yen Foo and his master Chi Fang. The same dull routine obtained; but beneath the surface was a difference. Dave Burgess was morosely uneasy by his inability to find cause or reason for his unaccountable sleep.

" Dropped off just as if I'd been hit with a blackjack or doped with K. O. drops," he thought, but as there was no bump on his head, and the after effects of the powder dropped into his tobacco left no pain or disturbance in the digestive interior of Dave, he began to worry about the correct functioning of his heart.

" Must 'a' missed a beat," he decided, and as Horry said nothing to him, never for an instant did Dave suspect he had been " stepped over." As many a better man believes, Dave thought himself infallible.

As for James Horry, he was indeed in a bad way. He had exchanged a condition of voluntary retirement for one under the control of Chi Fang. He had paid out all the ready cash he had on hand, given over a big check; pledged himself to costly " protection " and was harnessed by the inexplicableness of the manner in which his cartridge clip had been tampered with. He searched the rooms he had isolated from the rest of the house by the closet-door, and although he tapped the walls and scrutinized every corner, he found—nothing.

Then came a message from the master of the Lhassa.

" Have ready what was arranged for," said an unidentifiable voice over the wire, " and there will be sent you the key to liberty."

Horry obtained the money, and when Yen Foo came for the packet of bank notes, he placed in the closet a small, leather covered box. Truly enough it contained a key, but it was so named figuratively. The glittering, nickel-plated syringe with its hollow needle was at one and the same time a sesame to solace and a pledge to envenomed slavery. Tucked in a corner of the box was a small phial of morphine.

Horry's first act was to fling the hypodermic from him and retreat to his couch in babbling, futile rage. For hours he kept his gaze away from the " key " sent by Chi Fang; but little by little an idea became a conviction in his mind. He needed a complete rest; to sleep undisturbed by nightmares and wakeful intervals of persistent insomnia. He longed to forget and—was he not strong of will? Could he not control himself and take just sufficient of the drug to give his brain and body time to recuperate and gain strength to break free?

Round and round in an ever-narrowing circle Horry allowed thoughts to follow desire and woo temptation. It was a peculiar situation, but common enough. A weak willed man can convince himself of anything he pleases, adopt any point of view, and by a crassly easy and stupid process of self hypnosis, delude himself to whatsoever belief he wishes to adopt. As a financier, a juggler of ways and means of making money, James Horry had proved himself. Indiscriminating reporters had lauded him to the skies. Superficial fathers had quoted him to their sons as a brilliant example, whereas he was nothing but a whited sepulcher of rascality.

With ever increasing frequency, Horry's eyes sought the glint of the hypodermic. One little sting from that lethal reservoir and he would be transported to Elysium. Realities would fade and vaporish illusions prevail.

" Anyway," he decided with willing acceptance of specious, false reasoning, " I can be no worse off. I'll take the minimum injection and fool that Chink. Probably he expects I will become an addict; but I can delude him and set a scale that can do me no harm."

Thus did James Horry fool himself and fulfill the expectations of Chi Fang

In a little while he slumped back, a self-made prisoner in mind as well as body. Ten feet from the couch where he lay, a door that had been, and for that matter, was still nailed fast, was lifted aside. With the door went the framework, and Chi Fang came through the straight edged opening. The sawn cut, that had severed the door and frame completely from the wall, had been made by one of Chi Fang's best experts. The severing hairline did not waver from the edge of the woodwork or mar the wall paper. The job had taken three nights of noiseless labor; but it was a masterpiece of skill. When the door was in place, a wedge hidden by the top molding held it immovable. Horry had searched his room, but had not even touched the door. It was nailed up and bore no visible signs of having been tampered with.

"Now," thought the master of the Lhassa when he stood looking down at the sleeping man, "I have no further need to fear you will do anything desperate. Madam Morphine will look after you for me and will still those jumping nerves to indifference of all else but her seductiveness. I will protect you from Sun Su—for a time."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SILKEN WEB.

WHEN first awakening, it is sometimes difficult to at once fix the dividing line between dream and reality. Genevieve Leblanc found it an impossibility. Which, under the circumstances, is not surprising. The last thing Jenny could remember was talking to Sun Su in the studio. The first thing she saw was a golden haze, backed by an expanse of turquoise blue.

Shutting her eyes tight, she thought hard and tried to concentrate her mind on some solid fact intervening between now—and then.

"I *must* be dreaming," she thought. "If not, what has happened to me and where am I?"

Through half closed eyelids, the girl peeped about her. The haze was still all above her; but clearer and brighter. She distinguished a large, hanging globe of mother of pearl, and after considerable effort, identified it as a lamp. But above the lamp was a summer sky! There were clouds, filmy and rosy as with the flush of dawn.

Lamps and summer skies do not go together. Jenny sat up and saw she had been gazing up at a painted ceiling. It was a marvelous piece of scenic work, and most certainly was not of dream stuff. Round eyed and with lips forming a soundless O, the girl turned her head slowly from side to side. She saw the walls were hung with ivory tinted silk embroidered with gorgeous plumaged birds and brilliant hued flowers. There were chairs and a table. All were of a deep, scarlet lacquer, but to Jenny they looked as if they were carved from solid blocks of sealing wax. Looking down and closer at hand, she became aware that she was sitting with her legs tucked under her in the middle of a large square couch. It was heaped with cushions. The proper and natural thing to do was to jump up and scream; but Genevieve was no ordinary girl, and—there was another reason why she sank back with one elbow deeply bedded in one of those soft mounds of swan's down. She was still under the influence of a spirit of passivity that had wreathed in a nebulous coil of blue-gray smoke, and had pleasantly stolen her will and power to direct her movements and actions.

"Jasmine! That's what it reminds me of," she murmured and dimly she saw a strange picture. It grew into her memory as part of the incidents that had come between the moment she had left the studio and this present time of half somnolent wakening. She saw herself seated at a dinner table. On her left was Hal Marshall, oddly pale and strained looking. At the right of her sat Sun Su, calm as usual, but watchfully intent. Somewhere in the background was Li Wang. There were other indistinguishable blurs of no importance. They had come, had stood silently around, and had made no more impression upon her notice than the supers of a play. But—who was that other? That tall, com-

manding figure whose slant eyes had held hers in fascinated wonder? Was it not he who had cast the spell that had caused her to drift from drowsy submission into deep, untroubled sleep?

On an ash tray, he had placed a pastille such as druggists sold, but possessed of a perfume far sweeter and pungent than their black pyramids of charcoal. He had lighted the tip of the cone. It had sputtered redly and then had sent forth clouds of wreathing coils of scented smoke. Sun Su had half risen from his chair and sank back. Hal had gone right off to sleep with his head on his arms. Then—that was all. The perfume of jasmine remained. It clung to her hair, and faint as it was, seemed even now to induce a desire to stay quite still and let events take their course.

Jenny's blond head had drooped a little. "After all," she thought placidly, "there is nothing to worry about. This is the most beautiful room I have ever seen, and I am more comfortable and contented than I have ever been before. Presently Hal will come and take me home and—and—"

There was no conclusion to Jenny's thoughts. Curled up among the cushions, she slept and presently dreamed she was a stolen princess.

Her dream was nearer to reality than dreams usually are, for in actual fact she was a stolen star. The reason for her abduction was allied to the motive that had caused Sun Su to select her for his picture play; but it was rooted deeper and of a tenacity destined to prove unbreakable in the face of all opposition.

Genevieve Leblanc had come into the possession of the master of the Lhassa. She slept in his city and—his word was law. Whatever he claimed was his.

CHAPTER XIII.

MOTIVE BEHIND MOTIVE.

FOR one who had committed a crime punishable by a long term of imprisonment, Chi Fang was singularly unperturbed; but, he ruled the Lhassa of Chinatown, and for this reason alone, could consider himself safe and beyond the reach of white man's rule.

He had gone to Sun Su's apartment to secure the film, and returned, not only with the picture, not only with Jenny, but also with three other captives. In another part of the Lhassa, but deposited on a strip of matting instead of a bed of downy pillows, were Sun Su, Li Wang and Hal Marshall. All three were sound asleep and likely to remain so for hours to come. The air of the room was heavy with the odor of jasmine. A pile of gray ash in a bronze incense burner showed that another pastille had been burned. Not one of the three men could speak or move with conscious volition. So—to Chi Fang they were prisoners to somnolescence awaiting the verdict of his conclusions. He was very much on the qui vive, and all his faculties were bent on covering all traces of an unpremeditated deed.

Had the quadruple act of abduction been the work of any other, scarcely an hour would have passed without a general alarm being sent out; but Chi Fang could transgress spontaneously and cause not a ripple of dangerous inquiry as the result of his temerity.

He stultified immediate question by providing a plausible answer to the unexpected, and although a rumor he had set going was beginning to germinate in the city above the Lhassa, it was designed to effectually mislead and preserve all conjecture from approach to the actual truth. Implant a suggestion, provide a reason for some untoward event, and curiosity is stifled at birth and there is no exciting mystery for inquiring minds to dwell upon.

Within thirty minutes of his capture and wholesale deportation of Genevieve Leblanc, Hal Marshall, Sun Su and Li Wang, the Master of the Lhassa had dispatched an agent to a semiprivate club frequented by movie people, artists, and writers. In this place, at a moment when a party of pool players were talking shop, Chi Fang's news distributor cast the seed that was to flower by repetition and conceal the truth.

"They say Hal Marshall's gone off with Genevieve Leblanc at last," announced Fang's agent.

That started one line of gossip.

Before midnight a telephone call came to Genevieve Leblanc's maid.

" Mr. Marshall and I will be away for a few days."

That was all; but it was enough, for Marie was sure the faint, rather agitated voice was that of Miss Leblanc, and she was equally certain that her mistress was embarked on a matrimonial venture.

" They married for sure," she said, and the next morning did her bit as helper to Chi Fang. Marie told the milkman and the janitor that her mistress had eloped, and that set going another fecund stream of gossip.

The telegram message received at the studio from Florida made a director anathematize Cupid and irresponsible youth, but gave no room for doubt that Jenny and Hal were certificated partners for better or for worse.

" They've gone off and hidden themselves like a couple of silly kids," declared the big chief, " but we'll get all there is out of it. Tell the press agency boys to spread themselves."

Thus it came about that the newspapers were amply provided with photographs of Hal and Genevieve and columns of matter detailing their romance. It was good advertising, but bad for any prospects the prisoners may have thought they had of speedy release. Further, all absence of a public hue and cry and official curiosity concerning her disappearance freed Chi Fang from all disturbing thoughts and gave him leisure to reassemble the fragments of a shattered romantic episode that he had believed ended for all time.

He had gone after Sun Su's film with a closer guess at the purpose for which it was intended than any who had seen or taken part in its making; but it was the inclusion of Genevieve that had given the Master of the Lhassa the great and overwhelming shock of his existence.

For one sole and specific purpose had Sun Su sought the services of Genevieve Leblanc, and never for one moment had he dreamed that Chi Fang would set eyes either upon the girl herself or her pictured part in the film.

After the dinner, when Jenny and Hal had been his guests, and while they were still at the table, Sun Su had revealed the nature of the surprise he had promised the girl. A small screen was set up at the end of the dining room, and the spool of film sent from the studio was inserted in the projecting machine provided for the private view.

The lights had been turned out, and while the spool unrolled Sun Su gave life and reality to the silent drama. Now and again he stopped the reel of photographs, and in a few connecting words captioned the arrested scene.

When the lights had been snapped off he had had an audience of two—Genevieve and Hal. While he talked five unbidden guests arrived. Accompanied by four of his self-pledged, willing aids, Chi Fang entered the darkened room. All five wore respirators, they came silently and unperceived, and although in an open trial of strength Chi Fang could have dictated terms and forced compliance with his will, he chose a means of inducing powerlessness that was a thief of strength to resist before either Sun Su or Hal became aware danger threatened. It was Genevieve who had given warning. More responsively constituted, her senses were the first affected by the pastille carried in a perforated burner by the Master of the Lhassa.

Between her eyes and the illumined screen there passed a shadowy trail of vapor, and no sooner had she become aware that it was not tobacco smoke than she felt herself seized by faintness.

She had cried out on the instant Sun Su had snapped on the lights. It was then that Chi Fang saw Genevieve for the first time. To the Master of the Lhassa the girl was more than an engaging, beautiful young picture actress. Sun Su had chosen her for her resemblance, her twinship with another girl, and for Chi Fang the years rolled back. That astounding, present moment linked with the past. In the living flesh was a dead girl reincarnated; but it was by no belief in some occult manifestation that Chi Fang was urged to the crime of abduction.

" You found her for your purpose," he

said to the half-unconscious Sun Su; "she will perhaps prove more considerate in the fulfillment of my desires than as Horry's dupe. Then—I pleaded and was labeled a fool. Now—I rule and may not be despised. So—to the Lhassa! All of them!"

With slow but sure stealth Chi Fang's men carried the four away.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANGEL-FACE.

BY reason of the demands of her profession Genevieve Leblanc was fitted beyond the scope of the average in courage and resourcefulness. In the making of thrilling, breath-catching film incidents she had been carried aloft to the roaring song of a six-hundred-horse-power airplane motor. Mazeppalike she had been lashed to the bare back of a demon-spirited broncho and hurtled across desert wastes during a sand storm that would have made a sun-cured cowboy ready to off-saddle and hide his head. As the heroine of flood and fire Jenny had been featured a score of times, and after the making of the pictures had returned to her dressing room ready for more.

Yet, hardened as she was to facing danger and risking life and limb, she had never figured in a situation where she could not, excepting accidents, foresee what was going to happen next. There had been periods of breathless excitement in her career, but never the suspense of not knowing what was coming next. Her part had been defined, written and limited to the instructions of her director. Now the case was different.

When Jenny awoke the second time her brain was cleared of the soporific effects of the jasmine-scented smoke, and her surroundings disquieted her and filled her with repugnance. Just as before, she was alone in the golden glow of the silk-draped room. There was nothing that could overtly alarm her; the difference was in herself. She was wide awake, fully conscious, and not at all content to accept the inevitable and take things as they were.

Alert of eye and quick of limb, she jumped off the couch and stood staring, listening. The first thing she became aware of was the entire absence of sound. Beyond the rustle of her own garments, the flutter of her breath, the beat of her heart, there was not a murmur to be heard. She seemed to be in a chamber insulated by a vacuum from all oral evidences of life. The stillness of a prettily decorated tomb shut her in and isolated her from sense of companionship and kinship with the noisy, everyday world. Her condition crystallized into one controlling emotion—she felt utterly and completely alone.

Under ordinary circumstances there is always some sound to be heard. In the quietest hour of the night there is the distant bark of a dog, the hoot of a tugboat, the cry of some nocturnal bird. Few seconds can pass without some movement of man, insect or nature causing the drums of the ears to vibrate.

Without having absolute proof and clear knowledge of how she had come into this place Jenny felt positive she had not been taken out of the city. She had no means of telling how long she had been asleep, yet by subconscious estimate she knew only a few hours had elapsed since she had been sitting at a dining table facing Hal and Sun Su. Now where was she, and—why was she there? Above all, what was the explanation of the stillness that encompassed her. Did those embroidered hangings conceal walls padded with felt?

In the stress of urgent desire to gain immediate cognizance of conditions obtaining at the moment, past causes and future prospects wait for explanation and consideration. It was Jenny's hope to ascertain why everything was so unusually still and quiet, and for the time being she did not allow her thoughts to go backward or forward. How she had come into this room of magnificence and enchanted stillness, and how she was going to get out, were questions to be thought over and decided upon later.

With a brusque gesture she tore aside one of the silk hangings. Behind it was a wall of highly polished paneled wood. Having started investigating, the girl continued. One after another she drew aside the strips

of heavy silk on three sides of the room. Behind each one was the same unbroken surface of solid woodwork.

" No door," she thought, " and no windows. What's over there?"

On the fourth side of the room Genevieve noticed that a strip of silk hung an inch or so in front of the others. When she pulled on its edge it moved inward, carried by a hinged rod. A thin line dividing the molding of the panels showed the outline of a close-fitting door.

" Fastened, of course," thought the girl. " Some silly, secret business, I suppose. No knob or lock. If it were not so horribly quiet in here I'd scream."

With no idea that any movement of the door would result, Jenny gave it an impatient, angry shove. To her unbounded surprise, the paneled rectangle responded to her touch. The door swung outward and then inward.

" A swing door. Not even fastened with a catch," she murmured, and, stepping forward eagerly, pushed again on the door. Distant but unmistakably clear she heard the ringing of an electric bell.

" Connected with this door," she thought, and before she could make out what lay beyond the girl realized she was no longer alone. A tremor, partly related to startled wonder and part natural excitement, caused a chill shiver to pass over her. Some one was standing behind her. Who was it?

Was it that tall, saturnine-looking Oriental who had come uninvited to Sun Su's apartment, or was it some less suave and more aggressive intruder?

A revulsion of feeling quickly gave Genevieve new courage. Prepared to stand on her dignity, to—if need arise—defend herself from insult, the girl whirled about and faced a tiny, smiling woman! She wore a loose-fitting, wide-sleeved robe and baggy pantaloons. Her ridiculously small feet were cased in satin, sandal-like shoes with thick white soles, pointed, and turned up at the toes.

The newcomer had the stature of a child, and although her face was smooth and unwrinkled she gave Jenny the impression of being years older and far more equipped with guile than herself. That smile had about it a suggestiveness of being a make-believe, a welcome simulated only by the muscles of the mouth and cheeks. The little creature's beady, slant-lidded dark eyes were hard and too watchful; there was no mirth in them.

Jenny vaulted all preliminary inquiries. She was in no mood to talk of health or weather conditions.

" I want to get out of here," she said.

" You wait lily bit," replied the woman in a thin treble.

" How long?"

" No can tell. P'laps you go—to-mollow. P'laps you stay allee time. I—think so."

Genevieve was not accustomed to being disposed of in this take-it-for-granted manner. At her studio she ruled next in power to her director and the big chief. Here, a chit of a woman, an insignificant stranger, spoke as if Genevieve Leblanc was bereft of all choice of yea or nay. An unpleasant state of affairs, but consistent, for personal authority is dependent upon favoring circumstances and conditions.

" But I insist upon being released now—at once!" cried the girl. " This is outrageous! I will have you severely punished. The police—"

" He allee samee no chop chop, no walkee this place. No see, no savvy. You belong mastle. Make muchee smile an' have good time. Plesently he come. He velly plopa pidgin man. Allee samee king."

" Nonsense!" exclaimed Jenny. " This is not China."

" Allee samee piecee China, yes. Too good for you 'Melican girl. This is *the Lhassa!*"

The pigmy woman's last words were said in a whisper. She spoke as one who mentions a forbidden, sacred name and—the look in her eyes was hostile; but her lips curved upward in cunning, confidant mockery.

" She hates the sight of me," thought Jenny, " and I am not fascinated with her sly coolness or that smile that won't come off. Horrid little beast. I wonder if she knows anything about the others? Are they here in this Lhassa, as she calls it—or

what has happened to them? If we can get together Sun Su may be able to do something, even if Hal can't."

In reply to the girl's question the midget woman made ambiguous and cruelly indifferent answer.

"P'laps they here, p'laps they sleep and not even wake up," she said. "The mastle—he say."

"You mean they will be allowed to die?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"P'laps," she piped.

The stupid repetition of the word brought the girl near to angry tears.

"You ugly, soulless little wretch!" she exclaimed recklessly. "Go away. Send your master here. Tell him I must see him at once."

The woman's face did not change; her smile remained fixed.

"P'laps he come, p'laps he wait for you to go to him. The door is open."

Jenny turned involuntarily and looked at the door she had discovered. Evidently it had been left ready for her to find and pass through. For what purpose? In Mexico, too cowardly to condemn a man to be shot, they provided prisoners with tempting ways of escape. The firing party waited hidden, and at the moment the unhappy victim reached the threshold of freedom he was riddled with bullets. What was the fate awaiting her in ambush had she ventured to boldly pass through that swing door?

"I believe there's a plot to terrorize me," concluded Genevieve. "The idea is to scare me and make me—what?"

A difficult question to answer was this. Excepting for the purpose of obtaining a big ransom, Jenny could think of no motive for her abduction.

"Is it money your master is after?" she asked, and received no answer.

The woman was gone—vanished without a sound.

Genevieve was more annoyed than alarmed.

"I suppose," she said loud enough to be heard by any eavesdropper, "Angel-Face is one of the puppets in the *master's* bag of tricks."

The remark was intended to provoke retort, to act as a "draw." It failed. In the silence and aloneness of that big, beautiful room Jenny shivered and felt the creeping horror of loathsome mystery.

Her eyes filled with tears, but they remained unshed.

"I won't—I will not give way," she resolved. "It's better to get good and mad than to flop."

Sound philosophy, but Jenny neither cried nor raved. She sat down in one of the red chairs and willed herself to calmness. She was by no means resigned and passively willing to submit to the slaps of fate, but Jenny Leblanc had that useful quality known as adaptability. Liked by everybody for her readiness to smile and for her frank good nature, the girl possessed a temperament that had helped her in her long climb to success as a picture star.

Nothing daunted her; she was a good mixer with circumstances as well as people. Her present predicament had no suggestion of being a blessing in disguise, but, all the same, Jenny determined to make the best of a bad job and get what she could out of the experience.

"I'll pretend I'm some one else, watching some other poor, unfortunate girl. Also, it might be just as well if I play polite to Angel-Face."

While Jenny was thus bravely trying to equip herself with fortitude, another prisoner in the Lhassa was casting off his habit of posing.

CHAPTER XV.

APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY.

THERE is nothing like the acid of adversity for eating off the veneer of manner, or the pressure of a tight corner for bringing to the surface the fundamental qualities. The man we see is very often not the man we believe him to be. We all, in some degree, pose and cloak our real selves. Not with deliberate intention to deceive, but because make-believe is a habit that stays with some of us from childhood days, and to pretend is often a relief from humdrum, dull routine.

Hal Marshall dressed the part of a dude, and acted professionally as the handsome hero. In private life, off stage, he carried with him some of the airs and graces expected of him when before the camera; and from the viewpoint of a man's man Hal had spoiled himself by overfondness for pink fingertips, batik neckwear, monogrammed cigarettes, and beclocked ankles. Even Jenny, who, with her feminine perceptivity, knew Hal was not half so sophisticated as he made himself out to be, was inclined to regretful amusement at the young man's boudoirlike finicalness and superelegance.

But there was good stuff in Hal, and it only needed a little rough treatment to cause him to shed his mental dress of fine feathers. Fops went into the war, and Algy and Percy proved themselves just as red-blooded as Hank and Bill. Some of them have come back physically maimed, but spiritually all man.

Hal had been swept into forgetfulness by a whiff of jasmine-scented smoke, and when he awoke to find himself a prisoner in the Lhassa he cast aside all the fancy trimmings of manner and speech he had acquired as his stock in trade as a movie favorite.

"Where's Jenny?" was his first question; and before he could be persuaded to listen to reason and give heed to the counsel of watchful waiting Sun Su and Li Wang had their hands full of a very active and wrathful young man.

It was only when Sun Su secured one agonizing, joint-rending armlock that Hal consented temporarily to abandon his intention of running amuck and generally tearing things up in his blind haste to get to the girl.

"Where is she?" he demanded after he had promised to be quiet.

"Somewhere here," said Sun Su.

Hal glanced eagerly about the grottolike place. The only other person he saw was Li Wang, hunched against the wall and sadly retrospective over the fulfillment of his forebodings.

"I do not mean she is actually with us," went on the young Chinaman, "but she is undoubtedly in the Lhassa."

"And what does that fancy name indicate?" asked Hal. "What the deuce has happened? We were sitting watching that picture of yours. You were telling us some yarn about what happened in China, and then— What was that queer smelling stuff? And those fellows? How did we get here?"

Sun Su looked at Li Wang.

"He knows more about it than I do. He tells me we were carried up to the roof, down through another house, and into some kind of a tunnel. That is as far as he remembers. Chi Fang got suspicious about Li Wang not being as effectually drugged as we were and ordered him blindfolded."

"Chi Fang? Who is he? The tall fellow? You have the name pat."

"I knew of him in China. He was connected with the story I was telling you. He is now the chief of a secret society."

"Some fake?" interjected Hal.

Sun Su shook his head. "In actual membership the Lhassa is not very extensive; but I believe it is the most powerful organization in existence."

"The police will be after us and soon get us out," said Hal confidently.

"I think not," stated Sun Su, and handed Hal Marshall a newspaper. "That paper was here when I awoke. It was evidently brought in order that we may be convinced that our case is beyond immediate outside help."

Hal flashed as he read the column headed: "Elopement of Movie Stars."

He threw down the paper.

"Can't we do something?" he exclaimed. "Genevieve may be in need of help. She may—"

Unable to voice the full extent of the fear he felt for the girl's safety, Hal stopped abruptly.

"For the present," said Sun Su, "there is no cause for anxiety. Miss Leblanc is a captive, but I feel certain that she is in no immediate danger."

"How so?"

"Because she is associated in Chi Fang's mind with the memory of one whom he worshiped. It is all part of what I was about to tell you when he put us all to sleep. Let me try and make things clear to you.

It will pass the time until someone comes and we shall know definitely where we stand."

"Just as you say," agreed Hal reluctantly, "but it certainly does rile me to be so helpless; but go ahead. The whole business seems like some melodramatic muddle to me. It doesn't seem real yet—"

Hal's troubled gaze went rapidly around the place. The walls were rock, the door of massive, bolted timbers.

"All solid, all real, and all impassable to us," said Sun Su. "We have no weapons. Our only hope is to match strength with cunning. Chance may favor us. On the other hand, we may be exterminated like so many rats in a blocked hole."

"You are pleasant," said Hal. "Get on with your story. If Jenny is safe I don't care much what happens. All the same I haven't your Oriental gift of placidly accepting the inevitable. Why did Chi Fang come after us?"

"He came to steal the film," said Sun Su. "I believe that was the limit of his intention."

"How do you know that?" asked Hal with a hint of suspicion in his voice.

"As I told you, I knew of Chi Fang, but never have I seen or spoken with him before. It is a peculiar and strange affair, yet when you know the inner workings, the reason for our being here is accounted for. I do not think that Chi Fang wanted to burden himself with any of the three of us. Primarily all he was after was the film. For some purpose of his own, he wished to prevent it from reaching the man I intended it for. You know James Horry?"

"Of course. He disappeared a few weeks ago. I've heard about him. He's got more money than any of our gold bugs. Supposed to own about half of China, isn't he? Sure, I know him. A few months ago we were down at his country place working at some scenes. How is he mixed up in our trouble, and if Chi Fang didn't want us, what are we here for?"

"Safer," said Sun Su. "Dead men tell no tales."

"But we are not defunct yet!" exclaimed Hal energetically. "While there is life there is—"

Sun Su shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course there is hope," he continued in completion of Hal's quotation. "But it is a mere matter of habit to be optimistic. We cannot save ourselves, neither can aid reach us. We are at the disposal of the Master of the Lhassa."

"You are—" Hal Marshall hesitated for a word. He was inclined to accuse the young Chinaman of cowardice and weak-kneed submission, but somehow the words that passed through his mind did not ring true.

"I know what you are about to say." Sun Su's voice was gently indifferent. "You consider me overwilling to accept the inevitable, too ready to quit, as it were; to submit to fate, but as things are now, there is no use in wasting effort and working ourselves up into a fever of irritation by courting disappointment. Chi Fang rules this place and is invincible. As you would put it: he is the boss and what he says—goes. Li Wang was followed the other day by some of his spies, and he afterwards talked with a friend who told him much but said little. Chi Fang is a strong man."

"And a rogue and a rascal!" ejaculated Hal.

"Agreed," responded Sun Su. "But a craftier one than he set him on the path he has taken. Now, it is Chi Fang's turn, and if I mistake not, he will deal more drastically and directly with James Horry than I could have done. It is strange how things turn out."

"I'd appreciate that point if I knew what you were talking about," exclaimed Hal bluntly.

"I forgot," said Sun Su apologetically. "I speak in riddles. Well, the rest can soon be told. Some fifteen years ago James Horry came to China. He was poor, and probably for that reason or maybe for some graver cause he was snubbed by the English-speaking residents. My father took a fancy to Horry, employed him as clerk and after a very short time Horry became a partner in my father's business. Horry was sharp, clever, and in less than three years he not only greatly increased the firm's exports, but enjoyed my father's implicit confidence. He shared in the profits and was treated

more like a son than a business partner. Horry was ambitious. He persuaded my father to apply to the empress for a concession of a large tract of land for the ostensible purpose of rice growing. The request was granted — conditionally. For reasons best known to herself, the empress wished to benefit another family, and she offered my father title to the land, provided he would give Chi Fang a third share in the business. It was understood that the land which was at the foot of some mountains and partly swamp, was to be cultivated and turned into rice fields.

" About the time that Chi Fang became partner, Horry engaged a young girl who had come out as governess to an English family. She acted as Horry's secretary. He led her to believe he loved her. She was very young, inexperienced and very beautiful, and James Horry was not alone in showing his admiration for her. Chi Fang, disregarding my father's advice and the girl's indifference to him, persisted in paying her attentions."

" No wonder Chi Fang is so familiar to you," said Hal. " You knew him when you were a boy."

Sun Su shook his head.

" No. The first occasion I ever met Chi Fang was the night he appeared at our dinner party. I had never seen him before. All that I have told you occurred while I was away at college. When I came home my father was dying. He was old; but it was not age that brought him to his grave. It was shame and disgrace. The man who killed him and dishonored his name was James Horry. The one who gave me all the facts was the girl so admired by Chi Fang and deceived by Horry. She is now dead; but James Horry does not know she is gone where her lips are sealed. When it was discovered what Horry had done, she ran away. Not only had he betrayed her love for him, but he had used her to help him in deceiving my father. She was innocent of complicity with Horry; but it was she who laid the paper in front of my father when he signed away his ownership in the lands made over by the empress. That paper was a deed of sale. Horry also induced Chi Fang to part with his share."

" Horry bought out his partners?"

" Yes, but he nearly ruined my father and caused Chi Fang to flee the country."

" He paid for the land."

" Yes, but he bought something that no one suspected was in existence. Unknown to anyone, Horry had surveyed the ground long before he persuaded my father to ask for a grant. Horry knew what was there; but he used my father to cheat the empress into believing she was giving away land worthless except for the cultivation of rice. That land is now the most valuable mining center in the whole of China. It is owned by James Horry, and he got it by a despicable, long premeditated artful fraud. Legally he could not be touched. By no means could he be compelled to make restitution."

" So he got off scot free?"

" Yes, but although my father pledged me to refrain from ever seeking to avenge him physically, I found a deadlier means of punishing Horry. It was years before I could think of a way of reaching him without violating my vow; but while I was in England I learned something of Horry's character. In the village where he was born they gossiped of the rich and famous Horry's boyhood days. The tales I heard gave me a clew to a trait that I believed Horry was still likely to possess in an exaggerated degree. A study of pyschology gave me ground for believing that basic qualities and weaknesses are permanent."

" The leopard cannot change his spots kind of thing," said Hal. " What was Horry's weak spot?"

" Imaginativeness."

Hal looked puzzled.

" As a child," went on Sun Su, "James Horry was abjectly afraid of the dark. He could not be induced to sleep without a light burning all night, or be persuaded to go out alone after dark. In a quiet English village there is nothing to frighten even a timid child; therefore I argued, that Horry had an imagination that ran to self-created bogies and fancies. When I heard he had settled in America I came, and a little while ago I tried an experiment. I sent him a replica of a unique jade bowl that used to stand on my father's desk. That was all I did. I made no threat. The result ex-

ceeded all my expectations. Under the goad of a bad conscience, Horry's imagination brought to the surface all the cowardice that he had been born with. He could only guess who had sent the bowl. He may have thought it was Chi Fang. In any case the result was the same. Horry threw up the sponge. In no real danger from me, he shut himself up. Just to keep his mind busy, I sent him a flower. It was a narcissus. Just such a one as my father was in the habit of standing singly in the jade bowl."

"An American would have punched his head or given him a darned good hiding. A Corsican would have sworn vendetta and stuck a knife in his back," observed Hal. "But somehow or other, you hit upon a nastier way of getting even with him. What was your ultimate intention?"

"Murder," said Sun Su with a simple directness that was all the more implacable by its lack of passion. "It would have been called suicide; but if I had succeeded in driving Horry into a frenzy of panic great enough to cause him to take his own life, I would be in spirit, if not in fact, his murderer. I had that film made solely for Horry's destruction. He holds high position and I wanted to make him believe that the story of his base treachery would be given to the world. I hoped to convince him that he would become an object of shame and scorn, and without direct threat implant the certainty in his mind that his life would pay forfeit. The scenes in the play were designed for that purpose, and Miss Leblanc in her impersonation of Horry's one time secretary was in herself alone enough to convince Horry that all of his secret history would be revealed. But, from what has taken place, I imagine I unwittingly crossed Chi Fang's trail and poached on his ground. It is more than likely he was waiting a favorable moment to come down on Horry and make him pay his double debt of dishonor. It is clear to me now that he was watching me long before I was aware of his presence in this country."

"Maybe," suggested Hal, "Chi Fang was bought off by Horry. You say you are not known to Horry so he would naturally think Chi Fang had sent the jade bowl."

"If that is the case Horry is doomed. Chi Fang is bound by no restraining oath and after he had secured all of Horry's enormous fortune, he will have him done to death."

"Master! Some one comes!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LIVERY OF SLAVERY.

EVEN as Li Wang spoke his cautioning words, the door opened and Chi Fang entered. He was clad in flowing robes and bowed with inclusive ceremony to Sun Su and Hal.

"I come in friendship," he said as he closed the door, "and," he went on, "it may hasten our good understanding if I tell you that I have overheard practically every word that has been said. I have the honor to inform you that most of your conversation has been surprisingly near the truth. We will discuss matters."

"Will we?" cried Hal, and before Sun Su could put out a staying hand, the young man leaped at Chi Fang with upraised threatening fist.

The Master of the Lhassa made no gesture of alarm or movement of self-defense. His eyes met Hal's with cold indifference.

"By a display of foolish temper you risk much," he said. "My life will not secure you one hour of freedom. I said I come in friendship. Why make of me an enemy? I may remind you that Genevieve Leblanc is—at my disposal."

Hal Marshall's hand dropped to his side. He stepped back.

"You hold a hostage too precious to take chances on," he said. "Otherwise—"

"You would be violent," concluded Chi Fang. "You are in no position to attempt heroics. Your interest in Miss Genevieve betrays a feeling deeper than a friendly hand."

"I intend to make her my wife."

"So?"

Chi Fang uttered the single word with self satisfaction. "That makes my plans simpler and safer," he said. "I intended to release you on bond of secrecy, but as you are a suitor for the hand of Miss Leblanc, I am sure I could not take your word. I

thank you for the information. You will remain here until I decide what to do."

Turning the back of his embroidered robe to Hal, Chi Fang addressed Sun Su.

"If I release you," he asked, "will you return immediately to China and hold secret all that has passed between us?"

"I prefer to stay with my friends."

The Master of the Lhassa raised his hand as if to caution rashness.

"It may be for life," he said.

"Even so, I remain."

"For friendship's sake, or because of *your* interest in the young lady?"

"I am Chinese," replied Sun Su.

Chi Fang sneered as he moved away. Sun Su's thrust had struck home.

"The passing sting of a gnat," said the Master of the Lhassa as he backed out, "cannot change the course of an elephant. I, too, am of pure descent, yet do I admit of greater feeling than friendship for Genevieve Leblanc. I shall doubtless find ways and means of persuading her to appreciation of my devotion."

For days, so many that they lost count of them, the three men saw nothing of Chi Fang or any human being. At regular intervals the door opened by some mechanical means, and they found their meals waiting for them in a small chamber. It was bare and thereby more convincingly cave-like. The rough walls dripped with moisture, and after they had eaten the three were glad enough to return unbidden to their furnished grotto. They talked in whispers and Sun Su never lost patience with Hal's natural, but futile outbursts of rage. Always did the young Chinese contrive to convince the other that Jenny would not be harmed. It was only the show of faith given by Sun Su and Li Wang that prevented Hal from becoming dangerously obsessed by torturing thoughts of the girl. He, too, was imaginative, but he differed from Horry, inasmuch that it was fear for another and not his own safety that tormented him.

Excepting for the swing door, that Genevieve by protective instinct made up her mind she would not pass through, the girl existed in conditions equally restricted as to liberty, but consideration for her comfort was far greater.

At first she refused to wear any of the clothes brought to her by Angel-face, who came and went through a door that had escaped Genevieve's first hasty search. *That* door was locked. Many hours passed before the girl would touch any food, but hunger conquered her and the discomfort of continually wearing a crumpled frock, at last wore down her resistance.

"You likee wash maybe," suggested the pygmy woman, and at a nod from the girl, opened the locked door and preceding her down a narrow passageway, ushered Genevieve into a bathroom. There was a total absence of the usual vitreous white and glittering nickel. The room was a harmony of green and brown marble, with here and there a touch of gold. In the center of the mosaic floor was a sunken bath. A seductive vapor of perfumed steam left the girl no chance for indecision.

"Bring some of those things you have been pestering me to wear," she ordered, and when Genevieve returned to her room she made a quaint picture of Western beauty in Oriental garb.

"You go see mastle now?" asked Angel-face, with a sly glance at the curtained door.

"Most decidedly—not," replied the girl.

"Maybe you send message? He come."

"So you are prompted to make suggestions and to question," said the girl. "Well, you can tell your so-called master that I shall neither seek him or send for him. Now answer some of my questions. What is this place? Where is it?"

"The Lhassa. Allee samee cellar."

"Very lucid and enlightening," said Genevieve. "And my friends, where are they?"

"Allee samee place." Then as if to avoid further questioning, Angel-face added, "P'laps you likee see Lhassa? I show you."

Jenny considered the suggestion, and reasoning that she could lose nothing by venturing, she consented. Beyond the bathroom the woman pushed aside a heavy curtain and the girl stepped under an arch onto an overhanging balcony.

Far below she saw a strange scene. The unexpected height made her dizzy and as she turned aside, Angel-face pointed above.

"Look way up," she said. "Plenty

stleets. Lhassa velly safe place. Plesantly I come back."

With this assurance the woman dropped the curtain and left Jenny alone.

" Allee samee cellar," had said Angel-face with deliberate malice, and Jenny had naturally imagined that she was in some glorified nest of holes and burrows. She had expected to find that her own room was the exception, both in size and furnishings, and reality amazed and confounded her preconceived ideas. She found herself on one of many open balconies and galleries that clung to the walls of a vast, domed cave. It was difficult, almost impossible, to realize that although she was probably some hundreds of feet below street level, there were hollowed depths far below her.

Thoughts of dark, noisome and dank cellars are associated with mental pictures of secret, underground places; here was unassailable, solid contradiction. Genevieve was in the center of the Lhassa of Chinatown, and although a prisoner, she could not help an involuntary exclamation of pleased astonishment. There was light, spaciousness, clean, pure air and—color. Color: vivid, raw, contrasting and riotously gorgeous. Hundreds of banners and strips of brilliant yellow-red and blue covered with hieroglyphics hung on the walls below her. Pendent from the roof by long chains was a multitude of orange-yellow globes. The rich warm light shed over everything was a glow simulating the effect of sunlight. The ground was apparently covered by an expanse of soft, fine sand and turf; but the sand was woven matting and the turf was carpet.

For a setting of a scene at the studio, cost was the last consideration; but Genevieve afterwards wondered if her company would care to foot the bill for a carpet of green velvet pile wide enough to cover an ordinary street and over three hundred feet long.

Dotted about on the carpet were groups of figures. The height from which the girl viewed them was so great that they looked as small as marionettes and as colorful as beds of flowers on a green lawn.

" Star scattered on the grass," she quoted in thought, and absorbed by the ultra novelty and beauty of all that she looked down upon forgot she was in the bowels of the earth and—a captive. A prisoner *de luxe* —but still as shorn of liberty and as far from hope of escape as one condemned to a life sentence behind the grim walls of a State prison.

Presently the girl discovered another marvel. To one side of the amphitheater was a small lake. It was bordered with a luxuriant mass of greenery and dwarfed trees. In the mirror of the still, clear water was reflected the inverted image of a steeply graded bridge of white marble. At the apex of its single arch the bridge broadened and supported a pagoda festooned with lanterns and glittering with inlay of precious metal, iridescent shells and lacquer.

The effect was bizarre; but undeniably fascinating, and when a fan-shaped ripple suddenly set the reflection in the water to grotesquely curving and Jenny saw a flash of red gold pass under the bridge, she was girl enough to want to clap her hands.

" A goldfish," she murmured, " as big, as big as a salmon."

Genevieve was not piscatorially expert, so this must be accepted as the nearest she could get to as a comparison. She had once seen a salmon, stuffed and mounted in a glass case; but what she now thought was a goldfish was a carp.

When the waters became placid again Jenny looked around in search of further points of interest. She found enough and to spare to hold her attention. When she came to examine the cavern in detail rather than *en masse,* she discovered her first bewildered impression had fallen far short in inclusiveness of a thousand items provocative of wonder. Nature had provided much; but the long labor of many hands had made ingenious use of the rough mold on the precipitous walls, staircases climbed like so many vines of geometric, angular design. Wherever there was a landing there was a curtained arch or opening similar to the entrance to Jenny's own room. In some cases the curtains were drawn apart, and the girl caught glimpses of lighted interiors. Excepting that they were roofed in by solid earth and rock, and provided with luxuries then unknown to man, the people of the

Lhassa copied in their habits the customs of the ancient cliff dwellers. The cave was honeycombed with apartments. Facing her, and but faintly visible through the golden haze from the globes, was a projecting plateau. A fissure divided the flat rock; but the gap was bridged, and although here and there a sharp angle hid some portion of the walls from her view, the girl judged it was practicable to walk all around the cavern.

" If so," she thought, and the inference was obvious, "why shouldn't I descend?"

Genevieve soon found incontestable reason why she should *not* go down. There was a staircase; but it had been disconnected from her balcony. Likewise, there was a gap of twenty feet each side. She could stand and look and—that was all. One would have need of desperation, daring and sureness of hand and foot to be able to climb up or down. Another deterrent to any human-fly act was the certainty that the balcony was in full view of the people below.

A captured wild bird will beat wings and head on the prisoning bars of its cage; it will perhaps mope and die of long pining for its liberty.

Jenny was far from being tame spirited; but she had accepted the situation with a minimum loss of energy, and when Angel-face came smiling through the curtain and made sign that the girl should return to her apartment, Genevieve obeyed like a well trained child. Without a backward glance she followed the little woman, but perhaps *her* faint smile was not altogether guileless.

" Maybe to-mollow you allee samee good, you go look see flom balcony again," said Angel-face in generous promise of future privileges, and Jenny thanked her.

Time and date were unmeasured to the captives in the Lhassa, and sleeping hours were marked off by diminution of the lights. In Genevieve's room the glow died down to a rosy red, and without direct command the will of the master was forced upon her.

Thrice she slept before again being allowed to go on the balcony, so she judged that over three days had passed since the initial privilege. " To-mollow " was, in the promise of Angel-face, a long time in coming, and entirely under the control of Chi Fang. He measured the days and nights in the forbidden city. With the rest Genevieve had to conform to his ruling.

With this difference, they who passed below her balcony had freely accepted the leadership of Chi Fang. They owned him master. Genevieve Leblanc regarded him as a velvet-gloved tyrant. Her cage was gilded; but bars are irksome signs of bondage, whether they be of iron or gold.

Yet, absolute as was Chi Fang's control over his beautiful captive, he did honor to Genevieve in a manner surpassing the extravaganzas of the luxury-crazed Romans. Every day some new and costly bibelot, some expensive trifle was brought to the girl by the sulky woman who waited upon her. Jenny's meals were served with a care to details of table appointments and preparation of delicacies equal to the culinary efforts of the most meticulous of butlers and chef. Her morning coffee came in a solid silver percolator, and the aroma testified that its flavor would be that of the genuine Arabian berry. Punctually at five each afternoon a wheeled serving tray was brought in. At the point of boiling on a spirit stove was a copper, silver-lined kettle. An antique caddy of Twinings selected golden tips stood ready to supply the makings for a delightful brew.

So much for the cup that refreshes and cheers. For luncheon and dinner Jenny was served with light wines of rare vintage and tempted by cordials, not only banned by law but seldom obtainable. In detail and in general, every possible luxury was provided for the girl's material comfort. Neither was the mental side neglected. New novels were brought to her on the day of publication and she could suit the mood of the moment with the latest record of rampagious jazz or ultraclassical severity.

Genevieve Leblanc had everything but her freedom. The loose, flowing garments laid out for her in such profusion by Angel-face were a pleasure to see and a caress to her sense of touch, but although productive of sensuous gratification, these soft silks and shining satins were an irritant when Jenny thought of what they symbolized.

"The livery of slavery," she thought resentfully. "I'd far rather wear khaki for the rest of my life than be a—silkworm."

Then, on the fourth occasion of her return from a brief stay on the balcony, the worm turned—wildcat. The quiet, demure Jenny changed and acted with swift unexpectedness. And while she brought off her coup—she sang. Accompanying her voice was an orchestral piece whirring on the instrument that had been brought in soon after her incarceration. It was noise and with plenty of crashing bars of vigorous crescendo. The only quiet person in the room was the one who wanted to make the most noise. This was Angel-face. She pawed the air and tried hard to scratch and tear, and the reason she could not vocally express herself was because she had a silk waist-scarf tightly and deftly wound over her puckered mouth and gritting teeth.

Before more than an inch of the record, Jenny had selected for just that moment, had been played, the pygmy woman was not only voiceless, but helpless.

Jenny's arms were soft and rounded, but they were of good stuff, useful as well as being ornamental. She made an excellent job of trussing up Angel-face, lifting her bodily onto the couch and tying here there. All the smile had by this time gone from the contorted yellow features that was Angel-face's. Vindictiveness shone from the narrow black slits of her glinting eyes.

"You look horribly poisonous," said Genevieve softly. "I like you better—this way."

Fitting the action to the word, the girl turned Angel-face over and buried that grimacing countenance in a cushion. Then, still singing, she waited until the record was finished and backed towards the door that gave access to the balcony. Her gaze never left the silken hangings concealing the swing door she had touched, but steadfastly refused to pass through. Had she been watched? Would some hireling or the master himself come at this last, critical moment to spoil all? Would she be stopped before she could reach the balcony and wait hidden in the curtained arch until the lights dimmed?

Even as these questions passed through her mind, the lights went down.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"... CHARMED TO EASE."

FOR hire, and no mean one at that, Genevieve Leblanc had risked life and limb in thrilling adventure. Now, with greater eagerness than was ever called forth by pecuniary reward, she prepared to venture on a more dangerous, more nerve-trying task than she had ever been called upon to perform by the most wildly imaginative scenario writer.

The chocolate sundae huntress, given to cheap joy rides in the summertime, and radiator hugging when the winds begin to blow, dotes on thrills—if somebody else is dancing to the tune of misfortune. When the oil stove gives a woof and bursts into flame, she yells and runs; and when little brother Jimmy mistakes his thumb for a chunk of kindling, she holds up her hands and faints.

To Jenny heroism was a commonplace, and now as she saw an opportunity of getting into action in dead earnest she welcomed the change from luxury-fed inaction. During the ten or fifteen minute visits she had made to the balcony Genevieve had used her eyes for other purposes besides that of taking in the ornamental peculiarities of the Lhassa. She had made the discovery that was responsible for the trussed-up condition of Angel-face. Out of the curtained alcoves and cavelike apertures she had picked out one that seemed to be different to all the rest.

It was above her balcony, isolated, and unconnected with a staircase. Was it there that Hal and the others were held captive? Jenny could not tell, but she determined to find out, and if her friends were not there she could search further and perhaps find opportunity to escape and get help from the outside world.

The chance was worth taking. Risky, but better than doing nothing. Question was, would the cavern lights also be dimmed? Was it the hour of rest all over the Lhassa?

Genevieve gave a sigh of relief when she reached her balcony and found her hopes confirmed. The Lhassa was in twilight, and no one was to be seen. Loosening the girdle about her waist, the girl let fall her robe where she stood. In her silken pantaloons she looked like a pyjama-clad, slim young boy bent on some midnight escapade; but it would have been a daring, agile youth who could have accomplished what she did.

Lifting herself to the rail of the balcony, Jenny commenced to climb. All she had for a hand and foot hold were the crevices and projections of the rocky wall. It took her nearly ten minutes to climb as many feet, and she trembled with exertion. Halfway up she stopped to rest.

Her toes were supported by a two-inch ledge. Her fingers were clinched in a shallow fissure that was no more than a crack in the broken face of the rock. A little rivulet of blood ran down the back of her hand and braceleted her arm in a long, serpentine curve. The nail of her middle finger was split and torn from the quick, but she felt no pain.

All her thoughts were centered on conserving her strength and reaching the ledge of the cave. She could not go back. She could not even drop onto the balcony. The course she had been obliged to follow had taken her to one side, and to live—she must climb.

Climb she did, but it was a feat that haunted her sleep for many a night and caused her to wake with cold beads of moisture on her brow. Genevieve afterward suffered by reaction all that she held herself unfeeling to while she conquered the inches to her goal.

While she fought her way up and wrestled with peril over the last yard, a man, silent and motionless, stood on her balcony and watched her with fixed, strained gaze. His close-pressed lips were a thin, hard line. His tongue uttered no word; but heathen though he was, if judged by orthodox Christian standards, he dared to pray.

" . . . . Only save her," was the gist of his plea, and is it not possible that He who presides over all the universe could accept a petition relayed by the medium of Buddha?

God is the *deus ex machina* behind strange altars and small thrones, and, playing no favorites, will lend ear to saint and sinner alike. When the girl dragged herself over the edge of the rock and looked down at the balcony there was no one there. Chi Fang had gone; but none more than he was familiar with the ways through the intricate maze of passages and tunnels girding the center of the Lhassa, and when Genevieve got to her feet she knew that her efforts had been wasted. At the back of the small cave she had faced such danger to reach was standing the man who so mystified her.

Hal, Sun Su, and Li Wang knew why Chi Fang had stolen the girl. She, the principal figure in the affair, was unaware of the true reason for Chi Fang's abduction of herself.

Jenny flushed with anger and disappointment.

" You have spied upon me," she accused. " Prowler of the night, why do you not explain yourself? Why am I kept a prisoner here?"

" You will return to the room allotted to you," said Chi Fang, ignoring the girl's questions. " If you wish to learn more the swing door is waiting your touch. Be good enough to follow me."

Without waiting to see if the girl obeyed, Chi Fang passed into a narrow passage. His words and actions did more than a volume of argument toward convincing Genevieve that resistance would be silly.

" If I refuse to move he'll pick me up and carry me," she thought. " I don't want him to touch me, so—"

Along the passage, down a steep flight of steps cut in solid rock, Jenny followed the tall figure. Outwardly she kept up a bold, semipathetic show of defiance, but inwardly she felt crestfallen and shamefully humbled.

" I will send another woman to wait on you," said Chi Fang as the girl entered the room. " Be kind enough not to mistreat her."

The first thing Jenny looked at when the door closed behind her was the couch. Angel-Face had been taken away. Following a miserable night came a long succes-

sion of hours passed in lassitude of spirit and physical relaxation. The woman who replaced Angel-Face refused to talk, but was impeccable in attentiveness and fulfillment of her duties as maid.

Abundance of creature comforts and insidious kindness will do more to weaken a person's will power than harsh treatment. From the very first Chi Fang's treatment of the girl was scientifically calculated to take the élan from her spirit, dull her energy, and reduce her resentment. He puzzled, mystified her, loaded her with gifts, and provided her with sense-appealing delicacies, encouraging supineness and disarming antagonism. When languor was at its bewitching best the waitingwoman went to the master.

"As the flowers drowse at noon hour, so is the maiden charmed to ease," she reported in Chinese.

"With gentleness and respect," said Chi Fang, "inform the young lady that I come. Then lay out the robes in the turquoise room and place this casket at the foot of the throne."

Indicating a bronze box that stood on a table by his side, the Master of the Lhassa waved his hand in dismissal. Bowing low, the woman backed away. Her attitude was humble; yet, unheard by Chi Fang, she mumbled a phrase oddly at variance with her air of servility.

"To the wrecker of sacred vows shall vengeance come."

Had Chi Fang heard the muttered words he would have ignored them. He was Master of the Lhassa—above censure, beyond reproach. He ruled, yet—

"The Lhassa for ourselves, and for ourselves only," had said Chi Fang when he had addressed the ceremonial meeting following the discovery of the central cavern, and until the coming of Genevieve and Hal no member of the white race had set foot within the networked boundaries of the forbidden city.

The lawmaker must be ruler of himself and abide by his own edicts. Chi Fang had broken his word, infringed upon that sense of privacy and sacred security so dear to they who conspire in places forbidden to all strangers.

There was no overt action against his introduction of Genevieve, no deputation waited upon him in protest, but, although the girl was accepted with apparent submission to the will of the master, there was a subtle coalescence of smothered resentment.

Chi Fang had cut deeper than he was aware of.

The wound he had made in the good faith of his people closed, but the poison of doubt rankled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY P'UTZU AND TORTURE.

COQUETRY differs from vampirish vanity, inasmuch that it is free of deliberate intention to lure, and Genevieve could not help a forgivable feeling of satisfaction when she looked up and saw the Master of the Lhassa standing in the doorway he had bidden her to pass through first.

"May I beg you to come here?" he asked. "I have something to show you and much to say to you. The future of yourself and your friends rests on your decision."

"That sounds very much like a combined threat and bribe," replied the girl, "but I suppose I must accept it as an invitation."

Chi Fang gravely inclined his head and beckoned to the waitingwoman who stood behind him. Before Jenny reached the open doorway the woman came to her side. Over her arm she carried what the girl at first glance thought was a white satin cloak.

"It is a whim of mine," said Chi Fang, "that you harmonize with the room you are about to enter," and as he spoke the woman unfolded the cloak and draped it over the girl's shoulders.

Genevieve was on her dignity, prepared to maintain an attitude of lofty unconcern; but the first glimpse of the other side of that cloak pierced her guard. She was young, impulsive, and beauty even in its humblest form appealed to her. The loveliness of the soft, clinging thing falling in

shimmering folds about her metaphorically swept her off her feet.

The dominant color was blue—a blue unlike any other, and never before duplicated in such extravagant, prodigal regardlessness of cost and labor. The whole cloak was covered with kingfisher feathers. Only in some opals is a speck of blue to be found that parallels the hue of these delicate gossamer flecks of color.

"O-oh!" breathed Jenny, and stood radiant, hypnotized by splendor ideally expressed.

Admiration blazed in Chi Fang's eyes, and even the stolid waitingwoman stared, open-mouthed and frankly amazed. Many a good-looking girl would have been extinguished, reduced to a pale, living dummy by the overpowering beauty of the cloak; Genevieve, with no desire to compete for favor, shone ethereally mistress of her adornment.

"The setting cannot do justice to the purity of your charm," said Chi Fang as Genevieve yielded to the urging pressure of the waitingwoman's hand, and entered the turquoise room.

"I have made a study of the beautiful, but in my fairest conception never have I reached the reality you personify. The place I have prepared for you has long waited your coming."

The "place" referred to by the Master of the Lhassa was a raised dais. Set thronelike on it was a couch of beaten gold. At the foot of the couch stood the bronze casket.

The rest of the room was all blue, and as in a dream Genevieve allowed herself to be led to the dais. She sat down, and at a sign from the master the woman opened the casket, and with one quick movement Chi Fang tilted the box and a cascade of shimmering color poured over the girl's feet. Leaning forward, she looked down. To the ankles her feet were buried in a glittering heap of blood-red and scintillating unset crystals. Their fire was convincingly, breath-takingly real.

"In India and Africa were mined these jewels," said Chi Fang. "They are yours if—"

The pause after the word wakened Genevieve from her beauty-induced trance of pliancy to external influences.

"What?" she asked with abrupt quickness.

"Retire," commanded Chi Fang, turning to the woman. "Return to your mistress's room and wait."

When the woman had gone the Master of the Lhassa looked long at the girl. "All that I have is yours—I will crown you queen and make you empress of the world," he said at last—"if you will consent to be my wife."

"I am not to be bought!" cried the girl, and as she rose the cloak of kingfisher feathers fell from her shoulders and a stream of rubies and diamonds rolled to Chi Fang's feet.

"Tears and blood," he said. "Is that to be my portion? Wait! Forgive one who woos so clumsily. Wait! Do me the honor to consider my request. In a few moments I will return."

Under ordinary circumstances the Master of the Lhassa was—a personality. One might dislike him, and with justice condemn his leaning toward intrigue; but, although in pursuit of a defined end he could outrage law and convention, he did so with the daring of a strong man and none of the pusillanimity of the mean-hearted, sneaking rascal. The result was not quite the same, and the difference lay in the manner of the deed's achievement.

In defining personality one may perhaps place it as the outcome of a mentality superior to the average. Out of the rut of commonplace is the individual possessed of personality, and moral goodness does not of necessity accompany intellectuality. Considered from a moral standpoint, a rogue is a shortsighted fool; but given a degree of brain quality he will rule over those unfortunate enough to come under the sway of his will. By lack of sufficiently developed gray matter the weak man obeys his clever black-sheep brother. For good or evil, personality dominates.

On this was founded the power of Chi Fang; but at times he called to his aid and the furtherance of his desires a subtler and even more elusive ally.

To those who consider the influence of

the inanimate to be nil, who have no belief in the hypnotic lure of the moon's path on broad, still waters, the method used by Chi Fang to raise his influence to greater potency will savor of the unbelievable. Yet, Hung Wu, versed in statecraft, and a practical-minded man of great learning, was the originator of what is known as the P'utzu. For functions, civil and military, he designed a series of embroidered plaques to be worn with official robes. When a delegation of Chinamen seek the consulates of some foreign nation, when they meet to discuss some important business of state, they come in full regalia, and on chest and back they wear a scroll-surrounded silver or golden pheasant.

It is easy to scoff at a piece of needlework, but the magnificence of these brilliant plumaged birds has a greater lure than the diplomatic phrase. The P'utzu is a deliberate, well-thought-out mysticism designed to impress the eyes of the beholder and tangle his volition.

With nations bounden to pomp and show, as evidence of ruling superiority, the P'utzu is far more powerful than it would be in America.

We would laugh, but in exaggerated evidence that we are not entirely free from the influence of external adornment consider what an effort it would be to be properly respectful if the boss came to the office in a bathing suit—one of those boyish affairs. He would be cool and might be comfortable; but would he not lose some fifty to ninety per cent of his impressiveness? Where would be his dignity? But, poor jokes and similes aside, the P'utzu is something more than the robes of ermine and the jeweled crowns worn by hereditary rulers for the sole purpose of impressing the common multitude.

It is the touch conclusive of the panoply of the Mandarin who goes to plead or threaten, but in either case—to win his cause.

So—when Chi Fang returned to Genevieve for his last effort to woo her by gentle means, he came in full regalia. He came, not to beg, but to demand. He came if not to court her heart, at least to conquer her will.

Had the girl been able to find cause to smile, a chance to laugh, all might have been well; but Chi Fang's dignity was impressively supreme. The first thing that caught Genevieve's attention was the golden pheasant blazoned on the square of silk hanging across Chi Fang's broad chest. It fascinated her, and to just that proportion so was her will power weakened. In some curious way, impossible for the girl ever to define clearly, she felt a lessening of her antagonism to this man. She did not consciously like him any better, but she subconsciously disliked him less—which is the way influences mesmeric and hypnotic have of working. While the senses are soothed the will is undermined.

"I crave the indulgence of your attention for a few moments," commenced Chi Fang with ceremonious formality that would have been laughable had it not been so austere. In its main particulars Chi Fang then told the same story that Sun Su had narrated to Hal; but he touched lightly on the part James Horry had played in his business trickery, and told nothing of the manner of his revenge. He concentrated on the tale of the girl he worshiped.

Chi Fang made an imposing picture. While he spoke he made few gestures, and his dark, brooding face gave the girl but fleeting glimpses of the emotion he held in repression. But a love story, however ill-paired be the central figures, must always make a call to the sympathy of a girl, and although she could not bring herself to any liking for Chi Fang, Jenny was compelled to admire his loyalty to one who, in the flesh, was no more than a memory.

It had been a one-sided incident, hopeless from the start. Chi Fang's love had been misdirected, yet the pure flame of his passion glorified his infatuated obsession. Had it not been for her own embarrassing and unpleasant position, Genevieve could have found it in her heart to befriend this imperious, daring man who had literally torn her from her world and buried her in his underground domain. He had despoiled her liberty; he was a buccaneer of modern efficiency, yet—was there not an allure of romance about him?

"To me," concluded Chi Fang, "you are she whom I loved and lost. I offer you wealth, power, all that man can give. I can crush, yet I plead."

"I am sorry," replied Jenny, "but surely you can see how impossible it is for me to fulfill your hopes. You hold me prisoner. Hal—my friends are your captives."

"If I release them, will you—"

"I cannot," interrupted Genevieve.

"Is it because I am a Chinaman?" demanded Chi Fang.

The girl did not reply.

"So—that is the reason. Then, I will act as a barbarian is expected to. I will break your will. Come. I will show you how the Master of the Lhassa punishes those who fail in their duty and will not obey his commands. You shall see the woman who allowed herself to be tied by you on the occasion of your foolish attempt to escape."

Genevieve was brave, but the sudden change in Chi Fang, the rage expressed on his scowling face, daunted her. She was in his power and dared not drive him too far.

From the beautiful splendor of the turquoise room Chi Fang conducted the girl to a tunnel ending in a barred cell.

"Look," he ordered.

Only a glimpse did Jenny catch of the interior of the dungeonlike place, but it was sufficient to cause her to shrink backward. The light was dim, and prominent in the foreground stood a brazier of live charcoal. Bound to a plank supported on trestles, with the light from the fire staining her yellow skin a bright orange, was Angel-Face.

Over her stood a threatening figure. It was Yen Foo. Close to the bound woman's terror-wrinkled forehead he held an iron bar. The tip glowed redly and radiated tiny rays of lambent carbon. Yen Foo grinned with the delight of the inquisitor as he lowered the searing iron within two inches of the moaning victim's face, and Jenny felt her flesh creep with sympathetic revulsion.

She screamed wildly as Chi Fang jerked her away and a shutter crashed against the iron bars.

Genevieve tore herself free from the hand that gripped her arm.

"You—you utter beast!" she panted, and as she spoke a quivering wail of agony rang out. With tear-filled, beseeching eyes the girl faced Chi Fang. She struggled for words, but wrought-up emotion choked her.

"You, and you only, can save her," said the master.

"How?"

"By acceding to the request I made."

"You would force me into a distasteful alliance by torturing that poor woman?"

"I will do more," replied Chi Fang with cruel emphasis. "Your Hal shall suffer and you shall watch him die by torture unless you at once give your consent to our marriage. I go now to order him brought here, or to acquaint my people that they are to have a queen. Which shall it be?"

"Give me time to think, to decide," begged Genevieve with blanched lips and imploring eyes.

"Not a moment."

"Then," cried the girl wildly, "I will—I must sacrifice myself to the bidding of a loathsome wretch."

"You consent to marry me?"

"Yes."

From the balcony the Master of the Lhassa harangued his people gathered below. When he finished he led the girl to the rail, and she looked down onto a mass of upturned yellow faces.

There was no applause, no roar from the multitude. The vast cavern was a temple of silence.

"In thirty-six hours the ceremony shall take place," said Chi Fang in a harsh voice. "My word is law."

CHAPTER XIX.

BY SUGGESTION.

WHEN he reached his own room Chi Fang gave orders for the decoration of the cavern. An altar was to be erected, the ceremony was to be performed with impressive pomp and show. The arched roof was to be festooned with a thousand lamps, the way of the bride was

to be strewn with roses. Then Yen Foo was summoned.

"Immediately after my marriage Hal Marshall is to be released. You will arrange for him to be smuggled aboard a ship and taken to China. Sun Su and Li Wang remain in the Lhassa until they take oath of allegiance. How about Horry?"

"He sleep most allee timee. When he wake he allee samee clazy man. He plick arm and—"

"All right—I do not need details," interrupted Chi Fang. Then, after he had consulted a note book and totaled a column of figures, he added: "I have done with him. He has paid his cash debt to me. We will see how Sun Su's film now works on him. Stop Horry's allowance of morphine and send him the projector and—no. That will not do. In his nerve-broken condition he may break the machine. This is better."

With a care to detail that showed how thoroughly he could concentrate, Chi Fang gave Yen Foo instructions that would insure the certainty of James Horry seeing the film.

"If he commits suicide it will save me the trouble of slitting his babbling tongue and"—thought Chi Fang with ironic humor—"it will rid the world of a meaner rascal than I am. I have forced the girl I love to bend to my will. Shall I ever be able to win her forgiveness?"

A softer look came over the master's face as he thought of Jenny. He was a queer mixture of strength and weakness, and his mad infatuation for the prototype of the girl he had loved in China had led him far from the rules he had laid down.

In the final analysis, what was Chi Fang? He was a lawbreaker; he traded on the religious fanaticism of his followers; he accepted tribute and made promises that he could not with certainty perform. Yet, like most daring adventurers in leadership, the Master of the Lhassa was not all rogue. His methods were kin to charlatanism, yet there was a streak of genuineness in him. He really believed he was to fulfill a glorious destiny. Through him the influence of the Lhassa was to permeate the soul of China. She was to waken to rebirth and recapture her prestige and ancient power. Mingling in Chi Fang were ambitions allied to self-aggrandizement and patriotism. His tormenting hold on James Horry was a side issue.

True, it gratified his pride, profited his pocket, to trample on the one who had cheated him and caused his exile; but it was Jenny who called to the surface all that was bad and all that was good in the creator of the Lhassa. With no deliberate intention she roused both the beast and the poet.

As for the girl herself, having given consent to the supreme sacrifice, dark and sinister thoughts came to her; yet not only was she bound to life by the clinging tendrils of youth; but of what avail would be the self-destruction of herself? Hal would also pay with his life. Only the brave shrink from self-extermination. Only the coward, too self-centered in hopeless envisagement of the future, willingly goes halfway to meet the tragic discontinuation of an existence filled with dread potentialities.

"I will wait until the very last moment," decided the girl. "I will even go through with the ceremony; then, if nothing happens—"

Genevieve could not conclude the dreadful thought, and suspense dwelt with her; but what she suffered was perhaps exceeded in intensity by the half-crazed agony of mind endured by Horry when he awoke and saw the scenes of his evil past recreated in light and shadow.

The girl had nothing to reproach herself with. The man was ridden with fears that had festered for years.

In the circle of light thrown up on the ceiling of his room Horry saw himself portrayed. He saw again the room where Sun Su's father sat when he signed the paper that ruined him in name and health. He saw the girl he had betrayed, and although he heard the clicking of the machine, and knew it was only a picture he watched, the reality of it drove him into a frenzy of fear.

". . . . At the zenith of your career you shall meet your doom."

Was the prophecy to be fulfilled?

With a bestial, inarticulate cry Horry leaped from the couch. He flung himself across the room, but even as he sprang the room went black. When he succeeded in dragging himself to his feet and striking a match there was nothing to be seen. No sign of an intruder, no vestige of a projecting machine. Yet his brain was sufficiently cleared of the effects of the drug that had been denied him for him to be positive that it was no hallucination he had experienced.

The match dropped from his fingers, and there in the darkness he stood stroking his stubble-covered chin. Over him crept the spell worked by suggestion, and he could think of nothing but the coward's way out. Presently he chuckled.

"I shall be safe. Dreamless sleep—rest."

Thus did James Horry pass beyond, and leave Dave Burgess to keep watch and ward over a dead man. The manner of Horry's going need not be told; but one may ask: Does the self-destroyed wrongdoer go to rest or to keener consciousness? Can a suicide, in absconding from the debts piled against him in this life, escape payment in the next?

Some time later, when even his turgid mental mechanism was stirred to alarm by his master's long silence, the door of the sliding panel was battered down, and Dave Burgess reaped a harvest of tips from the morbidly curious who came to see and exclaim. But none of these Paul Prys into scenes of tragedy discovered the door used by Chi Fang and Yen Foo.

When the latter brought the news to the Master of the Lhassa, Chi Fang nodded.

"It is better so," he said. "Horry was only an embarrassment to himself and others. Go now and hasten the preparations for the feast which is to follow my wedding."

Until the eleventh hour the Lhassa was a hive of busy people. And then—when all was ready, when the last rose had been shorn of its petals to be strewn at the feet of the prospective bride, when the last lamp had been lighted and the incense from a score of bronze burners was rising in tenuous, delicately perfumed and innocuous vapor to the arched roof of the subterranean temple—then the cup slipped.

No disloyal follower betrayed the master, no member of the Lhassa gave up one of its secrets, yet to Chi Fang there came full and bitter realization that he was thwarted, beaten, crushed to helplessness. To active, open revolt, to rebellion massed under a defiant, flying standard, there is hope of reprisal—prospect of turning defeat into victory. To passive, negative opposition, resistance is a futility, and Chi Fang was too intelligent to deceive himself with any false ideas.

Some men stubbornly refuse to read the writing on the wall; others, big enough to know their limitations, recognize when they are beaten. These last preserve their dignity even in defeat. Those others, hangers-on to the skirts of disdainful fate, plead and rail and frantically seek to patch up their broken schemes and go down ingloriously as puppets bedraggled in the mud of mischance.

"So far, and no farther," is the warning to the venturesome in love intrigues and schemes financial and political, and when fate takes a hand and plays a straight flush it is time to bow with good grace and accept one's destiny.

The gayly decorated, central cavern was deserted. An ashen pallor spread over Chi Fang's face as he quickly realized what had happened.

"So, that was the meaning of their silence," he thought bitterly. "They have all gone! Blood and tears! The omen of the rubies and diamonds is fulfilled. The Lhassa has crumbled; my dream is forever beyond realization."

Straight to the upper cave where Hal, Sun Su, and Li Wang were prisoned went Chi Fang.

"You are free," he said briefly as he threw open the door. "Circumstances are with you and against me. I will take you to Miss Leblanc."

In Genevieve's room the Master of the fallen Lhassa faced the four. His calmness was testimony of his great strength.

"My power over you is nullified," said Chi Fang dispassionately. "I can destroy,

but to no constructive end; beyond is a blank wall. To the future there is no continuity. There are now only five of us in the Lhassa, and presently there will be but one. My people have deserted me. Twice have I courted a dream and—" For a moment Chi Fang's expressionless eyes met those of the girl's; for a fleeting instant the steadiness of his glance wavered, and when he spoke again his voice was harsh with the storm of thwarted desires held in check.

" And," he continued, addressing Genevieve, " twice have I failed. It is enough. No man can fight against the dictates of a fate inimical to his hopes. No man should drag down when he cannot uplift. You were to reign with me. Now the king is dethroned, the kingdom deserted of its people.

" Soon the Lhassa will be only a memory; but it shall never become the haunt of the curious, a showplace for sightseers. To the end it shall remain—the forbidden city and—my monument."

The phrase was prompted by egoism, but, injured as they had been, none of the four felt any inclination to kick a beaten dog.

A moderate amount of ego is the seasoning of useful consciousness of self; by the road of self-approval is self-consciousness engendered; but like unto Cæsar and Napoleon, the Master of the Lhassa suffered from an insidious disease.

In its initiatory stages the cult of the Lhassa had succeeded and attracted adherents to its semireligious order because Chi Fang's personal aims were subservient; but immediately he began to use the Lhassa for his own selfish ends, so did he introduce an imperceptible but weakening factor in the thing he created.

A bloated, swollen ego is the sponsor of downfall and defeat. It is vanity that makes a man step in front of his own ambition and fall over his own feet, and the greater the ability of the man the more skilfully and stealthily does his egoism work against him.

In the beginning Chi Fang served. He ruled, but he placed the Lhassa first. Then, as he grew more powerful, his viewpoint insensibly changed and he began to envisage himself as a being of limitless authority over men and events.

In common with children, love-seeking girls, and money-desirous youths, great men dream fantasies and see visions, and Chi Fang's meeting with Genevieve Leblanc was the spark that set ablaze the greater glory he had been nursing in secret.

In the city, beneath which he had been king, nothing was known of the Lhassa by the authorities. Vague stories were told, but no attention was paid to them. Among the Chinese section above ground there were cautious whispers concerning the Lhassa; but the tale was told only to reliable, yellow ears.

Across the ocean the case was different. All over China the Lhassa was freely talked of, and Chi Fang, the mysterious, was regarded as a heaven-chosen savior of a failing people. To the Master of the Lhassa came strange and valuable gifts and a steady, ever increasing flow of money. Tens of thousands sent their mite, and in Shanghai and other populous centers, as in the isolated villages of Asia, prophecies were made that a new emperor was coming. China was to throw off the plucking hands of Europe and her greedy Nipponese neighbor, and she was to *rule the world!* This snaring phrase became a catchword, and in echo of it Chi Fang had said to Jenny:

" I will crown you queen—empress of the world!"

Given Genevieve's willing consent, given Chi Fang's unbiased clarity of vision over the situation, given time, and had the cohesion of his followers remained intact—who knows?

When millions of people are all thinking one way, when a tenth of a billion minds are bent in one direction, there is likely to be big trouble. When the thought of a myriad host bursts into action the alleged impossible merges into the probable. Yet, all because of a man's personal inclinations and a girl's desirability, the ferment evaporated.

When Chi Fang closed behind him the entrance to the Third Chamber he ceased to be a potential figure in the world's his-

tory. But—he did not run away. He retired.

"I have but little more to say," went on Chi Fang, "but before I show you the way out I wish to tell Miss Leblanc that the woman she saw in the barred cell was playing a part. With all the others, she and Yen Foo are now in the city above us. That is all. My people have left me without a word, and I do not believe that any one of them will betray the secret entrances to the Lhassa; but I will run no chance of betrayal."

In the wall of the turquoise room Chi Fang opened a concealed door. The room disclosed was small, bare of furnishings; but one wall was covered with innumerable wires and switches. Facing the door was an opening barely wide enough to admit one person.

"That is your way to dear liberty," said the master. "You will find cross passages, and, fifty feet up, another tunnel. Follow the one that is lighted. I shall allow you ten minutes. Then"—Chi Fang touched a switch lightly—"the way will be no more."

Without a word the three men filed into the straight passage.

"And you?" asked the girl.

The Master of the Lhassa smiled gently. "It is good of you to ask," he said; "but this is the Third Chamber—my answer to treachery and defeat. Farewell."

"He means to blow up all the entrances to the Lhassa!" exclaimed Hal as they climbed up the steep slope. "Now what? Which is the way? Both tunnels are lighted! Ah!"

The lamps in one of the tunnels went out, and Hal ran ahead.

"Follow me, Jenny!" he called, and looked back with a startled gaze when a dull explosion shook the ground beneath his feet.

"It is all right!" cried the girl. "He won't blow us up. I am sure we are safe and—"

Another explosion, more violent, nearer, sounded. Then followed a rending, rumbling crash, and the roof above Genevieve's head caved in. She went down under a shower of earth, stones, and timbers. Just as Hal leaped back the lights went out. Hal had been eager enough to rush to the girl's aid; but it was destined that the two gentlemen from China should save Jenny. Barely by a yard did Sun Su outdistance Hal, but by just that fraction of a second it takes to leap three feet, so was the girl's life saved. Square on his shoulders the young Chinaman caught the falling beam. The crushing weight bent him double, but even as he went down Li Wang dropped to his knees and crawled beneath his master, and on all fours bridged himself in rigid support.

"Drag her out!" cried Sun Su in a cracked, stifled whisper; and, seizing Jenny by her ankles, Hal pulled the unconscious girl beyond the break.

Then had come blackness and terror. The horror was all for Hal. It was impossible to see, but he could hear the creaking of the massive beam as it settled. Jenny was partially stunned to unconsciousness. Sun Su's voice, though he spoke with effort, was calm with fatalistic acceptance of his end.

"Go," he said to Li Wang, "else we shall both perish."

"I stay," replied the old Chinaman.

Then another explosion, this time in the tunnel itself, and the wall gave way. Through a mist of fine, choking dust Hal saw lights, rushing figures, and gleaming white tiled walls. The tunnel ran directly to a subway, and the veracity of a certain staidly dressed lady was reëstablished.

Eager, willing and many hands aided in releasing Sun Su and Li Wang, and hundreds of pairs of curious, wide-open eyes watched Genevieve as a disheveled and very unheroic-looking Hal helped her up the stairs and into the shelter of a taxi.

Sun Su protested, but he was forcibly but gently lifted into an ambulance and taken to the hospital to have his bruises and scratches dressed and bandaged.

"Y' know," said Hal the next day when he called on Jenny, "the newspapers are full of us; but don't you think we should live up to what is expected of us? We ought not to deceive the public."

"How d'you mean?"

"We're supposed to be married, and—"

"Why is it we are not?" asked Genevieve with a demure smile. "Are you broke? Must I lend you the money for a license?"

Need more be said, except that before she was allowed to accompany Hal to the judge's office a reporter found or bribed his way into the girl's sitting room and pleaded an interview.

"I'll give you five minutes," said the girl, "but—"

Before she had spoken ten words descriptive of the central cavern of the Lhassa Jenny stopped abruptly. The gaze of the reporter was admiring, but a look of amusement flickered in his eyes, the corners of his mouth quirked upward.

"You don't believe me?" the girl cried indignantly. "Very well, write your own story. I refuse to say any more."

The newspaper man apologized, expressed his willingness to give credit to all that Miss Leblanc might say, but Jenny was adamant.

"It is useless," she told Hal. "The best thing we can do is to preserve a dignified silence. No one will believe the truth, and in a way you cannot blame them. There are some things that have to be seen to be believed. We cannot show them the Lhassa, so we will let them imagine what they like."

So it came about that the true story of the Lhassa of Chinatown was never made public. Forced to draw upon their own imagination, the special feature writers could not carry conviction, and when they sought to get a basis of facts from the police they met with non-committal nods and shakes of the head. Some looked wise and allowed it to be inferred that they could tell many strange things if they would, but as a matter of plain truth the police were no wiser than any one else. As well as they were able they searched and burrowed; but those dull rumblings and explosions had loosened thousands of tons of earth, and there was no guiding trail left to the Lhassa.

In the Chinatown above ground there were many strange and curiously pallid faces; but although these Lhassaites had forsaken the master who had broken faith with them, they would not speak.

On the stern of an Orient-bound liner sat Sun Su. Beside him, squatting on the deck and bending over a long, narrow, canvas bag, was Li Wang. He looked younger, happier.

"What shall we do when we get home?" asked Sun Su.

"Fish," replied Li Wang.

"What else?"

"More fish. All the time—*fish*."

(The end.)

THE FLIRT

SHE was beautiful—
  Was Phyllis Brown,
And she had the choice
  Of all the town!

But the lovely belle
  Was hard to suit
As she passed from bud
  To ripened fruit.

When she would wed
  Her chance was small,
For the homely girls
  Had wed them all.

Faye N. Merriman.

Brass Commandments

Part II

by

Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THE cryptic message, "Come home immediately," has brought Stephen Lannon—known locally as "Flash"—from New York to Bozzam City, the station nearest his immense ranch. He is not recognized after five years' absence, but is quick to resent the sneering remarks of a former acquaintance, Bannack. Going to the only hotel he finds Gloria Stowe in charge during her father's absence; the father he had known. Lannon arrives just as Devake, a gambler, is making a familiar remark. Devake is forced to apologize. Learning from the girl that this incident is typical of many, Lannon discovers that of all the men only one, whom the girl has never seen, but has idolized from afar, could claim the name of gentleman; that one is "Flash" Lannon. She talks so freely of her hero that Lannon, whose name she has not yet learned, sees no way of stopping her without seeming discourteous. Meanwhile Ellen Bosworth, daughter of an Eastern capitalist who owns the biggest ranch in the vicinity, registers at the hotel for the night. Lannon introduces himself, and Gloria, overhearing, feels insulted and chagrined, wondering why he had not accorded her like consideration. That evening, at a barbecue, Devake, Campan, and others of his crowd decide to frame Lannon and send him out of town. A fight results, in which Lannon, unarmed, is victor. As he turns to leave he collapses; one of the shots has found its mark.

CHAPTER VII.

"THESE ARE THE COMMANDMENTS!"

LANNON stood erect on the gallery of the Bosque Grand ranch-house and stretched his arms above his head, testing the strength and elasticity of his muscles. He felt a slight stitching sensation in his left shoulder where Campan's bullet had gone in, and the flesh in the back where the leaden missile had gone out seemed to draw a little. The sensation was the only physical remembrance he had of the incident of the shooting.

He had spent two weeks at the Benson ranch-house, and three more at the Bosque Grand, most of the time sitting on the gallery gazing at the rugged peaks of the Capitans, or watching the droves of dusty mustangs that ranged a far slope of green-gray sage in search of pasturage, or in idly following the movements of bunches of cattle so far away that hundreds of them together made a mere dot against the dark green of the grass.

He saw his riders come and go; hardy, lean, bronzed men of bold mien, taciturn and steady of eye; he watched them range the distant ridges and levels, to disappear into the slumberous haze that veiled the horizons; he saw them reappear, apparently out of nowhere, to come homeward with their ponies in the steady chop-trot that permitted them to cover vast distances so easily; he had noted with a growing interest that the Bosque Grand stock of blooded

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 20.

horses had been augmented during his absence, that the great stables were well kept, that the fences were in good condition and that an atmosphere of prosperity seemed to reign over the big domain which had been left to him at his father's death. Tom Yates had evidently cared for the ranch as though it were his own.

Yates had visited him once at Benson's, but had made no accounting of his stewardship because Lannon had waved him away. Then Yates had gone with the outfit to a distant section of the range, leaving Ben Perrin in charge of the home ranch.

Lannon stepped down from the gallery, to see Perrin coming toward him from the direction of the bunk house, a low, rambling building on a little level near the bank of a river. He walked toward Perrin and met him on a slope, green-gray with knee-high sage.

"Yates is in," said Perrin. He peered critically at Lannon, his eyes quickening with pleasure. "Yore lookin' fit," he added. "But I reckon if Campan's bullet had struck a little lower, or if you hadn't took damned good care of yoreself while you was East—" His pause was eloquent.

"Perrin, that was my own fault. I'd had a clash with Devake that morning, and I'd spoken pretty plain to Bannack. And I'd seen Campan sizing me up. One of my old guns was in my traveling bag."

"Thet was a mighty good place to leave it, with guys like Campan an' Bannack an' Devake an' Tulerosa hangin' around. But you always was a fool for takin' chances." Perrin's eyes glowed. He shook his head. "You got them three ca'tridges yet?"

Lannon nodded.

"Mighty strange about thet gal, Glory Stowe. She showed right venomous thet night. Looked like a wildcat. She ain't lovin' you none. But she changed around complete when she saw you'd been hit. It was her thet took care of you till the doctor come. She was white as paper, but ca'm an' still, till after the doc come an' said he reckoned you'd pull through. Then she give up. I saw her outside, cryin' soft-like. Women is a heap strange, ain't they?"

"Have you been over to Bozzam City since?"

"Twice. Things was quiet. Devake is layin' low. He liked to bust his head when you knocked him ag'in' thet wall. Tulerosa an' Bannack an' Campan has pulled their freight. But Campan left word thet he wasn't payin' much attention to your threats. He'll come to town whenever he feels like comin'. But I'm bettin' thet won't be a heap soon or often." Perrin squinted his eyes at Lannon. "Thet Ellen Bosworth is shore thoroughbred," he said. "She'd arranged to stay at the Bozzam Hotel after the barbecue. Instead, she stayed right in the room at Benson's with you till daylight. Exceptin' she was a little pale you wouldn't know she'd seen anything. But she told me she'd seen it all. She was on the other side of the big room, opposite the door whar Devake stuck the gun in yore back. She left the next mornin' sayin' she'd send over to find out how you was gettin' along. Thar's been a Lazy J man hyar every day."

A tall man, booted, spurred, holsters low on his hips, capable-looking, with an air of quiet authority, was advancing through the sage.

"Thar's Yates now," said Perrin. "I'm lookin' after the blue-bloods. Yates is a crank about 'em. Seen Polestar yet?"

Lannon shook his head, but a light leaped into his eyes which made Perrin grin.

"Haw, haw! I struck fire thet time, eh, boss? Gawd! Thet's a hoss! He gets better with age. He's filled out. He's stronger an' faster an' cold as ice. Redfire an' Flash an' Queen Mab an' Gordon is good hosses, all right—racers if ever thar was any. But, Lordy! Polestar's got 'em skinned when it comes to downright runnin'! You reckon Polestar will know you?"

"Perrin, you're as boastful as ever about that horse. Queen Mab and Gordon are new?"

"Wild hosses, boss. Baldy McKean ketched 'em down in Vetters' Cañon two years ago. Had one hell of a time breakin' 'em. But he done it. McKean's a mighty good wrangler."

"Perrin's always talking horse," interjected Yates, who had come near. "He's been grooming Polestar every minute since he heard you were coming home. You're

looking good, Steve, though I'd say you were taking chances in meeting Campan without being heeled. Campan was always bad medicine; he's got worse since Bosworth fired him."

"Tom, I'm glad to see you. The ranch never looked better."

A shadow crossed Yates's eyes. "I couldn't talk in that telegram, Steve. But there's been hell to pay. We've lost over a thousand steers in the last month—since the round-up. Three men have been killed by rustlers. We've traced stock as far south as the desert. We found tracks through Vetters' Cañon and on down through to the lower basin this side of the Capitans. There we lost them. Seems like the earth had opened and swallowed the herd up. No signs beyond the lower basin. You know where Salt Cañon opens into the desert? I've seen some tracks that far. Seems the rustlers must have drove that way, heading toward the line. But the devil himself couldn't track one of his hellions through that sand, the way it shifts and changes. Once a man gets in that sand he's lucky if he gets out."

"I know where you mean, Yates. I was lost there two days. It's devilish mean."

"Then there's no use of me gabbing about it. The thing has got serious. The rustlers are well organized. They move fast and strike hard. The worst of it is that the thieves are not bothering the little owners. They seem to have centered their efforts on the Bosque Grand and the Lazy J —Bosworth's ranch. There's sentiment in the valley against Eastern owners. They consider the Bosque Grand is owned East, that you're Eastern.

"Things have changed since you left. The little owners tolerate stealing from the Eastern-owned ranches: the Lazy J and the Bosque Grand. They won't lift a hand to stop the stealing. They won't even talk. It looks to me as though there is an understanding between the little owners and the rustlers; the little owners not being bothered as long as they keep their mouths shut about what they see.

"It has got so that nobody is to be trusted, not even some of the men of our own outfit. It's got to be a popular thing to run off stock belonging to Eastern owners —you and Bosworth. The waddies swagger around and stick their tongues in their cheeks when the law is mentioned, for they know that the next man is as guilty as they. Rustling isn't a crime any more, and the sheriff who would try a man for stealing a Bosque Grand or a Lazy J steer would be laughed out of the country."

"Who is the sheriff?"

"Brainard. Brainard's all right—honest and all that—but he's powerless. He knows it isn't any use to buck the rustlers, because they're too many. If anything can be done it will have to be done by the Eastern owners themselves—that is, by you and Bosworth. The Bosque Grand and the Lazy J will have to take the law in their own hands. Somebody will have to show the rustlers that it's certain death to monkey with a Bosque Grand or a Lazy J steer!"

Lannon met Yates's level gaze. The foreman's cold gray eyes were aglitter with significance; exultation was in his voice.

"That somebody has got to be you, Lannon!" he declared. "Sure, we'll back you up till hell freezes over! But there's got to be someone leading us. Somebody that the rustlers will know means business! Somebody they'll be afraid of! That's you, Lannon! Before you left to go east you had this country down on its belly crawling after you! Your word was law! Bad men avoided meeting you. Your words were whispered about; what you said nobody questioned. Hell, don't I know? I've seen men blanch when your name was mentioned. I know men who took their guns off and hung them up when you struck town. I've seen town as quiet as a Sunday school when you rode through it. Lannon, you'll be lord of Creation out here, if you want to be! All you've got to do is to lay down your commandments and they'll be obeyed. These are the commandments!" He drew several cartridges from his belt and held them up so that they glittered brassily in the sunlight. "You know this is the only law this country will recognize, and you are the prophet of this kind of law. Make them like it! I reckon that's all. I've spoken my piece. Now come over to the house and I'll make my report."

Two hours later Yates emerged from the house, walked to the bunk-house, lingered there for a few minutes, talking with Perrin; then went out, threw saddle and bridle on a big black horse and rode southward to join the outfit. Perrin watched him with bright eyes.

"I reckon thet's settled," he mused. "All thet was needed was to get the boss stirred up. An' Yates was the man to do it."

After Yates left Lannon walked to the front door of the ranch-house. Yates had stirred him, had aroused the latent fire in him, the ruthless, destroying passions that had governed him in the old days; passions that he had confidently told himself had been conquered by sheer determination aided by the refining influences of his eastern training, by his complete yielding to discipline, and by his conviction that all violence sprang from degenerate impulses.

He knew now that environment was the governing influence; that it was easy to conform to laws where all men considered themselves amenable; where every man's conduct was regulated by considerations for the rights of others, and where the right to punish breakers of the laws was delegated to authority which must be respected.

He understood that it was the law as an institution that he had respected during his stay in the east, that it was to that institution that he had bowed. Several times he had met men who had aroused his anger, whom he had hated and whom, had there been no law to restrain him, he would have provoked to violence as he had provoked others of their type in the valley. Thus he knew that in the end a man must learn not to depend upon the law, but upon himself. He must govern his passions or they would govern him. Therefore, though he had respected the law, he had learned that he must first respect himself, must destroy his violent passions or they would destroy him. And until now he thought he had succeeded.

But there was no mistaking the mood that was upon him now. It was the same as in the days when he had roamed the valley exacting homage from all men; recklessly and arrogantly ruling over his domain and striking terror into the hearts of all who disputed his right. The wild exultation of the old days was upon him; he thrilled to it as he stood staring into the distance beyond the gallery of the ranch-house, tracing invisible trails over every well-remembered corrugation within range of his vision. Mile on mile the land swept away, ridge and valley and flat and mesa and rugged butte; battlement of granite, spire and tower, arroyo and barranco, forest and glade and sea of sage and mesquite. He knew what lay behind a frowning escarpment that stuck a huge shoulder above a basalt plain; he had followed a maze of cañons southward until they brought him into the desert beyond the Capitans. He was a part of the land, he belonged to it as surely as the rugged hills; its sinister threat was in his heart; he felt its menace in the bitter mood that had descended upon him. He had sought to change his nature, but had found that the basic, primitive instincts in him were as immutable as the brooding calm that hovered over the vast land at which he gazed.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I'M SHOOTING ON SIGHT."

IT seemed to Lannon that the inexorable finger of fate pointed to the door of a closet in the room he had occupied in the days before he had gone East. A dozen times each day during the three weeks of his convalescence at the Bosque Grand he had looked at that closet door, sometimes with a strange, wild yearning, more often with contempt and regret.

He stood before the door now, cold, hesitant, bitter, fighting a losing mental battle. He knew he would have to open the door; he had known it since Yates had told him about conditions in the valley. Once he opened the door there would be no turning back; he would have to go on, to fulfill what at this instant seemed to be his destiny. His five years of effort in striving to eradicate an inherent savagery would be wasted. He would revert to type.

His face flamed as he flung the door open. He stood rigid, breathing fast, his gaze steady, sinister, coldly malignant,

reminiscent. He was seeing what Devake had seen in the hotel office in Bozzam City, the dim, hazy mental picture that the gambler had visualized when, ready to reach for his gun he had hesitated to stare at Lannon. A brown flannel shirt hung in the closet. Near the shirt was a blue neckerchief, a wide-brimmed felt hat, black leather chaps, a black leather cartridge belt and two worn, flapless holsters, somber as the chaps. In a corner of the closet stood a pair of soft-topped, high-heel boots, and on a hook near the chaps was suspended a pair of silver spurs with long rowels. A black-handled Colt was in one of the flapless holsters; the other holster was empty.

Lannon reached for the chaps. They were as smooth and pliable as they had been when he had taken them off before going East. Perrin, he knew, had oiled and rubbed them, for Perrin had written him that he was keeping them in shape against the day when Lannon would return to wear them. Cartridge belt, holsters and boots were in the same wonderful state of preservation. The flannel shirt had been washed, ironed. To be sure it was not the only flannel shirt Lannon had owned in the old days, but it was the one he had taken off just before he had left to go East, and it was where Perrin had found it.

One thing Perrin had not succeeded in rubbing off the chaps, the boots and the cartridge belt with his oil and muscle. That was the strange, pungent odor of the leather itself and the faint, peculiar, lingering scent of horses. The scent brought swift memories to Lannon; vivid, compelling recollections of the past. It brought to him again the old atmosphere; the aroma of new sage crushed beneath Polestar's flying hoofs; the feel of a steady wind pressing against him. He felt again the ripple of Polestar's mighty muscles; he experienced again the sensation of freedom from restraint of all kinds; the breathless exultation, the wild exaltation of arrogant youth.

Delving deeper into the closet he brought forth a saddle—his saddle. Its leather too, was smooth and pliable. The high cantle bore his initials, inlaid with silver; the cinches held new buckles, new latigo strings.

Flushed, thrilling with strange emotions, Lannon dropped the saddle to the floor and began to strip off his civilian attire. He found the brown shirt too small, and he got another from a drawer in a dresser, which though a trifle snug, felt roomier and gave free play to his eager muscles. But the chaps, the boots, the hat, the trousers he took from the closet—all were perfect. He strapped the cartridge belt around his waist, drew another Colt from the traveling bag he had brought with him and dropped it into the empty holster. It was of the same pattern as the one in the other holster, with the same dark, forbidding handle.

Stooping, he tied the bottoms of his holsters to the legs of his chaps with rawhide thongs that dangled from the black leather; strapped on the silver spurs, tied the blue neckerchief around his throat, loaded the guns with new cartridges which he found in an unbroken box on the dresser top—placed there by Perrin, he decided, smiling wryly—and removed a few cartridges that were still in the belt around his waist to replace them with those that had been left in the box after he had filled the cylinders of his guns. For an instant he stood, examining the gun that belonged in the holster at his right hip. Then he deliberately unloaded it, stuck the six cartridges in his belt, took out of a pocket the three that had been given him by Gloria Stowe and shoved them into the cylinder, leaving three chambers empty. He lowered the hammer on one of the empty chambers, to the right of the three full chambers, sheathed the weapon and strode to the front door. Crossing the gallery he stepped down and began to walk toward the pasture. A little later he was standing at the fence, whistling peculiarly.

He had almost forgotten the call, and he whistled a few times before he could master the plaintiff note which had brought Polestar to his side many times in the old days. But finally he got it and repeated it several times softly.

Half a dozen horses were bunched in a far corner of the pasture. Nearer to Lannon was Polestar.

A great admiration thrilled Lannon as he watched the magnificent animal. Per-

rin had not exaggerated. Polestar was bigger, finer, greater than he had ever been. He was groomed until his silver coat shone like polished metal, his superb muscles rippling beneath it like writhing serpents. His chest had grown broader, his slender, tapering legs more sinewy, his beautiful neck had a firmer arch, his nostrils a bigger flare; and his wonderful mane shone in the sun like a white flame. He had heard Lannon's whistle; he stood with head erect, facing the fence where Lannon stood, his ears forward, quivering, his eyes big and blazing; he was statuesque, heroic.

Lannon repeated the call. Polestar pawed the earth, then suddenly came forward with a cautious, sidling motion as though he doubted. Again Lannon sent forth the plaintiff call. This time Polestar increased his speed, stepping high and whinnying softly. He approached within thirty or forty feet of Lannon and halted, sniffing the air, snorting with excitement. Again Lannon whistled. Then the big silver horse lunged forward, whinnying a note of welcome which was almost human. His dark muzzle came over the top rail of the fence and inquisitively nuzzled Lannon's cheek. Then Lannon threw an arm over Polestar's neck and held him close.

Not more than a stone's throw distant, standing at a corner of the big stable, Ben Perrin watched.

"Gawd!" he said, awed. "What a hoss! What a man!"

Lannon turned after a while, saw Perrin watching, and motioned to him.

"Perrin," he called. "Get my saddle. I didn't bring it; I didn't know if Polestar would recognize me, and I didn't intend to ride him unless he did. Perrin, you've taken mighty good care of him. He's a better horse now than when I left."

Perrin's eyes twinkled. "I reckon you found yore riggin' all right, too? An' I expect mebbe you found them cartridges?"

"Perrin, you're too damned wise. You knew I'd want new cartridges!"

"Shore, I knowed you'd want 'em. The powder in them old ones would be caked, mebbe, in five years. When a man wants to use a gun, I reckon he wants to be pretty sure it'll go off."

He brought the saddle and watched while Lannon threw it on Polestar. Then, when the big horse was led forth, prancing and playfully nudging Lannon's shoulder, Perrin again spoke:

"Boss, whar you goin'?"

"To town."

Perrin hesitated, frowned and turned a troubled eye on Lannon.

"Boss, you been away five years."

"Five years, Perrin," affirmed Lannon.

"I reckon you ain't done no gun-slingin' since you left hyar?"

Lannon's eyes gleamed. "I get your point, Perrin. I'm obliged to you. But I reckon I can still throw a gun pretty rapid."

"Uh-huh," said Perrin, doubtfully. He fidgited. "A man loses the knack—if he don't keep at it. Guys like Devake an' Tulerosa an' Bannack an' Campan, an' some more of them coyotes, hev kept their hand in."

"I wonder," said Lannon. He led Polestar to the fence, tied him, walked a little distance to a cottonwood, drew out a pocketknife and stripped a piece of bark from the tree.

Then he stepped back several paces, broke the gun which he drew from the holster at his right hip, extracted the three cartridges he had previously placed in it and substituted six others. He dropped the weapon back into the holster and stood for an instant facing the tree, both hands hanging at his sides. Then his shoulders lifted and the big guns roared, spouting flame and smoke in continuing streams.

"Lord Almighty!" gasped Perrin as he ran forward. He examined the tree and turned again to Lannon, amazed, pale.

"Boss," he said, "thet draw! I've seen you do it before, but I never thought you was thet quick! I reckon it's because it's been five years, an' I'd sort of forgot. I reckon you don't need to worry none about Campan an' thet bunch. Lordy!"

He moved away; watched Lannon mount Polestar and ride north.

Lannon reloaded his guns as he rode. Into the chambers of the weapon at his right hip he placed the three cartridges Gloria had given him; the other gun he reloaded from the cartridge belt.

Shortly after noon he rode into Bozzam City and brought Polestar to a halt in front of the hotel. He threw the bridle without hitching the silver horse and strode into the hall through the big front door.

Halting in the archway between the hall and the office his glance found Gloria behind the counter, her arms resting on its top. She steadily watched Lannon, eyes bright with excitement, though she was trying to appear coldly unconcerned. From the window at her back she had seen Lannon dismount from Polestar, and she had gasped with admiration at the changed appearance of the man who had slighted her.

" Good afternoon, Miss Stowe," greeted Lannon.

" Hello stranger," responded Gloria, coldly.

" I've come to thank you for what you did the night of the barbecue," said Lannon.

" Meaning what I did before or after?"

" Well—after, I suppose."

" That wasn't anything. There was no doctor right away. Someone had to take care of you. All the rest of the women was too nervous to touch you."

" It was mighty good of you."

" Shucks!"

" Also, I've come to apologize to you."

" What for?"

" For an oversight. I meant to introduce myself. I put it off because I wanted to tell you why I let you talk about me that way. Then Miss Bosworth came in and it was too late."

" I think you're making that too important, stranger. I didn't care a darn then, and I don't care a darn now. You are presuming a lot if you think I want to know you."

A strange fury had driven her to the declaration. She knew she hadn't spoken the truth. She did want to know him. Moreover, she wanted him to think well of her. In addition, she desired him to think of her as a lady, even though she was aware that her coarse speeches were making it impossible for him to think so. The trouble with her was that she didn't know how to gain a man's respect. She vaguely realized that respect couldn't be *commanded,* that it had to come as a tribute to certain sterling qualities; that it was not sought, but that it came of its own accord, as a natural reward of worthiness. But that explanation did not console her, for she had failed to deserve respect, had lost her chance to earn Lannon's admiration, and she knew she couldn't force him to like her. Her fury arose from that conviction, though she would not admit it, and kept telling herself that it came from resentment over the way he had shamed her in the presence of Ellen Bosworth.

" I don't know that I blame you for feeling that way," said Lannon. " Let's put it the other way. Suppose I want to know you?"

" You took a darn queer way of showing it!" she declared.

" I admit that. I want to tell you why I didn't tell you my name sooner."

" You didn't tell *me* your name at all, stranger," she reminded, her eyes flashing.

" Well, then, why I didn't tell you at all. No one had ever praised me as you praised me. I wanted to hear more of it. If I had told you my name you would have stopped."

" Sure," she said, scornfully. " That's a mighty weak explanation, stranger."

" It's the plain truth."

" Stranger, you're lying. You saw my rags; you knew I was running this hotel; you'd heard Devake. You thought I didn't amount to much, and you tried to make a fool of me."

" Gloria, you are wrong."

" Don't you call me that! You've got no right to!"

" I'm taking the right, I reckon."

She gave him a quick, startled glance as the " reckon " came from his lips. Not only had he changed his clothes, he had altered his speech to conform to them. Nor was the " reckon " the only idiom she had detected while he had been talking. There was a flavor, a slow drawl in his pronunciation, the suggestion of an elision here and there that proved a changed habit of thought as completely as his picturesque rigging had changed his appearance.

Gloria had a queer feeling that the ideal she had envisaged had suddenly and magically appeared in the flesh, that the tender-

foot Lannon who had slighted her had not been a real person at all, but a dream-man, characterless, vague, who was rapidly becoming a dim figure in her memory.

The Lannon who was looking at her now was the Lannon of her romantic visioning. In his bold, reckless, ardent eyes she saw a character she knew. A great wonder filled her.

"I've been telling you the truth," said Lannon. "I'm wanting you to talk straight to me. Why did you take Campan's end of the quarrel at Benson's?"

"That's my business, stranger," she said, steadily meeting his gaze. "I don't hev to make any explanations to you."

"Why did you pick up his gun, unload it and give me the three cartridges?"

"I reckon you ought to know why." Her eyes mocked him. "You had him down; he had no chance after you hit him. I wanted him to live so that one day he could shoot you for treating me as you did. And Campan will do it, stranger, make no mistake about that!"

"Gloria, you don't love Campan. You're too good for him."

"I reckon I ain't too good for him," she replied, smiling bitterly. "I ain't good enough for anybody. But I ain't making any excuses or explanations to you, or any of the darned fools in this hyeh town. If I want to love Campan I'll love him, and if I don't want to love him I won't! It's nobody's darned business!"

"It's my business, Gloria," said Lannon. He was thinking of what Perrin had said about how he had found the girl outside the Benson ranch-house, alone, crying, after the doctor had come. "Listen, I've come back here to stay. Campan is bad medicine. Sure as he hangs around here long enough I'm going to kill him. I reckon you heard what I told him that night at Benson's. I meant it. I mean it now. I'm going to rule here. I'm going to lay down some commandments. They are going to be obeyed. One of them I'm going to tell you right now, but you are the only one who will hear this one: You will never marry Campan!"

"Well, I'll say this for you, stranger: You've got nerve!" she said, scornfully. "You're starting in with mighty big talk. When I get ready to do my marrying I'll not come to ask your permission. And you be careful that Campan or some of his friends don't drill you before you can lay down your fool commandments!"

Gloria was bitter, but she was strangely stirred. Lannon's words had a fatalistic sound. It was as though a prophetic vision enabled him to look into the future, and she had an odd prescience that what he had predicted would come to pass. Lannon's words had not been boastful; they had been uttered with a cold deliberation that carried conviction. She shivered as she stared into his eyes, noting the terrible earnestness of them.

"There's one thing more, Gloria. You know my name is Lannon, but ever since I've been in here you've been calling me 'stranger.'"

Her eyes lighted proudly. "We've never been introduced, stranger," she said coldly. "I never call any man by his name until I know him."

"I'm introducing myself, now," said Lannon. "I'm Stephen Lannon, of the Bosque Grand."

She shook her head. "It ain't the same, stranger. You're leaving something out that you put into what you said to Ellen Bosworth. I don't know what it is. It ain't words; it's the way you said it. I reckon it don't make any difference, anyway, to me or to you. It's done, and that ends it. You're staying a stranger."

She turned her back to him so that she would not surrender to the reproach in his eyes. She picked up a pencil and made some meaningless figures on a piece of paper that lay on a shelf, while she waited breathlessly, hoping he would refuse to accept her rebuff and insist upon her accepting his apology. In this minute she knew her attitude was indefensible, that she was demanding too much from him, that there was danger of his taking her at her word and leaving her, to make no further attempt to win her friendship. If at this instant he had spoken one word of appeal she would have swiftly turned, to forgive him.

But that word did not come. She heard

him move away from the counter, cross the room. She turned as she heard his step at the archway; but she saw only his back as he went out. She ran to the window behind the counter, and from behind the lace curtain saw him mount Polestar and ride slowly down the street, not looking back. She watched him out of sight and then with a sudden access of wild emotion she leaned on the counter, her back to the window and sobbed: "Lannon, Lannon! I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it!"

How long she leaned on the counter she did not know. It seemed she had been there hours when at last she straightened, dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief, walked to the little mirror on the wall near the lounge and stared at her reflection.

"I reckon the devil has got into you, you darned fool!" she said, aloud. "Hyeh comes along a man you've loved for years without seeing him, and when you see him you've got all you can do to keep from throwing yourself in his arms. What you really do is to make him think you're a stubborn swell head. And I reckon that's just what you are!"

She dried her eyes and went out upon the gallery, drawn there by an irresistible longing to see Lannon again, a shameless, wanton impulse which disregarded appearances, which even stiffened her to an appearance of at least outward unconcern over what Lannon might think should he chance to see her on the gallery gazing in his direction. There were a number of men in front of the post office; she saw Jim Johnson, the station agent, walking with long steps toward the crowd; she saw other men moving in that direction; and a cowboy swayed past her on unsteady legs, brazenly winking at her and smirking foolishly. But she did not see Polestar at any of the hitching rails in front of the stores. Disappointed, her senses strangely tumultuous, she stepped down from the gallery to a point between the hotel and the building adjoining it, where she got a view of the south trail. At a little distance out on the level she saw Polestar and his rider traveling steadily southward, a thin film of dust trailing them.

Assailed with a conviction that the crowd in front of the post office was somehow linked with Lannon's visit to town, she moved down the street toward the group of men. When she reached the post office she lingered for some minutes at the outskirts of the crowd, until she saw that the men were interested in a paper which had been tacked to the front wall of the building. Curious, she began to squirm through the crowd, finally getting close enough to the paper to read what was written on it.

But before she began to read her attention was attracted by the gleam of the sun on some brass objects just above the paper. The postmaster had fastened a small bulletin board to the front of the building, upon which, according to his custom, he posted information regarding the arrival and departure of the mails. The board, which was small, was provided with a narrow shelf-like strip top and bottom. The brass objects which gleamed in the sunlight were six forty-five caliber cartridges. They stood erect on the lower shelf, eloquently suggestive.

Not until Gloria had stared at them for some seconds did she read what was written on the paper below them:

WARNING!

THE rustlers who have been working on the Bosque Grand cattle are known. Six are to leave Lannon basin at once, to stay forever. The six are Campan, Bannack, Tulerosa, Devake, Slim Lally and one other.

This notice is to stay here. The man who takes it down or destroys it will be considered the "one other" mentioned above.

I'm shooting on sight.

LANNON.

A man standing in front of Gloria whistled softly.

"Whew!" he ejaculated, "That's shore a mighty pointed dockiment! But shucks, this here Lannon is mebbe bitin' off more'n he c'n chew?"

"H'm," said his neighbor, "I dunno about thet. Mebbe he is, an' mebbe he ain't. But I'd a heap ruther be me than airy one of them six guys he's mentioned. Flash used to be chain lightnin', an' meaner'n pizen. Hell! Now I wonder who thet thar sixth man is?"

"I'm dead sartin it ain't goin' to be me thet pulls thet thar notice down," said another man.

There was more talk, though most of the men who read the notice were silent and thoughtful. But all day there were groups in front of the post office. Night fell and the crowd grew, augmented by cowboys in from the ranges. All apparently watched each newcomer, anticipating that eventually one would tear the notice down. Though many smiled skeptically, and many more commented unflatteringly upon the character of the man who had posted the notice, none offered to remove or deface it. Apparently no man cared to be known as the mysterious personage Lannon had designated as "one other."

CHAPTER IX.

"ABOUT A HUNDRED LAST NIGHT."

ED CONNOR, the Lazy J. foreman, stood with his legs asprawl, his thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt, staring dejectedly at James K. Bosworth.

"About a hundred last night," he repeated savagely. "They got 'em from that grass the other side of the red buttes an' run 'em through Salt Cañon. We tracked 'em to the edge of the desert an' lost 'em. Disappeared as if the earth had swallowed 'em. I'm sure a heap puzzled."

Bosworth's face flushed darkly. A big man, sheathed with surplus flesh from a pampered appetite and from lack of physical effort, Bosworth still showed signs of former muscular force. His cold gray eyes lit with passion, sternly repressed. He spoke slowly, quietly, with the voice of one accustomed to issuing orders and having them obeyed without question.

"Connor, we've got to organize to prevent future stealing. This thing is getting serious. What do you suggest?" He glanced swiftly at Ellen, who stood near, as though he thought she might have something to offer. Ellen was silent, glancing from her father to Connor.

"Boss, there's only one thing to do—fight 'em!" declared Connor.

"Not a difficult matter," dryly agreed Bosworth. "We've got some good men; we can get others, I presume. If we knew where to find the rustlers the fighting would be very simple. But it seems the rustlers have an annoying habit of being everywhere except where we expect to find them. They seem to anticipate our movements. Take last night, for example. You had your men scattered on the north range. Result—the rustlers strike from the south."

Connor scowled. His muscles tensed; he seemed in the grip of a terrible rage. His eyes blazed as he looked at Bosworth.

"There's a leak somewheres, boss. Somebody's puttin' the rustlers wise to our movements. I'd like to know who it is; I'd sure make him think hell was after him!"

Bosworth glanced slyly at Ellen, to note the effect of Connor's profanity upon her.

"I feel quite as strongly as Mr. Connor," she said coolly. The foreman flashed her a glance of admiration.

"That makes it unanimous," smiled Bosworth. "But it doesn't get us anywhere. A threat hasn't any teeth unless there's a chance to make it good. We seem to have no chance; our mysterious enemy has will-o'-wisp qualities. I've heard a report that the only sufferers have been the Eastern owners, myself and Lannon. But yesterday I had a talk with Clearwater. He says he has missed large numbers of cattle, too, at various times, but has kept silent. And Clearwater isn't an Eastern man; he has lived here all his life."

"Father, why don't you form a defensive alliance with Stephen Lannon?"

Connor's eyes brightened; Bosworth smiled faintly.

"Lannon seems to want to go it alone, doesn't he? It seems that several weeks ago, after he got over the wound that man Campan gave him, he posted a warning in Bozzam City. He mentioned the Bosque Grand. He hasn't sent word that he wishes coöperation of any sort. That seems to let us out."

"Have we made any advances to Lannon, father? Perhaps he feels as independent as we have shown ourselves to be?"

"There may be something in that." Bosworth looked intently at Ellen. "You've

met him. I remember you said you danced with him at the Benson barbecue. I've never seen him, though I've heard a lot about him. How does he strike you, Ellen?"

"I really don't know, father. He is rather quiet and soft-spoken, but at the same time he seems to suggest force. I thought him rather contradictory, and subject to strange moods, as though he had flashes of passion which he tried to repress. He was terrible in the Benson patio, after Campan shot him. After getting that awful wound he knocked Campan unconscious. The strange part of the incident was that nobody knew he had been wounded until the fighting was all over. Then he collapsed. But I told you about that."

"You haven't seen him since the fight?"

"No; but I sent a man to the Bosque Grand every day until he got well."

"Get any word from him?"

"No."

"H-m. What do you think of Lannon, Connor?"

"He's man's size, goin' an' comin'. No show, no fuss; likes to play a lone hand. Cool an' easy an' dangerous. Two-gun. Throws 'em so fast that you can't see 'em. Lightnin's slow when Lannon moves his gun hand. Dead shot; cold as an iceberg under fire."

"Then his threat to kill Campan wasn't idle talk?"

"I reckon not. Flash never run a whizzer on no one. He'll do what he said he'd do. If I was Campan I'd sure pull my freight."

"Do you mean that Lannon will carry out his threat literally? That he will disfigure Campan, then cripple him, and finally kill him?"

"That's what will happen, boss."

"Lannon must be a savage." Bosworth's eyes narrowed. "But I suppose Campan has it coming to him, according to the code out here; and I don't know but that I'd feel satisfied if Lannon did punish the man. That would help to square my account with him."

"He sure give you a raw deal, boss," said Connor.

"Yes, but that's past. I think we won't bother Lannon right now. We'll wait. Clearwater is nearer; he's a friend and he's in the very fix we are in. We'll join forces with him to defend ourselves from the rustlers. I'll ride over to-morrow to have a talk with him."

"Don't forget your heart, father," warned Ellen. "The doctor's orders for you to rest do not include riding."

"H-m; that's so," agreed Bosworth. "I wish I'd been a little more active in late years. Connor, you'd better slip over and tell Clearwater I want to have a talk with him."

"It won't be more than two or three miles out of my way," said Ellen. "I'm riding to Bozzam City this morning, for some things I need—and to see Gloria Stowe. I'll stop at the Star and tell Clearwater to ride over here to-morrow." She smiled at the troubled expression in Bosworth's eyes. "Don't worry about me, father. I've been over the Star trail many times and could ride it with my eyes blindfolded."

"It isn't that, Ellen. You know what Campan is. He and his gang have kept pretty quiet, trying to avert suspicion, I suppose. I'm afraid that since Lannon has issued that warning they'll come out in the open and do things they wouldn't have thought of doing before."

"Meaning that they'll kidnap me?" mocked Ellen. "What a ridiculous thought! This isn't the seventeenth century, father. And besides, I would rather enjoy such an experience. I am not afraid of Campan or any other man!"

"All right," laughed Bosworth.

"I'll stay overnight with Gloria Stowe," said Ellen; "she has a perfect jewel of a room. And she is very good company, father; she has such a primitive way of saying and doing things."

Connor saddled and bridled the big gray horse Ellen had ridden to Bozzam City on the day of the barbecue at Benson's. Connor disappeared while Ellen was mounting, and Bosworth stood near the ranch-house for a long time, watching the girl and the gray horse as they faded into the gray-green sage of an upland, south-eastward.

Until her father had spoken of Clearwater, Ellen Bosworth had not thought of

going to Bozzam City, though the instant the words had left her father's lips the secret of the strange restlessness that had afflicted her for the past few weeks was explained. She wanted to see Lannon again. Shamelessly, as she rode, she admitted it. And why not? The man had intrigued her interest; she had been touched with the spell of the romantic atmosphere that seemed to surround him; subtly affected by the force she felt in him. His reputation as a gunfighter of the old days had appealed to her imagination, and the quality in him that had sent him East to school had aroused her admiration because it had betrayed an ambition to lift himself to better things.

Ellen knew herself as no other person knew her. She was aware that she had been on the verge of falling in love several times, and that she had escaped only because she knew that once she married she might meet another man she would like better than she liked her husband. That conviction had been a deterring influence. She could not be true to any man until she was certain that she could be true to herself. Therefore she sailed serenely past the matrimonial bark, searching the seas for a craft that she knew would engage her entire attention. She had yet to see the man who was so captivating that he could cause her to lose her interest in other men. Lannon was the nearest to her ideal, and she meant to adventure with him merely to determine if he would continue to hold her captious interest.

The trail to Clearwater's ranch, the Star, was a rough one, through a wild, majestic wilderness. Beyond the upland of sage she came to a barren ridge which she rode for some distance until the dim trail took her down into a river bottom among some huge buttes that rose on each side of the water-course, rugged, cañon-like. The trail ran along a narrow bench featured by rotted rock and barren of all verdure except for clumps of alder that grew along the edge, and some manzanita bushes growing in the dark clefts. The bench came to an end, merged with a slope which led her down into a basin where saccaton grass grew tall and caught at her stirrup leathers. Presently the gray horse was mounting another upland of sage, and then came a grass level that stretched far.

Ellen had ridden the trail many times, for Clearwater had proved himself a friend, and both she and her father had taken advantage of Clearwater's invitations. Ellen liked Clearwater. Clearwater was rough and uncouth, but he was shrewd and kindly and always a gentleman, and his interest in Ellen and her father was that of a considerate neighbor in a new arrival. Nothing more. Ellen would have been willing to swear to Clearwater's unselfishness.

From the end of the level Ellen saw the Star buildings, grouped in a clearing beside a small stream of water—the Elk. The slope at the end of the level was too steep for safe riding, so Ellen continued to follow the trail, which turned sharply southward into some hills, wooded, dark, wild.

At the base of the last hill was another wood, which she rode through, to emerge into a dry arroyo not more than a hundred yards from the group of Star buildings. The arroyo led her directly to the western end of the Star horse corral, where she dismounted and tied the gray horse to one of the top rails of the fence. Then she walked to the ranch-house, passing the rear door because it was closed, and went around to the front. From the edge of the gallery she saw that the front door was open, so she crossed the gallery, stood in the doorway and called to Clearwater.

When there came no reply to her call she drank from the tin dipper hanging on the side of the olla on the gallery, and sank into a chair standing near the wall. She decided she would wait for a time, and if Clearwater did not appear she would go on to Bozzam City and visit the Star on her way back to the Lazy J.

She had been sitting comfortably in the chair for perhaps fifteen minutes when at a little distance out on the level she saw a number of horsemen moving rapidly toward her. The horsemen would be Clearwater and some of his men, returning from a ride to a distant part of the range. She watched the riders, and presently made out Clearwater's big form.

Yielding to an impulse of vanity, for she knew Clearwater admired her, she went into

the house and standing before a glass in the front room tucked in some stray wisps of hair and readjusted her felt hat. Then she stepped to a window, smiling, and peered through the lace curtains at the advancing riders. She watched them ride to a little level in front of the house, halt their horses and dismount—Clearwater, Campan, Devake, Tulerosa, Bannack and Slim Lally!

CHAPTER X.

"CLEARWATER, YOU ARE A THIEF!"

THERE were several other men in the group, but they were strangers to Ellen. When she saw them come toward the house she turned and ran into another room closing the door after her, intent upon escaping through the rear of the house. But she had entered a bedroom which had no door except the one she had entered, so she stood for an instant, breathing fast, undecided, vacillating. Into her heart had come a sudden distrust of Clearwater, a distrust which had for its basis nothing more tangible than the fact of Campan's presence with his men at Clearwater's house.

To her vast relief she saw that the men were not coming into the house, for watching through the curtain of the window near her she saw Clearwater plump himself down on the edge of the gallery and motion the others to do likewise. Some of the men followed Clearwater's suggestion; others, notably Campan, seemed to prefer to stand.

"Well," said Clearwater, as though he were resuming a conversation, "you guys c'n do as you like about it, but I'm ag'in' monkeyin' with the Bosque Grand. I'm tellin' you it ain't goin' to be healthy from now on!"

Clearwater's voice carried distinctly into the room where Ellen stood. The girl caught her breath and grew strangely cold and calm. Swiftly, Clearwater had brought vindication of her distrust.

"Clearwater, you're scared," mocked Campan. "Lannon's bluffin'. He's tradin' on his past reputation. Mebbe he could throw a gun when he lived here before. But five years is five years, an' I reckon he didn't do a heap of shootin' in the east. An' mebbe he thinks he's fast yet. A man can fool himself a lot without knowin' it."

"I'm scared, eh?"

Clearwater's voice was mocking, truculent. "Well, I never laid no claim to bein' fast with a gun, Campan, an' Lannon could have slowed up a lot an' still be too swift for me. You guys have been talkin' a heap about not bein' scared of Lannon, but I notice that none of you has been in Bozzam for quite a spell—not since Lannon put that fool notice up in front of the post office, decoratin' it with ca'tridges. Nor I ain't seen anybody rushin' to town to tear the notice down!"

Campan flushed darkly. He flashed a glance of sullen hatred at Clearwater, but tried to conceal it with a smile.

"You ain't meanin' to get personal, Clearwater?" he said, coldly.

"Campan, you know a damn sight better than that!" declared Clearwater. "I ain't questionin' your nerve, an' I ain't got no notions about testin' your draw. But all you guys has been claimin' you ain't scared of Lannon, an' you're all provin' it by stayin' away from him as far as you can get. I ain't makin' no claims, nor I ain't runnin' no chances. I'm just tellin' you that I don't want no truck with Lannon. As long as he's in the valley I ain't monkeyin' with no Bosque Grand stock. An' I'm advisin' you guys straight to lay down an' be good while Lannon's here!"

A change came over Campan. He stood, legs asprawl, his hands on his hips, his lips curving crookedly, his eyes glittering with passion.

"Clearwater," he said, "that palaver don't go. You're stayin' all the way in or you're goin' all the way out. There ain't goin' to be no straddlin'. Now, you talk straight. We're runnin' off some Bosque Grand stock tonight. What's the word?"

"I'm in."

"I knowed you'd stay," smiled Campan. His passion still gripped him, but he masked it with an outward calmness, a polite, smooth coolness. "Therefore we'll go ahead as we was goin' when this thing came up," he added.

Thereafter, for some time, Ellen listened to the men while they arranged the details of the proposed raid on Lannon's cattle, but she could not follow their talk intelligently, for they spoke a jargon that was new to her, and referred to localities of which she had never heard because she was not familiar with the great expanse of country southward in which, it appeared, they intended to operate that night.

An hour passed before the men showed signs of leaving. Then Campan, who had finally seated himself on the edge of the gallery, got up, yawned, stretched himself.

"I reckon we'll be movin'," he said. "We've got to do some nosin' around. Clearwater, we'll see you tonight." There was a significant lift to his voice.

"Sure, I'll be there, Campan."

Campan laughed. "But you ain't a lot enthusiastic, I reckon," he said. "Lannon's throwed a scare into you, for sure. If it was Bosworth's stock we was figurin' to run off tonight you'd be there strong like you've been right along. You figure Bosworth's easy, I reckon, an' there won't be no come-back. Haw, haw, haw!" he laughed. "You're sure a mighty slick article at that, Clearwater. Hangin' around over there, soft-soapin' Bosworth, an' runnin' off his cattle. It's sure amusin'!" He peered closely at Clearwater, his eyes narrowing. "You ain't been takin' a shine to Ellen, have you, Lem?"

Clearwater reddened, but spoke quietly: "I reckon I ain't got no chance there, Campan."

"Sure, you're right, Clearwater. That girl is goin' to marry me. Mebbe. Mebbe I'll change my mind. Glory Stowe ain't no slouch. Times when I run into Glory I'm pretty sure I want her. Then I bust into Ellen Bosworth, an' I'm dead certain that some day I'm goin' to lead her to the altar. It ain't in no way certain what I'll do. Mebbe I'll marry both of 'em. Don't you go to tryin' to cut me out, Lem!"

He laughed and strode to his horse, mounted, and with the others beside him rode southward over the level toward some rimming hills.

Campan's colossal conceit dismayed Ellen. Yet she believed the shock she had suffered over the revelation of Clearwater's dishonesty was what had brought on the terrible weakness that now afflicted her. A cold rage upheld her, banished the weakness. Yet she realized that she must escape from the house unseen if she was to gain any advantage from her discovery of Clearwater's duplicity.

She did not apprehend any personal danger; Clearwater would not dare to harm her, and she was not in the least afraid of him. But she wished he would get on his horse and ride away—she prayed he would!

Clearwater evidently had no intention of riding. He sat for a time on the edge of the gallery, staring after Campan and the others until they became mere dots mounting the rimming hills in the distance. Then he got up and walked back and forth on the gallery, scowling, muttering to himself. At last he walked to the door that led into the big room adjoining the bedroom in which Ellen stood, and the girl's heart pounded with apprehension.

But Clearwater did not enter. Ellen listened through the closed door for sound of his step in the big room, but heard nothing. Presently she heard him clear his throat and knew he was still standing in the doorway.

Her rage grew. Why didn't he go away? Why must he choose this time to stand in the doorway? Over her stole a grotesque conviction that this incident had been arranged by an ironic fate; that she was to be trapped and exposed to danger; that there was no use in concealing herself longer; that she might as well march right out and reveal herself to Clearwater. This thought made her feel strangely composed, and brought on a cold unconcern given spirit by defiance.

At the instant she was on the point of opening the door to confront Clearwater she heard a step on the gallery and a man's voice:

"They've gone, eh? Headin' to the cache?"

"Bolton, I reckon that's where they've gone. That damned Campan is gettin' too fresh. I sure hope he runs into Flash Lannon!"

"Ho, ho!" laughed the newcomer. "So that's how things stand? Well, I reckon you're right. Campan is gettin' too damned bossy, for sure. If he had any sense he'd lay low till Flash Lannon pulls his freight East. That guy Lannon ain't for to be monkeyed with."

"Campan's goin' to bring on hell, an' don't you forget it!" declared Clearwater. "If Flash Lannon ever cuts loose in this basin we'll all have to pull our freight!"

Bolton laughed. "I'm hopin' Flash gets Campan first. The rest of the boys has got sense. Campan is tryin' to hawg it! Where's that Bosworth gal?"

"Home, I reckon."

"Ho, ho, Clearwater! What you tryin' to pull off here? Sure as hell you're gettin' to be a lady's man! If that Bosworth gal is home, what's her hoss doin' hitched to our corral fence?"

"Hell's fire!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Bolton in huge derision. "That's good! You don't know she's here, eh? I seen her come ridin' that silver hoss of hers out of the gorge. She hitched the hoss an' passed the back door. She come around here. I seen her step up on the gallery. Ho, ho, ho! Clearwater, you're gettin' to be a wolf with women. I reckon you've got her hid somewheres in the house!"

Her face flaming, her eyes flashing with contempt and scorn, Ellen opened the bedroom door to confront the two men. Clearwater was standing in the door that led to the gallery. He was facing her, and she had evidently opened the door at the instant he had decided to leap inward to search for her, for his body was bent forward a little, his hands were spread wide in front of him as though ready to grasp her, and his eyes were wild with fear and astonishment.

"No one is hiding me, Mr. Bolton," said Ellen calmly. "I came here of my own accord. Clearwater did not know I was in the house."

Bolton, standing just outside the doorway, on the gallery, grinned incredulously. "All right, ma'am," he said. "I reckon that's between you an' Lem. Mebbe Lem didn't hide you. Mebbe you just—"

"Bolton, you shut your rank mouth an' get out of here!" ordered Clearwater.

He had not moved from the threshold; he blocked it, almost shutting out the sunlight. He was breathing heavily, his face was pale, and he was striving for self-control. Not another word did he speak until Bolton, still grinning incredulously and with a significance that made Ellen yearn to choke him, stepped down from the gallery and disappeared from view.

"What you doin' here?" demanded Clearwater then. His eyes still held the wild light. They expressed apprehension, doubt; they probed hers as though they sought confirmation of a terrible question which his own mind had already answered. His voice was hoarse, his lips loose, pouting. "How long you been here?" he said, before she had time to answer the first question he hurled at her.

"Long enough," she answered coldly. "I heard you talking to Campan and the other men."

He took his breath quickly, shrilling it into his lungs. His face had suddenly become mottled, bloated. His hands slowly clenched and unclenched; he seemed to be in the grip of a terrible indecision.

"What did you hear?" he asked.

"Everything, Clearwater. It is enough to know that you are not the honest man you profess to be."

He seemed to writhe under the contempt in her voice. His big body seemed to shrink, to become flaccid. His shoulders drooped, his chin sagged; he stared at Ellen vacuously; he appeared to be dazed.

"You say you heard everything?" he asked thickly. "You heard Campan talking to me?"

"I overheard Campan; I heard you talking about stealing cattle; about how you had stolen from my father; how you thought he was easy to steal from; and how you intend to raid the Bosque Grand stock tó-night. Clearwater, you are a thief!"

"You heard that?" he said. "Where was you when Campan was talking?"

"In that room," she replied, indicating the bedroom.

He watched her intently. He did not

appear to be the Clearwater she knew. An amazing change had come over him. She had always admired his keen eyes, clear and steady. Now there were strange shades in them—a misty haze, a glaze that made them seem like the eyes of an animal. There was a leer in them, a cunning glitter, a sinister furtiveness. Startled, she moved toward him, toward the door.

"Clearwater," she said, "please step aside. I am going home!"

The declaration seemed to rouse him.

He straightened, blocked the door.

"I don't reckon I can let you go home, Ellen," he said. "You'd tell your dad what you heard."

"I shall certainly tell him!" she confirmed. "He has a right to know what kind of a man you are and what is going on in the basin."

He shook his great head. "No; that's the trouble. You'd tell. You'd bring them all down on me like a pack of wolves. No; I reckon you can't go home for a while yet, Ellen. There's too much at stake. You'd blab everything. I couldn't trust you."

"Clearwater," she said firmly, "I want you to get away from that door. I am going home."

"All right," he said. He stepped aside.

Ellen started to walk past him. Too late she saw that his apparent complaisance was a ruse. For he moved into the doorway with her, squeezing her against a jamb as though she had been wedged there. His big arms came around, inclosing her own, holding them tightly to her sides. He lifted her, paying no attention to her struggles, swung her around, and carried her into the bedroom, where he threw her upon the bed. Leaving her, he went out, slamming the bedroom door behind him, bolting it from the outside.

She was off the bed by the time he had fastened the door, and when she found she could not escape in that direction she ran to the window. She got the sash open just as a heavy wooden shutter outside began to swing inward. She caught a glimpse of Clearwater's face as he peered around the edge of the shutter. Then the shutter closed with a crash, blotting out the light.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Bo Darrow Sentimentalist

by Herman Howard Matteson

BO DARROW was asleep in his bunk in the glory hole when the Queen Lil struck. She drove well up onto the coral reef and began sliding sternway, but a sea hit her and hove her back onto the reef. There she lay hugging the rock, gravity and the pound of waters seesawing her across the jagged atoll.

By the time Bo had swarmed to the deck Skipper Jensen had got away a stern life craft from the davits and had dropped it into the narrow area of comparative calm on the vessel's lee. Twelve men, officers and crew, slid down the falls and climbed into the lifeboat. Bo Darrow was the last. As Bo was about to cast off the stern

hoisting block he suddenly sang out to Jensen: "Wait a second, captain! I forgot something I wouldn't lose for the world!"

As Darrow started a monkey climb back up the falls, Jensen blistered him with colorful oaths. "Let the damn fool drown!" roared Jensen. "Cast off!"

When Bo Darrow returned to the deck from the glory hole the life craft was a hawser's length away, riding the mountainous seas, heading in for shore where half a hundred excited natives were running back and forth shrieking, and swinging their arms.

Bo looked despairingly after the receding boat; then he drew from his pocket a blue and white celluloid disk about the size of a silver dollar. This disk had formerly ornamented the headstall of Old Fox, a big, splay-footed horse back on the home ranch in Oregon. When Bo had run away from home, five years before, because the lime and sulphur spray smarted his eyes and burned his face, he had chanced to have the blue and white disk in his pocket.

Bo had never written the home folks. He had been ashamed to write. Like many another prodigal, he was awaiting the time when he could return in splendor and pomp, hand dad over an ox-choking roll of bills, carelessly toss a hand in the direction of the boxes piled upon the floor that contained silk dresses and jewelry for ma and Grace and Betty.

Bo looked down at the celluloid disk. For this trinket, dear for remembrance sake, he had returned to the doomed ship, and had been left there to die. Now as he glanced up at the lifeboat a monstrous seventh wave lifted it, stood it upon end, and spilled the eleven men into the sea. The natives along the shore, forming a human chain by clasping hands, contrived to draw two bobbing, black objects up on the beach, where the objects lay still. The nine men went down in the swirl of waters. The worthless little trinket had at any rate given Bo a few moments reprieve.

Still the Queen Lil continued sawing itself across the reef. A mighty sea drove it higher upon the coral rocks. There was a splintering, a tearing, and the ship broke fairly in two amidships. As Bo skipped nimbly forward, the after part of the hull slid into the sea, while the forward portion settled itself into a niche in the coral, and there it stayed. A longer reprieve had been granted Bo Darrow.

All night the man perched upon the frail bit of wreckage that lay just beyond the reach of hungry seas. Toward morning the storm abated. With daylight the waters shoreward were comparatively calm. Bo removed a life ring and a heaving line from the shattered rail, flung it overside, and followed. Rather easily he made the shore, and staggered up the sands to be welcomed by chattering natives.

The two men, Jensen and McClintock, whom the human chain had dragged from the surf, were quite dead. Bo gave them sepulcher in a grave dug in the sands, repeating what he remembered of the service from the book.

The natives appeared friendly enough. They fed the derelict with baked yams and flesh of swine. When he walked the beach, staring out toward the pitiful remnant of the Queen Lil, they followed him, gazing upon the white man in wonderment.

Bo got to thinking of the splendid figurehead that still graced the prow of the Queen Lil. The old fanatical love and reverence of the sailorman for the figurehead of his ship is passing, for the reason that modern shipbuilders esteem it foolish extravagance to expend a thousand dollars for the carving of a woman's face and figure from an oak log.

The Queen Lil, built somewhat later than the day of the clipper ship, possessed a heroic figurehead, carved from a single log of white oak. Throughout the seven seas the sword woman of the Lil had been remarked and admired.

Bo stood looking out at the figurehead, shining immaculately white in the searching sun. What a shame to let the sword woman perish with the slow sea rot!

Bo pointed, gesticulated, tried to make the natives understand. He wanted an outrigger canoe, in which to put out to the wreck. But the islanders shook their heads. When Bo made as if to shove a canoe into the water a hideously tattooed chief threatened him with a spear thrust.

Finally Bo waded into the surf and struck out. With knees and hands bleeding, he crawled up the face of the coral and swarmed to what remained of the Queen Lil's foredeck. From a tool kit in the cubby Bo got a hammer and a wrench. Unbolting the figure from the billet head, he lowered it overside with a line and flung the line after it.

It was a long, hard swim, but finally he gained the shore and dragged the figure up the sands. Near the shore was the stump of a coco palm, sheered off twenty feet from the ground by a typhoon. To the stump of the palm Bo bolted the figure, and again the sword woman gazed in inscrutable meditation over the waste of sea and sky.

Only the boldest of the natives came near the figurehead. This thing in the form of a woman must be a powerful white man god, or potent taboo devil-devil. Aye, a devil-devil! Had not the white man, unharmed, swum a shark-infested sea to fetch it from the wreck, set it up in their midst where it would bring upon them the spotted fever and all manner of evil? A blue-faced savage crept up behind Bo Darrow where he stood looking up at the figure, and dealt the white man a blow with a war club.

Too late, Rang Betu, the chief, recalled a painful instance when a British man-of-war had shelled his island because of an attack upon a white man. The white man of the devil-devil image was not dead—yet. It would be as well to rid themselves of incriminating evidence. The limp form of Bo Darrow was gathered up from the beach, loaded into an outrigger canoe that had just been paddled in, and the canoe set adrift.

Bo Darrow awakened to a consuming thirst and a terrific headache. He scraped the dried blood from his face, combed it out of his hair with his fingers, and looked about him. Everywhere sea and sky, but nowhere land.

In the bottom of the canoe in a pandanus fiber basket were several dozen oysters. Bo pried open a shell with his claspknife, swallowed an oyster. They weren't so bad, only salty. His thirst increased, and he ate another oyster, for it was cool and for an instant assuaged his longing.

On drifted the canoe. The sun beat down mercilessly. The day passed, the night, and a second day. Bo had devoured all the oysters save one, a crinkled, hideously distorted thing. He opened the crooked shell with his knife. In his palm he held a pearl, as large as his thumb end—a perfect pearl that the islanders call "eye of heaven." Bo thrust the pearl into the waistband pocket of his dungaree pants.

The canoe drifted on. Bo began to feel streakings of pain through his head. He talked to himself, laughed immoderately. The canoe drifted on. Other days passed and other nights.

When the workboat of a trading ship put off to see what this was adrift to starboard the mate and the seaman that manned the boat found a rack of bones covered with a cracked and yellow hide. The cook of the trader conjured life back into the castaway with robust delicacies. By the time the trader fetched down the coast of Luzon Bo was almost himself again.

Here the skipper of the trader put Bo ashore, assuring him that he would find a settlement near by. Bo could find no settlement, so for safety's sake returned to the beach. In the offing finally he descried a crazy craft, sort of a raft thing, with a dirty, slattern sail hanging to a crooked yard like old clothes on a scarecrow. Bo waded into the surf, howled, flung up his arms.

The craft put in. It was a *tek pai,* the sort of bamboo raft sailing rig found often along the China coast. An old fellow, his face hideous with ancient tattooing, beckoned Bo aboard. Amidships was a large tub that served as cockpit to keep provisions from the sea wash. The old chap stabbed a thumb toward the tub, an invitation to Bo to help himself. Bo nibbled at a ball of rice wrapped in a succulent green leaf, and found it good.

Weathering seas and wind more stanchly than Bo would have supposed possible, the *tek pai* after some days fetched down an island. Shoreward was a fertile plain, dotted with paddy fields; foothills beyond, tree-fringed; still farther on, the mountains.

"What country is this?" asked Bo.

"Taiwan," said the old fellow. "Some folks call it Ilha Formosa."

Hinoki, the skipper, brought the *tek pai* about and headed it into a V-shaped lagoon into which emptied a sizable stream.

Beaching the *tek pai,* Hinoki beckoned to Bo to follow. Some miles inland they traveled, now crawling on hands and knees beneath the overhang of brush and vine, now wading the shallow bed of the streams.

Presently Bo caught an acrid scent upon the air. They came into a clearing where stood a number of thatched huts. In the border of the clearing half-naked native men were chipping at fallen logs with big chisels. Women garbed in gay-colored smocks collected the scattered chips in baskets and carried them to a still: a camphor camp.

"My place," explained Hinoki proudly, comprehending the clearing and the forest with a sweep of his yellow hand. "Mine." Then he turned to Bo and, grinning vacuously, said: "I save you from bad starving to death on the shore. Now we are brothers, all time brothers. So you go to work for me now. We are brothers."

Hinoki's idea of brotherhood was evidently service. For interminable hours Bo chipped away at the camphor wood with a dull chisel. The fare in the camphor camp was meager—rice, always rice—and Bo slept in a hut that back on the Oregon ranch would have been deemed unsuitable for a hog wallow.

But Bo worked on for a week. He felt that he did owe that much to Hinoki. At the end of the week he advised Hinoki that he was leaving.

"But we are brothers," said the camphor man reproachfully. "No."

That night Bo crept out of the camp, followed down the stream to the shore. At daybreak two Japanese *gendarmes* marched him back to the camphor camp at the point of their bayonets.

One of the basket girls called San Tai spoke a bit of English. She had been a singsong girl in a *samshu feng* of Kelung. San archly admitted that she had been a prime favorite, had gained her meed of praise and yen pieces with her singing and her playing of the two-stringed fiddle. She was a tiny creature and wore a peacock blue smock. Her hair was bobbed off square in front and jounced up and down like a shutter when she came running back from the camphor still with her empty basket.

"You come back work some more my master white man?" greeted San Tai when the *gendarmes* had prodded Bo back across the clearing and settled him at work with the chisel astride a camphor log.

"Looks like," answered Bo, grinning wryly and looking up at San Tai. For the first time he noted two thin, almost imperceptible blue lines tattooed upon her forehead.

San Tai, aware of the object of the master white man's scrutiny, lifted a tiny hand, ran a slim finger over the cicatrix of the tattooing.

"I belong all same Hinoki," she volunteered. "Hinoki he pay it a thousand yen, buy me out of the *samshu feng.* I never go away from here. I belong all same Hinoki."

She smiled, shook her head, and began tossing the camphor chips into her basket. Whenever Bo Darrow was working remote from the other chisel men, if no other basket girl was near, San Tai, nimbly picking the chips from the earth, would talk in low tones to the master white man.

"Another time, my master," said San Tai upon occasion, "you try run away, you go that way."

San Tai pointed to the eastward. "You go maybe long time it takes to fill three baskets chips. There you see another stream of water. You wade down that stream. You come to the sea. Maybe you get away. I don't know."

San Tai smiled, bobbed her head, fell to work filling her basket. Whenever Bo had the opportunity he questioned San Tai further. About five minutes were required to fill a basket with camphor wood chips. The girl meant, then, that he was to walk eastward about fifteen or twenty minutes, say a mile in distance.

"Yes, yes. Walk long time as fill three baskets."

San Tai, in her eagerness to aid the master white man, forgot that she was a slave

girl, that it was her business to pick up chips, and more chips, and transport them to the still. She drew near the white man's side. In the palm of her tiny hand with dainty forefinger she traced a map showing the meanderings of the stream and the places in it that were deep and dangerous.

" Oh, I hope you get away, master white man," she said fervently. " I hope you get away. As for me, I stay here always. I belong all same Hinoki. I never go away."

Hinoki, his hideous face distorted with rage, burst from the brush. Savagely he lashed San Tai with a thin rattan whip. A purple welt showed across her face. A stroke of the rattan cut through the peacock blue smock and left its burn upon her shoulder. Still Hinoki lashed savagely at the girl.

Bo Darrow sprang from the camphor log, swung the heavy chisel, knocked Hinoki into the shrubbery, where he lay, his legs kicking, his mouth opening and closing like the gills of a gaffed fish.

Bo stood looking down at the camphor man.

" I hain't none sure I hain't stove in this bilger for good," he muttered anxiously. " He hain't dead—yet. Maybe he won't die. I don't know. Anyway, likely the best thing I can do is to wing out and beat for lee. Yeah, I guess I'll pull my hook."

Bo flung down the blood-stained chisel, and looked away to the eastward. As he turned to say a last good-by to San Tai his words were arrested by the look upon the girl's face. What an infinity of pleading in the dark eyes; in the drooping, dejected, tiny figure, what despair!

" What's the matter, San Tai, of you goin', too? Come on. Two of us can run good as one. Come on."

" But I can't leave Eek-eek. They'd kill him. I can't."

Eek-eek was her pet white rat, of which she had spoken several times to Bo.

" After all, he's just a rat, San. Come on! We got to hurry!"

Bo leaned over, seized the stricken Hinoki by the shoulders, and drew him a little farther into the underbrush.

" Hurry, San Tai! Come on!"

She shook her head. " Go, master white man! Go!"

" Listen, San! Where is this Eek-eek? In the shanty? Run and get him! I'll wait. But hurry."

Like a flitting gorgeous blue moth San Tai ran across the clearing, entered the wretched hovel where she lodged. In a moment she was back beside Bo Darrow.

Together they plunged into the wood and made swiftly away toward the east. Without untoward event the fugitives found the stream of water, waded into its shallows, and after the lapse of hours came finally to the coast.

Thus far, no sign of pursuit. Grown bold, Bo walked along the shore for a distance and came to where Hinoki kept the *tek pai* anchored. Shoving off the craft, Bo sailed it back upshore and took San Tai aboard. Though in the offing a considerable gale was blowing, Bo laid the course of the *tek pai* toward the open ocean. Then, with the wind strongly, fairly astern, he turned to the north, paralleling the Formosan coast.

When the wind began to abate San Tai removed Eek-eek from a fold of the peacock blue smock, made him stand up, roll over, do his whole repertoire of tricks for the entertainment of Bo Darrow. Then she began to apologize, explain why for the sake of a mere rat she had hazarded the chances of escape by running back to the hut to bring Eek-eek.

" Many honorable ancestors has Eek-eek," she said. " His kind have been pets along the China coast for hundreds of years. I love him. Why, he is all I have to love. Besides, if I left him behind, Hinoki, who I think will not die, would kill him. Once Eek-eek, who is fond of sandalwood, chewed the sticks of the fan that Hinoki carries always at the feast of the seven lanterns. Hinoki would then have killed Eek-eek. Instead, I let Hinoki beat me with the rattan."

San Tai smiled and bobbed her head with a knowing air as she recounted this instance of her astuteness.

" Funny what folkses will do, just for the sake of some keepsake, or even a pet rat," said Bo. His left hand, thrust in a pocket,

came into view. In the palm lay a blue and white celluloid disk that once had been on the headstall of Old Fox. "Funny what folkses will do."

In the bowl cockpit of the *tek pai* were some dried fish. Upon these the fugitives and Eek-eek dined frugally. Once Bo drove the craft ashore and into the mouth of a stream, where he filled an earthen jug with sweet water. Then on again.

The afternoon of the third day Bo steered the *tek pai* into a harbor, found it a berthing among *tek pai* sampans and other native and modern craft.

"This is Kelung," said San Tai, her face a little troubled. "Here, long ago, I was a singsong girl. Here Hinoki bought me."

"You got relatives here, of course?" asked Bo.

San Tai shook her head.

"You got friends that will take you in, and kind of help you out?"

"No. No friends—no relatives. My people live away on the China coast. My people are honorable folks. If I went home they would send me back to Hinoki, who owns me. I have only Eek-eek."

Bo Darrow wrinkled his brow perplexedly. Here he had on his hands a singsong girl in a peacock blue dress, and a pet white rat. That both girl and rat were possessed of honorable ancestors did not at the moment extenuate Bo's responsibility.

He stood looking down at his wards a bit bewildered.

"Well, anyway," said Bo, "we'll go uptown and buy ourselves a feed—feed for all hands, including Eek-eek. I got a good Yankee silver dollar left. If that hain't enough, that dollar, I got besides—"

Bo gave San Tai a lofty grin, held up the pearl, returned it to his pocket.

II.

HALFWAY down the bund, a Japanese *gendarme* stopped them, laid a hand familiarly upon San Tai's peacock blue shoulder. Slowly he turned her about, pointed to the thin, blue tattoo lines upon her forehead. Then the soldier gave Bo Darrow a malevolent look from his ophidian black eyes, tossed his carbine to port arms, and nodded for the fugitives to precede him down the bund.

Arriving at the prefecture, the soldier herded his captives within, and jabbered animatedly to the young lieutenant in command. The Japanese officer took down some tissue paper books filled with vertical writing, and asked San Tai her name and place of birth.

In a faint whisper the girl answered.

Swiftly the lieutenant turned the tissue paper leaves of the tome. "This girl," said the officer in English, addressing Bo Darrow, "is San Tai. In June, 1920, she was sold by Nam Bop of the *samshu feng*, to Hinoki, the camphor distiller. How came she in your company? Have you bought her? If so, you have the signed bill of sale."

Bo's mouth gaped open stupidly. He began to stammer.

"Japan holds a protectorate over Formosa," said the officer. "By the laws both of Formosa and Japan, to aid a serf to escape from rightful master is a serious offense. This time you may go. And go at once."

Bo, disregarding the command, advanced to the desk behind which the lieutenant was seated. Bo was fumbling at the waistband pocket of his dungaree trousers.

"How much money it 'll take," he asked, "for to buy off this little girl so she won't be a slave no more? How much?"

The lieutenant glanced at the book of tissue leaves. "A thousand yen," he replied. "By imperial mandate a slave may purchase freedom at the price of its last sale. A thousand yen."

"How much is that in good United States money?"

"A yen is forty-nine cents in American money. Four hundred and ninety dollars American."

"Well, I hain't got no four ninety—only one dollar. But I got this. What's the matter you cashing this in and turning San Tai free like a seagull?"

Bo Darrow placed the eye of heaven upon the desk before the lieutenant. The officer picked up the gem, turned it this way and that against the light, replaced it upon the table.

"No," he said. "I cannot accept it. It may be worth the amount required. Regulations are strict. I may accept only lawful money, a thousand yen."

"Well, how long I got to bail little San Tai out? I'll sell this pearl somewhere, to some one. How much time I got?"

"Until six o'clock. You have an hour, no longer."

Bo grabbed up the pearl and tucked it into his pocket as he rushed to the door. He gave a bob of his head over his shoulder to San Tai and hurried down the bund.

Now he was looking for some craft with a white man skipper aboard. A white skipper would buy the pearl—would at least advance four hundred and ninety dollars upon it as security.

A slattern fore and aft schooner lay alongside the wharf. A Chinese, a Kanaka, and a lascar lounged upon the dirty deck, but a pair of obviously American blue overalls flapped from a line atop the house. Bo hurried up the gangplank, approached the house, knocked upon the door.

A gruff voice replied: "What hell you want?"

Bo lifted the latch and stepped in. The skipper was a white man. In the act of devouring a tin of tomatoes with a pewter spoon, he turned an inflexible, pale blue eye upon the intruder.

"I want to sell this," said Bo. "I got to sell it—and quick."

The skipper of the fore and after, by name Banning, turned the pearl in his fingers. For years an ostensible trader in the Malays, the Gilberts and the Solomons, in reality a black birder, trafficking in wretched brown, black and yellow flesh, Banning knew pearls.

"Where you get it? Quite a blister if it's real. Where you get it?"

Bo desired to sell, not to answer questions. "I got to have four hundred and ninety dollars. You give me the money and then take and keep the pearl till I pay the money back."

Shrewdly Banning appraised the flushed, anxious face of Bo Darrow. Without a doubt this fellow needed money badly. He had got himself into some sort of a jam, Banning reasoned, and needed money to get him out. When a man is *in extremis* is the time to drive a bargain.

"What's the matter of me slipping my moorings, dropping down coast a ways?" asked Banning. "Then we could talk about the pearl. Three miles from here the authorities hain't got jurisdiction."

"No. I want the money—want it now."

Banning shook his head and handed the pearl back to Bo. "You might try some of the Chinese shops," suggested Banning with a cunning leer. "Them Chinks know pearls. And they all got money. Try them."

Darrow thrust the pearl back into his pocket and was halfway across the plank. Banning thrust his head from the house door, bobbed it at the Chinese sailor to whom he spoke a brief word. Across the plank hastened the Chinaman, and fell in behind Darrow, who was rushing with all speed toward the narrow lane of Chinese and Japanese shops that debouched from the far end of the bund.

Bo darted into the first one that he came to, spilled the pearl out upon the counter. "You buy this?" he asked eagerly.

The Chinese, thinking what a poor gambler the white man would have been, picked up the jewel, fastened his bright rat eyes upon it.

The Chinese sailor sauntered into the shop and stood appraising with critical eye a copy of Hsu Hsi's painting of the bird on an apple bough, and, as though self-communing, uttered some words in a low voice. The Chinese merchant flickered never an eyelash, but stood shifting the pearl from palm to palm.

"Beware," the Chinese sailor had said. "The pearl is a stolen gem. By the law, the rightful owner may recover it and thrice the amount thou payest. Beware."

The sailor sauntered from the place. The merchant, with a sad shake of his head, returned the pearl to Bo's hand. Shop after shop Bo visited and offered the pearl. Always the Chinese sailor was present talking apparently to himself, then walking on. In his distress and anxiety Bo did not note the presence of the soliloquizing Oriental until the call at the last shop. As the proprietor of the latter handed the pearl back

to Bo a Connecticut clock upon the shelf struck six.

Back to the prefecture Bo hurried. Two Japanese *gendarmes* stood before the lieutenant, marching packs upon their backs. Truculently Bo poked the pearl at the officer.

"You just got to take it. Got to. It's worth the money. You got to take it."

Angrily the Jap struck Bo's hand aside. An officer of the imperial army *had* to do nothing save obey the laws, the orders of his superiors.

The door leading to an inner apartment opened. San Tai came shuffling across the floor. She laid a tiny hand upon Bo's arm.

"It is no matter, master white man," she said. "I have been happy these few days, so happy. I must go back to the camphor camp of Hinoki. It is fate."

The two soldiers advanced, ranged themselves alongside the girl.

"Good-by, master white man. Good-by. All that I have to give for remembrance sake is—"

Into Bo's hands San Tai thrust the warm, round body of Eek-eek. "I love him. Therefore I give him to you for remembrance sake."

The soldiers' heavy-soled shoes clumped upon the floor, and across the planking of the bund.

Midway of the latter the soldiers and their blue butterfly captive boarded a sampan which pulled out into the stream, headed south.

III.

EEK-EEK nestling in the crook of his arm, Bo Darrow walked aimlessly down the bund. When Banning, skipper of the black birder, accosted him, Bo looked up vacantly and started to pass on.

"What's the matter with a cup of *samshu,* mate?" asked Banning, making an attempt at a friendly smile. "You're seafarin', hain't you? Come on."

Into the *feng* Bo suffered himself to be led. Tucking Eek-eek inside his flannel shirt, he sat staring at the cup of China wine.

He awakened. A million torturing fiends, it seemed, were inside his skull, tearing at his anguished brain with red-hot hooks. He lifted his reeling head. He was in an unspeakably filthy fo'c's'le, low beamed, dark. The air was close, fairly fetid. He got his feet over the bunk rail and drew himself to a standing posture.

Eek-eek, thrusting a sharp nose from the front of Bo's flannel shirt, uttered a faint squeak.

Slowly Bo's drugged brain began to clear. He had been doped in the *samshu feng,* and shanghaied aboard a ship. He felt in the waistband pocket of his dungarees.

The pearl was gone.

Upon unsteady legs he mounted the companionway, took a look across the deck. Banning, leaning against the foot of the mainmast, gave him a mocking grin. The fortnight that followed was an inquisition of unspeakable brutality.

Because the white man sailor loved the little pet rat, lascars, Malays and Banning found a fiendish delight in torturing the creature. Whenever and wherever Banning discovered Eek-eek, Banning made it a target for flying belaying pins, splicing irons, anything that was throwable. Down in the fo'c's'le a lascar spilled a palmful of kerosene from the slush lamp, doused it upon Eek-eek, and struck a match.

Bo Darrow, a raging fury, knocked the lascar kicking. A Kanaka and a Chinese sprang to the lascar's aid. In the end of the fo'c's'le Bo piled them up, a bruised and bloody mass.

The black birder, Bo had learned, was headed for Manila. There certain trade goods were to be loaded. At Manila, by hook or by crook, Bo proposed to jump ship. To remain longer on that floating hell—well, he simply would not. From Manila the ship would head for the Solomon Islands, to be absent six months or a year. In Manila he would escape. A premonition had seized upon him. He felt that Banning was awaiting a favorable opportunity to kill him.

The fore and after came to anchor in the roadstead of Manila harbor.

"No shore leave," growled Banning, climbing over the rail and into a work boat manned by a lascar. "No shore

leave. If any man tries for shore, Barata, feed 'em a pill out of that automatic."

Banning, perhaps guessing Bo Darrow's intention, had forestalled him. Just the same, Bo Darrow was going to escape, or try to. It was a longish swim. The night was dark. The tide was setting out. There were long, gray sharks in these waters. No matter.

The crew of the ship were clustered about the deck, bending longing eyes toward the lights ashore. Presently the work boat would return and the sampan loaded with trade goods.

Bo slipped down into the fo'c's'le, felt around in his bunk, whispering: "Eek-eek! Come on, little boy! Come on! Eek-eek, where are you?"

Eek-eek, bent upon some private enterprise, was nowhere to be found in the fo'c's'le. Bo went to the door of the galley, softly called the little creature's name. No Eek-eek; no answering squeak. Bo opened a hatch, whispered down into the hold. Where was the little vagabond, anyway?

Louder Bo dared not call, for fear of attracting the suspicious attention of Barata. On hands and knees Bo pawed about beneath the bunks, whispered the creature's name.

No answer.

Well, after all, a rat was only a rat. This opportunity to escape the devil ship meant liberty. More, Bo believed that it meant his life. A rat was only a rat.

The crew were lining the rail nearest shore. Crouching against the opposite rail, Bo crept to the stern of the ship. His plan was to climb into the tiller chains, let himself softly into the water, swim in a direction at right angles to the course the work boat and the sampan would pursue coming offshore.

He flung one leg over the rail. As he balanced upon the rail he whispered to himself, "A rat is only a rat." As rapidly as he said over the words like a fanatic mouthing some fetish charm, other words crowded into his consciousness, smothered them, the last words of little San Tai: "I love him, therefore I give him to you, for remembrance sake."

The work boat was coming. Bo could hear the creak of oars. Now he could begin to see the looming, bulky shape of the laden sampan right beside the work boat.

"For remembrance sake."

Bo drew his leg back over the rail, and ran across deck. Near the stern of the ship he began calling recklessly loud: "Eek-eek! Where are you, you little monkey! Come on here! Eek-eek!"

Pausing beside the door of the skipper's cabin that stood open a crack, Bo called: "Eek-eek! Eek-eek!"

At last there was an answering squeak. Eek-eek came hopping out of Banning's quarters, a tiny object held in its teeth, and between its forepaws. Bo lifted the rat from the deck, took the thing from it. It was a square sandalwood box, perhaps an inch and a quarter high. One end of the box Eek-eek had gnawed away. Bo opened the box. Within lay the pearl—his pearl—the eye of heaven.

Bo popped the pearl back into his waistband pocket and flung the box overside. Then he tucked Eek-eek inside his flannel shirt, returned swiftly to the stern of the ship.

Too late. The work boat and the sampan had drawn in alongside. A flaring torch upon the stern of the sampan threw a fitful yellow light across the area of water which Bo would have to cross to make his escape.

Lining up at the shoreward rail with other members of the crew, Bo began hauling in the bales of stuff passed up from the sampan. Another bale or two and the trade stuff would be aboard.

Banning walked forward, began giving his orders to make sail. Bo Darrow climbed over the rail, leaned his body out into space, dropped like a cat upon the sampan's deck, dived in under a thatch canopy forward. And there he lay, one finger scratching Eek-eek behind the ear.

The sampan shoved off, made slowly toward shore. As Bo caught the sound of the trader's anchor chain rasping through the hawse pipe, he crept out on deck. At the least sign on the fore and after, indicating that his escape had been noted, he would jump into the water and swim for it.

Slowly the fore and after came about. Slowly also the sampan crept toward shore. But finally made it. Bo was across the wharf like a flash, and into the lee of a shed.

IV.

THE morning sun rose. From the flag staff of a building near the shipping, the Stars and Stripes broke out.

"Look at that, Eek! Fetch a look at that there colors!"

Down street a distance a porter was taking down the shutters from the window of a jeweler's establishment. As Bo approached the store the proprietor entered. Bo followed, laid the pearl upon the show case.

"How much you give?" asked Bo.

The *joyero* gave Bo a keen glance, which the sailor returned with even, steady eyes. The jeweler fastened a glass into his eye, turned the pearl, took it to the window, turned it again.

"Perfect," he said. "A rare gem. I'll give five thousand dollars for it, American money."

Bo held out his hand.

The *joyero* smiled. "As soon as the banco open—at ten o'clock, you shall have your money."

Waiting for ten o'clock to arrive, Bo made inquiry at the shipping offices. A steamer that would touch at Kelung left that afternoon. Six days later a steamer left Shanghai bound for Seattle.

At three minutes past ten Bo Darrow had his five thousand dollars in American currency. He wadded the money into his pocket, drew Eek-eek from its nest, stood it up in the palm of one hand and began to talk to it with the forefinger of the other.

"Eek, we'll just naturally wing out for Kelung. We'll buy San Tai out of the camphor camp. We'll stake her to clothes, money and so forth. Then I'll beat it out for Seattle, and—home. I ought to land in Oregon with four thousand dollars easy. I'll hand my old pa over an ox-choking roll, and I'll hand my ma and Grace and Bet each some jewelry and so forth, and a red silk dress. And say, Eek, I'm going to hit Oregon just about time to do the spring sprayin'. I swear. Yeah. That's the program."

Bo tossed Eek-eek into the air, caught him deftly. Then Bo pointed down street. "See that there restaurant, Eek? She's an American chow ark, hot cakes and sirup, and so forth. We'll warp into that restaurant, Eek, and we'll naturally eat till we start a seam. Come on, Eek."

THE DRAWBACK

CYNTHIA'S eyes are sweetly blue,
Golden-tinted is her hair,
Pearly white her teeth are, too,
Yet she drives me to despair.

Cynthia loves so tenderly,
Gives caresses soft and shy,
Just what kisses ought to be,
Yet she makes me long to die.

For—a detail this I know—
Yet somehow I never can
Quite ignore that detail's woe—
Cynthia loves another man!

La Touche Hancock.

The Gusher

Part III

by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "Treasures of Tantalus," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MISTAKEN SACRIFICE.

VIOLET WORTHINGTON had been among the first on the scene when the fire alarm was sounded. She drafted the two Flanders girls, and together they formed a water brigade, keeping pails of water from a nearby spring at hand with which the men could allay their parched throats and keep their clothing wet so as to be less likely to catch fire from the flying sparks.

The first moment she had for rest or to think once more of her father was when the fire was finally checked just back of the Dibble buildings. Then with a word to Mrs. Flanders, who was standing in the Dibble dooryard watching the fire, she sped back to the Flanders house.

She found her father had at last been aroused by the distant shouting and was calling to her to find out what it was all about. When she told him he insisted that he felt strong enough to go to the window and see the last of the blaze. Suddenly as they watched Violet's eye happened to rove back to the pasture lot just as the little tongues of flame were working through the fence into the Flanders woodlot. In a flash she thought of the oil soaked ground and the oil well just a little beyond. She had heard many tales of burning oil wells recently. She knew the possibility of the nearby buildings catching fire in case the well should burst its cap.

She was electrified to immediate action now. There was no time to lose. She must get her father out of the house at once, and do it without letting him know why.

"Oh, daddy!" she exclaimed. "If you feel equal to it let's go outdoors. We can't get the best view from here. Down the road a little as I came over from Dibble's it seemed to me from there it's the most glorious spectacle I have ever seen."

While she was helping him finish dressing she went to the window again just in time to see the blaze flare up on the oil soaked area. She hardly breathed while she guided his trembling steps downstairs and out the front door on the side out of sight of the conflagration. Every moment she expected a deluge of burning oil.

But not till she had her father safely established on a low stone wall the other side of a clump of trees that concealed the Flanders house from him and gave him a good view of the fire did the eruption come. And there they were in safety when Mert Dibble made his heroic sally into the burning house, believing them imprisoned there.

A few moments later Mert Dibble, whose last conscious sensation was that of falling,

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burned and suffocated, through the charred flooring of the stairway, came to his senses again to find that he was lying on his back in a shallow pool of water, his burns soothed a little by the cool fluid and breathing air again instead of acrid smoke, dank close air, to be sure, but air.

His first impulse was to struggle to his feet, but he was so weak and hurt that he gave it up. He reached out and felt a cement bottom under about six inches of water in which he lay. Bits of charred wood floated about him. It was pitch black around him, but he looked up through a ragged gap down which curled flames and smoke. The floor about the gap was sagging and giving off bits of flaming wood.

Then it all came clear to him. He had fallen through the stairway into the Flanders cistern in the cellar. At any moment the frame of the house might fall and he would be buried alive under a mass of flaming timbers.

Again he tried to struggle to his feet, but failed as before. He called feebly, futilely, for help.

A section of heavy timber crashed through the floor above and fell beside him, barely missing his head. Again he called for help involuntarily, realizing as he did so how perfectly useless it was.

Then his heart leaped with sudden relief as he heard a familiar voice just over his head.

"Me comin', Mert. You hold your horses little time," said Firewater Joe.

Now against the light from the burning gap in the floor Mert could make out the silhouette of the Indian's face. Joe wriggled over the top of the cistern wall, let himself down and stood over him.

"We mebbe better get out dam' quick 'fore house come smash down," was his only comment as he raised the injured man to his feet.

Nevertheless the process of getting out was a painful and seemingly slow one. And every minute lost brought them nearer to sudden death. Mert Dibble could not help himself. His hundred and ninety pounds of rangy weight was a tough proposition even for the stalwart Indian. His burns made it hard to pick him up without causing him excruciating pain. But at length, by grasping him about the knees and boosting, Joe worked him across the top of the wall of the shallow cistern and clambered after him. Then he dropped to the cellar floor, put Mert on his sturdy shoulders and bore him out to the open air by way of the outside cellar-way.

And just as they reached the top of the steps there was a roar and a crash. The frame fell in, smashing down the floor and filling the cellar full of burning timbers. Then Mert fainted again.

When he came to once more he was in his own bed at home. The doctor was dressing his burns, and setting a broken wrist.

"The old man and the girl?" Mert demanded with his first waking breath. "Anybody save 'em?"

"Here I am," said Violet Worthington, stepping from behind the doctor whom she had been assisting. "Father and I were both out of the house before it caught fire. You splendid fellow, you risked your life to save us. It was a mistake. I'm so sorry."

"Devil of a note!" sighed the woman-hater, and turned his face to the wall.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERT SOFTENS A LITTLE.

THE month of invalidism that followed was a period of sore trial to Mert Dibble, but one of gradual awakening to a new emotional life. For Violet Worthington, obsessed by a sense of debt to Mert for his mistaken sacrifice, insisted on acting as his nurse regardless of his brusque inappreciation of that service.

Not that she forced herself upon him against his directly expressed protest. But an onset of fever with delirium followed lasting for several days, when the patient was not consulted as to his likes and dislikes. The doctor had decided that a nurse was needed. Violet at once volunteered, citing her experience in caring for her father as proof of her proficiency. Her father was enjoying one of his periods of improved health which made her close attendance on him unnecessary.

" It will be mighty good of you, young lady," the doctor declared. " Mert probably'll raise Cain and want to pay you up, and fire you when he comes to, but don't pay any attention to him. As a matter of fact I happen to know he's pretty short of money. This damage to his farm and loss of his own time on top of it, with bad crops on account of this long dry spell, has put a bad crimp in him. They tell me, too, that he had to make a cash settlement with his stepmother a spell ago that didn't help any. He ought to appreciate a volunteer nurse."

Mert was first conscious of her presence the fifth day of his illness. He had just awakened from a natural sleep at last. He stirred a little, but still lay with closed eyes. Then a soft hand felt of his forehead. It was a cool and comforting hand. He thought he might still be dreaming. Some one was smoothing his pillow and straightening out the sheet under him. It was all very comfortable. He had no desire to move. He wanted the hand on his brow again. He had a mind to ask for it. Yes, he must be dreaming.

At that a low voice spoke close to him.

" Are you awake, Mr. Dibble? Here's some medicine for you."

He opened his eyes with a start. He knew the voice. Whose was it? And he knew the brown eyes full of anxiety that hovered over him embarrassingly close to his own. Then he recognized the face and stiffened. He was no longer comfortable.

" How'd you get here?" he demanded in his surprise.

Violet recoiled an instant, then recovered her poise. He might still be delirious.

" Take the medicine like a good boy, and I'll tell you," she replied with a smile that was both gentle and very firm. That was the way she talked to her father when his nerves got the best of him.

Mert hadn't in the least intended to obey, but somehow he did. It seemed surprisingly hard to refuse to obey this competent young woman.

" You've been pretty sick for several days and haven't known what was going on," she explained. " The doctor needed a nurse at once, and I was right here, so I've been helping him."

Mert thought it over in silence. He wanted to tell this girl he didn't need her any more, that he would send to town for a trained nurse, or get Firewater Joe to take care of him, anything to get her away. But when he tried to frame words he found the same difficulty he had encountered in trying to be firm with Simple Martha. Again a woman overawed him, this time a very charming one, but that fact only made him the more furious with himself. He wanted to be brutal and couldn't. He didn't know how to enforce his wishes any other way. So he compromised for the time being by silence, and to cover his embarrassment he pretended to go to sleep.

But as the days went by he found, in spite of himself, that the feeling of comfort and content he had from the ministration of Violet Worthington's hands that first moment of normal awakening kept recurring in unguarded moments. He could not help noticing how she anticipated most of his wishes and how efficiently she did everything. He remembered how she had helped them fight the fire that night by keeping the men supplied with water. And she did what she did then, just as she was helping him now, for no apparent reason.

" Perhaps, now, she ain't like most other women, after all," he thought one day as she left the room. Then he pulled himself together sharply after a moment's thought.

" You darned soft-headed fool," he muttered. " She's jest lookin' fer a home. Tryin' to bamboozle me jest as that woman bamboozled dad."

He was still thinking this when Violet returned, and for a day or two he was more taciturn than usual, even, answering only when necessary, and then in gruff monosyllables. It was while he was still in this mood that he decided one day that he was strong enough to get up, and proceeded to do so without any announcement of his intentions while Violet was out of the room.

He was quite surprised to find himself very weak after all, but persisted in his efforts, and was partly dressed when his volunteer nurse returned unexpectedly. She made short work of forcing him back to bed, and in his weakened condition he had to submit. But the effect on his over-

wrought temper was sufficient to overcome his shyness and enable him to speak his mind for once.

"Looka here!" he shouted. "I'm no baby. I don't have to do anything I don't want to do. I don't need anything any more that Martha can't do for me. So if you'll tell me what I owe you, you can go when your day's up."

He had accurately fulfilled the doctor's prophecy, though a little belatedly.

The girl turned white and looked at him fixedly for a moment. But she kept her temper.

"I'll leave of course as long as you wish, Mr. Dibble. But please understand I am not here for money. I'm not a professional nurse. I felt under obligation to you as long as you had been hurt trying to save my father and myself. I have been merely trying in a measure to discharge that obligation as I have no desire to feel under any obligation to you. Good-by. I hope you have a speedy recovery under Martha's care." And she was gone.

Mert stared after her with suddenly returning helplessness. For the first time in his life he was conscious of his boorishness. Somehow he had said something that no man who is right says to a woman.

"I'm — I'm sorry!" he found himself calling faintly. But the door had closed firmly behind the indignant young woman's back and she had not heard this half involuntary apology.

Mert lay for a long time hating himself. Then he got up and tried to finish dressing, but he was so weak and giddy that he had to give it up, and drop back on his bed.

This was Simple Martha's cue for an entrance. She was beaming with satisfaction.

"Wal, Mert," she squealed. "So you'd ruther had ol' Martha carin' fer ye after all! That Miss Worthington's jest bin tellin' me ye tol' her to go. I'm right glad. She seemed nice at first, but she got so 'tarnal fussy 'bout things. I'm glad she's gone. Now it's time fer yer medicine."

Thereupon she produced the wrong one of the two varieties he was receiving alternately. Most of it she spilled down his neck. She made such a to-do about repairing the damage, shrilling into his ear: "La! La! What a mess!" as she did so, that Mert nearly had a return of temperature.

"Now Martha'll bring your dinner up right away," she announced when this ordeal was over. "It won't be any namby pamby stuff like what that girl's been feedin' ye either. I bin tellin' her ye needed sumpin heavier if ye wuz goin' to git yer strength back."

It was heavier all right. It was fried pork and boiled potatoes with coffee that a rock would have floated in and a big slab of apple pie for dessert.

While Mert gazed helplessly at this menu and picked at it a little without courage either to eat or make his well-meaning substitute nurse understand what he wanted, Martha bustled about the room noisily in one of her orgies of cleaning, with a running fire of shrill comments as an accompaniment.

This sort of thing the invalid endured for twenty-four hours. When she was not discovering imaginary flecks of dust about the room or standing on a chair to swat a stray fly with a towel, she was garrulously retailing all the misadventures that had taken place on the farm during his illness, things from which Violet Worthington had carefully shielded him, having enlisted the capable Mrs. Flanders to keep an eye on that end of the job.

And the things that had happened were numerous and serious, so serious that Mert realized that his already tangled financial affairs were in a worse state than ever. To begin with, the man Mert had hired as a substitute for Firewater Joe had left suddenly without any assigned cause. Three other men whom Mrs. Flanders had secured in turn had each worked one day and departed for trivial reasons. As a result the crops that were already suffering from drought had received practically no attention for a month and were threatening utter failure.

Martha had a true sense of climax. She next related how his most valuable horse had been found in the pasture so badly torn on a barbed wire fence that it had to be shot. Then, bracing herself for the doleful finale, she told how his entire herd of cattle

had departed into the hills one night through a gate carelessly left open by one of the hired men. Not one of the cattle had been heard of since. Martha freely expressed the opinion that they had been found and disposed of by the thieving Hookfingers. She wound up by saying that now Mert was better she thought it high time he knew what had been going on.

Mert as he listened found himself rapidly growing no better. He realized with sinking heart that he was farther than ever from making the expenses of the season meet and that he was in danger of having to mortgage the old place, a thing that to his mind was a disgrace and something that had not happened in the Dibble family for generations.

He suddenly felt very sick again. The ministrations of Simple Martha were no longer tolerable. He held out against a growing desire a little longer, then capitulated.

" Martha," he shouted, " go over and tell Miss Worthington I want to see her."

CHAPTER XV.

A WOMAN SCORNED.

VIOLET WORTHINGTON left the Dibble house in a rage and returned to the Flanders tenant house where the family had taken refuge after the fire. All the scruples that had been steadily gaining ground ever since the night of Mert's injury had vanished in a flash. He deserved to be tricked. She had discharged her sense of obligation to him completely, and her whole-souled efforts to help him had met only rebuff and insult.

She was ready to aid in any subterfuge that would accomplish her purpose. And for the moment the winning of her much-needed reward was not the uppermost motive in her mind. Indeed she almost forgot it altogether. Her supreme desire was to punish and humiliate an insulting boor. She was no longer scrupulous that Mert should get fair play once induced by hook or crook to sell his oil rights. In her anger she rather hoped he might be cheated.

She had not heard for some time from the mysterious agent of the oil men who was directing her movements through occasional clandestine meetings. At their last meeting just after the Night Rider fiasco he had told her he had a definite plan to put up to her soon, but she had received no word from him since. It was a part of their policy of secrecy that no letters should be exchanged. She had up to now rather dreaded the day when the plan should be divulged, and she would have to do something definite, though she wondered at the delay. Now she looked forward to it eagerly. She felt that she had been wasting altogether too much time.

It was, therefore, with the thrill of a soldier called to battle that she got a cryptic telephone message late that afternoon, which meant that her mentor would be at the rendezvous that night to give her further instructions.

But the first words of the man she found in the darkness down by the wharf gave her another revulsion of feeling.

" You're doing fine at last, little girl," he exclaimed enthusiastically. " I began to think at one time you were a lemon, but that stunt of getting in on the young man as a nurse is a winner. It was worth having the well catch fire to give you your big chance even if it did burn up about ten thousand dollars worth of oil on us before we got her capped again. Keep it up. Is he softening up any yet?"

So the one decent thing she had done since she came to Goar Valley had not only been unappreciated by its beneficiary, but this matter of fact person considered it a piece of arch trickery.

" Well," she replied a little listlessly to the man's question, " you can judge of how much he has softened up. He has just dismissed me with a censure and told me to present a bill for my services, implying that they weren't worth much."

" What you been doing? Pulling some hoity toity fine lady stuff on him?"

She told him the story in a few words.

" You might as well give up the idea that he can be softened by any sentimental considerations," she concluded. " He's got to be tricked in some way. Show me how, and I'll do it."

" That's the way to talk, my girl," the fellow exclaimed. " Maybe you're right about the sentiment. But you've at least made him believe you're on the square, and shown him you got some business in you. You may've made more dent in his sentiment than you think. Don't show any grouch when he gets around again. Just treat it as a joke. All you need really now is his confidence, and you can put over a cute little business trick I been workin' up. I got to get the big men's O. K. before I tell you about it. They're busy now workin' up a consolidation of interests here, and won't make any new move till that's done."

And the next afternoon she had proof that the oil agent was not so far wrong in his belief that she might have made a dent in Mert's sentiments when she was waited on by Simple Martha with the message that Mert was sorry for what he had said, and wished to see her.

" Sorry because he isn't being fed right or getting any other sick-room comforts!" she sneered, but deaf Martha failed to hear. She finally made out that the lady had no intentions of coming back, and returned to Mert and told him that with great satisfaction to herself and great distress to the invalid.

The woman-hater was cured at last, at least as far as his feelings toward this particular woman were concerned. He suddenly realized that he needed her. He believed that here was at least one good woman, such a woman as his own mother must have been. He didn't blame her for refusing to see him again. He knew now that he had been a brute.

If anybody had told Mert Dibble that he had been falling in love with Violet Worthington, he would have been frightened to death. It never occurred to him to analyze his feelings that way. He had simply discovered that here was one good woman who had tried to be a good friend to him, and that in return he had treated her shamefully. And he knew that he needed her and that he missed her terribly.

Nevertheless, despite lack of proper care, he gradually regained his strength and presently was up and around the house. Finally came the day when he was able to be out again. And he deliberately prepared to do the thing that he had been planning with fear and trembling for two weeks. He was going to call on Violet Worthington and beg her pardon.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAM GOAR IN A VISE.

WHILE Mert Dibble was thus nerving himself up to the point of doing this revolutionary thing, the plots of Messrs. Dunsmore, Haslip and Goar moved on apace. It was the very night before the one Mert had set for his radical move that these precious enemies of his met in Sam Goar's sanctum to complete the plans for consolidating the oil interests of Goar Valley and dividing the plunder between them.

There was present in Sam Goar's sanctum that night besides the three principals above mentioned, the mysterious agent who was directing the movements of Violet Worthington. He was introduced as Mr. Craig, confidential agent. Sam Goar had never met this gentleman before, and his presence vaguely troubled him.

" Well, to get down to cases," Dunsmore opened the conference. " What have your people decided to do about combining with us, Haslip?"

" They have empowered me to perfect a combination of interests with you and take over half of the options secured for us jointly by Goar here, paying the price originally agreed and deducting from the payment one half of the money advanced to Goar originally for the purchase of these options."

Sam Goar was startled. He stared at the speaker coldly. This wasn't the kind of talk they had at their last meeting when the combination was first proposed. Then they had agreed that he should sell his options for a good-sized cash consideration plus stock in the new company, the total to be at the new market price established by the enthusiastic bidders against Dunsmore and Haslip. He was still more startled at Dunsmore's rejoinder.

" That suits my group," he said. " We

made a fair agreement with Sam at what was then a good figure to represent us as buyers of options. Of course we didn't know then he was buying for both of us, but there is no reason why we should go above that figure now just because Sam is trying to take advantage of a technicality in having the options in his own name."

"The devil you don't see any reason," Sam snarled. "Say, I give you the reason the other day. The reason is I got the options an' you ain't. Now if you fellers don't want to live up to the talk you handed out then all I have to do is hunt up the guys that was hot after the options then. I took pains to git their names an' addresses, thinkin' you might try to double-cross me. Say, where'd I git off givin' away a good thing to you suckers that tried to trim everybody in sight?"

"Sam, old top, be calm and listen," Dunsmore said softly. "You won't have to get off. You've already got off. You got off and got off complete the evening after our conference to which you refer. When you went out under the shadows of holy night, and about a half mile down the road here did certain things in the fireworks line to an innocent little pine tree, you at that time and place got off, got way off, so far off that you'll never get back on."

"What d'ye mean by that rigmarole?" demanded Goar, a little puzzled by the language, but getting its drift so well that he turned suddenly white.

"I mean," Dunsmore stated coldly, suddenly dropping his bantering tone, "that on the occasion of your last conference with us, you suggested to Haslip and me that Dibble's farm be burned over in an effort to force him to sell. We had Mr. Craig here secreted where he could overhear you, and as a reputable representative of a certain well-known detective agency his word will go in court when corroborated by Dunsmore and myself, both businessmen in good standing. We took your suggestion as a joke, but we didn't trust you, Sam. We had Craig watch and trail you that night, and he caught you with the goods. You did a lot of criminal damage that night, Sam, and we can send you up for it without half trying. We hate to do it, though, and won't, provided you turn over those options without a whimper, and leave us entirely alone from now on."

"But, curse you!" roared Goar, rising and towering over them menacingly. "You did suggest it. You know you did. You squeal on me and I'll squeal on every crooked deal you've tried in this valley for the last twenty years."

"Go as far as you like, Sam, old top. Get it all off your chest. You can't prove a darn thing, and you know it. Your unsupported word isn't worth a tinker's dam in any court, and you know that. We'll give you just five minutes by my watch to produce those options and sign 'em over. If you haven't done it by that time we'll get 'em anyway by process of law, and send you up for a long term in the bargain."

Sam Goar stormed and threatened, but the three sat in calm silence. In the end he capitulated. They left him with the warning that the slightest sign in the future that he was trying to do them or their interests any damage would mean a trip to State prison for him. Sam Goar's golden bubble had burst.

After they left the crushed but still raging Hookfinger, they held a further conference. Haslip was a little nervous as to the outcome.

"You made a dangerous enemy, Dunsmore," he said. "I'm still a little afraid you've made the same mistake with him that you say I made with the Dibble widow when I got through with her and threw her off without paying her enough to satisfy her. He knows too much. He engineered the stealing of Dibble's cattle and killing his horse, for instance."

"Yes, but everybody knows the Hookfingers are always up to such things, and he can't prove we had a hand in it. We've got him in a vise he'll never even dare wiggle in.

"But now we've got other things to worry about. Mr. Craig has an interesting report to make."

"I'm happy to report, gentlemen," Craig announced, "that I've seen everyone of the speculators that stole a march on us in nailing down options the morning after the gusher broke loose, and they've all agreed to turn over their options to us for a cash

bonus that won't run on the average much over the figure you've had to pay our friend Goar, the balance to be paid in stock in the new company. They were more than willing when I told them we were going to run in a pipe line and freeze out any independent operators who tried drilling. That's pretty cheap, considering the low price of printing stock certificates."

Dunsmore and Haslip chuckled contentedly.

"I guess we've mended the old fence pretty well after all," said the former. "The only thing that remains is to get the Dibble property. I still have a hunch that's worth more than all the other rights put together, and a fear that some rich but honest competitor may speak out of turn and get it away from us in spite of our bluff about the pipe line."

"I think this will solve that problem."

Craig drew a set of type-written documents out of his pocket and handed a copy to each of his companions.

"That's the scheme I outlined the other day. The young man is around again and ripe for the slaughter."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEAL IN APPLES.

MERT DIBBLE had many a time gone over the top and across No Man's Land with less trepidation than he felt when he started out to make his momentous call on Violet Worthington. He spent a long time dressing that evening. He had never before been accused of being a Beau Brummel. But to-night it took several attempts to get his tie set to his satisfaction. His hair persisted in an obstinate cowlick which took some fifteen minutes to conquer. His clothes were covered with imaginary dust.

He was ready finally and walked slowly down the road toward the Flanders place, half hoping that Miss Worthington would be out and the ordeal could be put over till another night. He was rehearsing to himself a carefully set speech of apology and gratitude as he went, one he had been composing for two weeks.

Violet by chance met him at the door. That disconcerted him. He had expected someone else to admit him and give him time to compose himself while he waited for her to come in. As it was he simply stared at her helplessly.

She looked at him a little coolly waiting for him to speak. Finally when his parched tongue refused to act she said still coolly:

"Good evening, Mr. Dibble. Come in. I'll tell Mrs. Flanders you're here."

Mert followed her in dumbly and sat down where she indicated. She had nearly reached the door on her way to summon her landlady when the caller took a tight grip on his courage and blurted out:

"I came to see you."

"To see me?" she asked with pretended surprise.

"Yes. I — I — want to — to tell you something."

She sat down opposite him.

"What did you wish to say?" she asked sweetly.

Mert in a panic felt around in his mind for his set speech. It had been hopelessly mislaid. The more he fumbled for it the more confused he became. He tried in his desperation to improvise something, but it seemed hopelessly inane. At length maddened by the calm inquiring eyes of the girl he blurted out:

"It's—it's a pleasant evening, isn't it?"

Thereupon Violet suppressed a giggle and decided to help. She could not afford to have him flee in a panic just when she was ready to use him.

"Yes, it is a pleasant evening and I'm glad you came over. I am the one who ought to do the talking. I want to apologize for not coming back when you asked for me. You needn't have apologized for anything you said when you were sick and half out of your head. And you don't need to thank me for the little I did. I owed you much more than that. Father needed me here, so I couldn't come back, but I couldn't make Martha understand. So that's all settled.

"If you do want to do me a favor though, you can give me some advice that will be a great help to father and me. You see

father was planning to meet our expenses this fall by buying apples from the farmers around here. He represents some shippers in Flowerville. But he's too ill to attend to it and I'm trying to take his place. We buy the apples right on the trees and attend to the picking ourselves. I have the regular contract forms here, but I'm no judge of apple crops or the prices that I ought to pay. We sell to a fancy trade and can pay a little more than the other buyers for good apples."

This turn of the conversation loosened Mert's tongue. This was business. He was talking to a business woman who had appealed to his judgment. Apples were Mert's specialty. He had a fine old orchard, the returns from which gave him a large proportion of his income from the farm. The crop was a good one this year, but with the difficulty of getting help to pick it there was danger that it might rot on the trees. Here was a chance he had not hoped for to solve the problem of picking and save him from further bother.

He plunged into the subject of apples and talked well. Even Violet, preoccupied as she was, became interested and realized for the first time that the usually sullen young farmer had a bright alert mind. He sized up the orchards of the valley, giving her a rough idea of what each was worth and ended by offering his own crop as it stood for two thousand dollars.

His offer Miss Worthington accepted so readily that it took his breath away. She got duplicate copies of the contract form and handed him a fountain pen. In something of a daze he read through the tangled legal phraseology and signed the document. It seemed all right to him. Such a spell had Violet woven over him that he would have signed anything.

Violet almost snatched the contracts from him and signed them herself as agent. She gave him his copy and a check and remained standing. She was anxious now to have him go.

But Mert was in no hurry to go. He had forgotten his embarassment. He wanted to talk.

"You've no idea what you've done for me, Miss Worthington," he said. "I was broke. This just fixes me up. You've saved me from mortgaging the old farm and mebbe losin' it. Let me tell you what that means to me."

And while the girl listened with growing interest he told her the story of his father and his boyhood, the fight against the crooked oil men, of his father's death, of his devotion to his memory and the father's dying wish that the old place be preserved. Before he had finished his listener's eyes were filled with tears.

Then he went into his reasons for not selling his oil rights. He told her what he thought of the crooked gang who were after them and backed it up with proofs that suddenly opened the girl's eyes to the kind of men she had been dealing with.

A sudden uncontrollable impulse seized her.

"Let me see your copy of that contract a moment, please," she said.

He handed it to her unquestionably.

With trembling hands she placed the two contracts together and while Mert looked on in amazement she tore them into bits.

"I can't buy your apples after all," she cried and rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VIOLET SEES THE CLAWS.

VIOLET WORTHINGTON kept her next appointment with Craig, the confidential agent of the oil men, the evening after she bought Mert Dibble's apples and repudiated the bargain.

"Well, did he bite?" asked Craig.

Violet in her reply did not mince matters. She told the whole episode from start to finish, including Mert's statement that her employers were crooks.

"I'm through," she concluded in a white heat of anger. "I'll go back to town and go to work and do all I can for father. It won't be much, but he'd rather die than have me mixed up with crooks like you any more. You'd have given Mr. Dibble a dirty little two thousand dollars and robbed him of a fortune. I don't believe now for a moment that you'd make it right afterward as you promised."

Craig was so enraged that he could not speak for some minutes after she was through. When he did speak he swore fluently.

"And to think," he wound up, "of the trouble I went to doping out that contract so that the joker giving us the oil rights would hold in court. And you had his name too. All you had to do was transfer it to us, and then you spilled the beans.

"Look here, young woman," he said finally. "Don't think you're through. You're mighty touchy about your father. Well, what'd he think if he saw some of the checks I been handin' over to you. Signed by Ellis Wheeler, they were. Never thought to look into who he is. Well, his connection with us is secret. See? He's well known though as a prime rake around Flowerville. Any woman getting her name coupled with his won't have enough reputation left to be worth saving. Of course you've never seen him. I know. But suppose I testify that I was hired by certain parties to trail him and found him having secret meetings out here with you. And there's the checks to prove it. Guess that blow wouldn't kill father, eh? How about it?"

Violet's answer was to throw herself on the grass and sob as if her heart would break.

Craig arose abruptly.

"Be here ready for orders to-morrow night!" he commanded gruffly and walked off.

Violet spent the next day in bed on the verge of hysterics, but she was on hand for the receipt of orders that evening, crushed and submissive, willing to do anything to shield her father from belief in her disgrace.

"Here's the dope," Craig began. "From what happened the other night it's easy to see you've got this woman-hater nutty about you at last. All you got to do now is to follow it up and you can wind him round your finger. 'Course he must have been peeved at your going back on your apple contract. You got to overcome that.

"Now I figure he tried to save your life once and it was a flivver. He'd be crazy to do it again. We'll give him the chance. He pulls off a rescue we plant. You throw yourself in his arms. He does the rest. Then when you've hooked him, tell him you got to have money, all that stuff, and he must sell his oil rights. We'll provide a guy to do the buyin' that he won't know belongs to our gang and that you make him believe is honest.

"I got it planned to have you take a canoe ride. Dunsmore's got an Indian workin' round the well who runs errands in his canoe. We'll get him to take you out. We'll stall around till we know Dibble will be on hand, then have the Indian tip you over in shallow water and beat it. Our man does the rescue act. Close up of happy couple with gusher in background. Nothin' to it."

So it came about that a few days later, as arranged, Violet went to Senabaugua in the canoe with Firewater Joe and did a little shopping to give plausibility to the performance. Not till they were on their way back was Joe entrusted with the knowledge of the part he was to play. Then Violet told him to paddle past the Dibble farm and if he saw Mert at work near by tip her over in a place that was not too deep and then swim away and leave her. She said she wanted to play a trick on Mr. Dibble. The oil man had counted on the Indian's acquiescence without further question, as he understood Joe and Mert had quarreled.

But two things he hadn't counted on. First, Joe had absorbed an unusual quantity of his favorite beverage that day. Second, he had some time since come to the conclusion that the young woman was an enemy of his friend and secret employer. So Joe decided to obey the young woman, but not literally.

There had been a heavy shower up above the valley that afternoon and the river was swollen. As they neared the Dibble place another heavy downpour of rain broke. The girl saw at a glance shoreward that Mert had sought shelter and was not in the field near the river where they had counted on his being at work.

She called to Joe that she had changed her mind and to take her home. But Joe acted as if he had not heard. Nor did he keep inshore in shallow water as he had

been directed. Instead he ran deliberately up the center of the boiling current. Just opposite the Dibble house, a hundred rods from the shore and in the deepest part of the stream Joe suddenly leaned over the gunwale despite the girl's screams of protest and the unstable craft turned turtle.

Violet, who could not swim, struggled, screaming, for a moment in the muddy torrent while the Indian swam calmly for the farther shore, then with a final cry for help she sank out of sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

MERT FAILS IN HIS RÔLE.

WHEN Violet Worthington tore up her apple contract so mysteriously and left Mert without a word of explanation, he had been at first amazed and mystified. Then as he walked slowly back trying to puzzle out the meaning of the incident an explanation dawned on him that filled him with rage, wiped out his growing sentiment for the strange young woman and revived all his old hatred in a flash.

She had of course been making game of him, doubtless to revenge herself for the way he had treated her. All her gentleness and request for his advice had been put on just to draw him out. And he had been drawn out. He opened his heart to her and talked as he had never expected to talk to a woman in his life. What a fool he had been! Then she had made him think she had solved the problem of his present financial needs by buying his apples only to gloat over him a little and then enjoy dashing his hopes. And he had talked to her about his father!

Mert's self-loathing was equaled only by his hatred for Violet.

He was nearly home when he remembered that he still had the check she had given him to bind the bargain. She had never thought to take that back. Perhaps she meant to stop payment on it. Or was she a fool as well as a heartless man-baiter? It didn't matter. In a rage he snatched the check from his pocket and tore it up.

"There, I'd begun to think she was pretty fine, but the woman in her had to crop out after all. I hate every danged one of 'em. They're all alike."

He was entering his house by now and his eye fell on Simple Martha who was just finishing her morning's work. Mert went berserk. His timidity vanished. He wouldn't have one of the creatures around.

"Martha," he roared in her ear, "you're going back to the little old house where you belong. No. You can't live here any more. I don't want you. You needn't do any work here. I can take care of myself."

The simple-minded creature wept and wailed dolefully, but Mert was adamant. He pushed her up to her room and made her bundle up her slender belongings, then he helped her carry them through the woodpath to the cottage which still contained its rude furniture just as Martha had left it when she moved into the main house. Mert then went back and took her enough provisions to last for a short time and told her she would be kept provided as she needed. In short he gave her to understand that she was being retired on a pension and that the little house was hers as long as she wanted to live there.

This was all incomprehensible to Martha and the cause of prolonged grief. But Mert's mood overawed her as much as it puzzled her and she dared not resist.

"The Lord will pervide fer Martha," she intoned piously when Mert left.

The next morning Mert rose earlier than usual and essayed to be his own housekeeper. Put to it to prove his proposition that he could take care of himself, he even did some sketchy sweeping and dusting before getting his breakfast. He didn't want Martha to come snooping around when he was out and gloat over the shape things were in. After breakfast he baked a batch of bread, fearful and wonderful stuff as a matter of fact, but Mert didn't take time to test his product and it looked pretty good to him.

But after he had gone out to the field to work, Martha sneaked over from her cottage and swept, dusted and tidied in furious haste. She took a look in the kitchen and discovered the new bread. Martha didn't have to test the miserable stuff. She gave it one contemptuous glance and dumped it into the swill pail. Then she

baked a fresh lot, a white, flaky delectable product in place of it. She was back in her cottage when Mert came to dinner.

The new-fledged housekeeper noted with satisfaction the neatness of everything.

" Don't see but what I did a purty good job o' cleanin' this morning," he approved, passing on his supposed handiwork. " Can't see's Martha kept things any slicker."

When he tested the bread he thought he had made, his delight was unbounded.

" There now," he ejaculated. " Women try to purtend that cookin' is a knack. They's nothin' into it."

And this farce comedy kept up day after day. Every morning Martha found on her doorstep provisions Mert had stealthily left there the night before. Each morning Mert did a hasty dab of cooking and cleaning and marveled at his skill more and more as the days passed. Martha was sure that the Lord was " purvidin' " for her—Mert as sure that he was providing for himself.

Mert was at work down by the river the day selected by Violet Worthington and her fellow-conspirators to stage an accident with Mert in the unconscious rôle of rescuer. When the heavy shower broke loose he fled to the shelter of the house with the first big drops.

For a moment he stood in the open doorway watching the storm sweep down the mountain and across the river. Just as the thrashing rain shut off his outlook and he was about to close the door he heard a shrill cry off over the troubled water. He turned and listened intently, but the cry was not repeated.

" Some wild critter scared by the rain," he told himself and went about the job of closing the house against the beating torrent.

So it was that Mert failed to play the rôle of rescuer assigned to him.

CHAPTER XX.

MAROONED WITH HIS HATES.

THE shower, the kind of exceptionally heavy summer downpour that the papers describe as a cloud-burst, turned presently into a steady rain without abating much of its fury. All night long and into the next day it continued. It was the heaviest rainfall seen in that region in many years, old residents reported afterwards.

Mert Dibble, protected by an old mackintosh, went out to do his chores the next morning and found himself living on an island. His house and barns fortunately stood on a considerable knoll. The rest of the farm lay on the flat land very little above the normal high-water mark. Over these flats the river was now pouring in a rushing torrent. The farm was under deep swift water. The ruin of his already dubious crops was complete.

He had barely grasped the situation when with a start of alarm he thought of Simple Martha. Her cottage lay on the edge of the lowland. It might have been swept away and her with it. Though he thought he hated the old servitor along with the rest of her sex, put to the test he was as stirred as any other normal man at the thought of a helpless woman in danger.

Half way across the woodlot he saw a sight that filled him with amazement and dismay. Coming toward him was Simple Martha supporting the swaying form of Violet Worthington.

At sight of Mert staring at her, a mixture of hostility and amazement on his face, Violet's pale features flushed a little. She disengaged herself from Martha's sustaining arm and with a visible effort stood proudly erect, a little touch of defiance in her manner.

" I'm sorry to trespass on your property," she said, " but I can't help it. I was tipped over in a canoe last evening right out here just as the storm broke. The Indian who was paddling me swam away and left me to drown. I can't swim and nearly did drown. I guess I lost consciousness for a little. When I came to I was lodged in the branches of a tree that had floated down stream and caught on the bottom. It was too dark to see where I was. But this morning I found I was near shore and only shallow water between me and land. I waded out and tried to get home but I found I was cut off by the flood. I went to Martha's cottage, but the water has just driven us out of there. I must ask you for shelter in your house for a little time."

She paused and as Mert still made no move and said nothing, an involuntary look of appeal crept into her face with a recurring sense of exhaustion from her night of exposure.

But it was for the moment lost on Mert. He still eyed her in silence torn between disgust at finding himself marooned on a tiny plot of ground with the woman he hated and a grim satisfaction at seeing her punished after making game of him as she had.

Then Violet, her exhaustion getting the better of her, suddenly swayed and seemed about to fall.

Mert leaped and caught her. It was a movement entirely involuntary, quite out of keeping with his mood. Again the woman-hater, who had never practiced consciously the art of chivalry, was true to the finer unconscious instincts within him.

And while he led her toward the house he was conscious of further conflict of emotion. His reason continued to assure him that he hated this girl, but the touch of her soft helpless body with its appeal to his protection sent a strange contradictory thrill of joy through him. When he released her after guiding her into the house and to the old lounge in the corner of the dining-room he was trembling.

Mert went to the barn while the two women were drying their clothing. When he returned Violet was already sleeping off her exhaustion. Martha was bustling about at her everlasting cleaning. Mert, his nerves torn to shreds by the destruction of his crops, the dreary discomfort of the unabating storm, the climax capped by having these two hated women imposed upon him, flew into a rage and ordered Martha to leave things alone entirely.

" I've been running this house alone for days and getting along all right. I'll run it now. You and that girl can stay here till the river goes down, but I'll do the work. I got nothing else to do and I won't have any women interfering."

He was stopped in the midst of his tirade by a light but firm step behind him. He whirled and was confronted by a new Violet he hadn't observed before. She was a little fury incarnate, her eyes blazing with scorn.

" Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she snapped. " You big brute! Bullying a simple-minded old woman who worships the ground you tread on! Now just talk that way to me if you dare. I'm sorry I have to impose on your grudging hospitality, but as long as I must I'll earn my keep. I'll do the work as long as I'm here and you won't prevent me. I thought for a few moments the other night that you really had something nice about you when we had such a good talk, but I see I was mistaken."

In spite of himself Mert had quailed at this onset. But her reference to the humiliating evening of the apple contract nerved him to faint protest.

" But you were making game of me the other night," he protested. " Why did you make me think you'd bought my apples an' then go back on it?"

Violet braced herself for her part. She thought of the threat of the agent Craig and desperately determined to go on with her orders even though the rescue plot had miscarried. She must first restore his confidence. She had already invented a plausible answer to his question.

" You see you jump at conclusions. I know I was excited and didn't give any explanation then as I should, but I thought you'd be fair enough to call again and ask for it. I did act queer and I don't know as I should blame you after all. As a matter of fact, though, when you were telling me of your dealings with crooked oil men I got to thinking. Neither father nor I knew much about the fruit dealers we were representing. We'd sort of taken them on faith. I'm afraid neither of us know anything about business. Some intuition made me want to look at your contract again. Then I saw a clause that didn't look right. On impulse I tore up the contract and then, at the thought that I might have been the means of tricking you and confused by the fact that I couldn't explain myself very logically, I just ran like a little fool. I've found since, though, that I was right. The contract was a trick one. I would have turned it over to those men in good faith and they would have beaten you out of most of your money. Now am I forgiven?"

She capped her plea with an appealing smile, and Mert's rage vanished.

"Gosh, yes!" he exclaimed. "Say! You've been mighty good to me all along and I've been a brute just like you said. Will you forgive me?"

"If you'll be a good boy and help me a little around here," she smiled, and he at once became her slave and began helping with the efficiency of a clown at the circus.

The storm beat on in unabated fury for three days. The telephone wires were down and there was no way to make known their plight to the outside world. Mert gradually found himself enjoying the situation more and more. His shyness was steadily wearing away and presently, under the tactful drawing out of Violet, he was talking as fluently with her as though she were another man, with the difference that the thrill he felt when he helped her into the house that first morning was becoming a permanent one, and no longer complicated with his former mental reservations.

Violet kept at her task of fascination with a smiling face but a heavy heart. As she realized more and more the sturdy worth of the young farmer and his real native gentleness now that his shell was removed, the job that she must perform became steadily more abhorrent.

It was the morning of the fourth day that Mert's revelation came to him. When he arose that day the rain had ceased and the sun was out. When Violet came down she greeted it with a cry of joy.

But Mert felt a sudden sick loneliness. It meant that the long hours with her would soon be ended. He thought of how empty the house would be without her. Then he suddenly started as though stung by a wasp. He gave her a long look, flushed furiously and abruptly started for the barn.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed a moment later to the benign faces of his placid cud-chewing cows, "I'm in love sure as preachin'."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFESSION.

MERT'S first feeling was one of supreme elation but it was followed by a corresponding depression. The supernally wonderfully creature that Violet had suddenly become could never care for an ignorant countryman like him. He did his work at the barn in a daze. When he returned to the house he was beset with a new bashfulness under the girl's seemingly friendly gaze.

And her woman's intuition told her instantly that she had accomplished the purpose for which she was being paid, and she felt no elation in the thought. She tried to live up to her part and encourage him to speak but could force no naturalness into her smile. She in turn became silent and awkward.

Mert in a panic interpreted this as dislike and fell still deeper into despair. All that forenoon he brooded. The river would begin to subside soon and Violet would be leaving, or perhaps even before that some one would come along in a boat and rescue her. He must speak before she left. But time and again when they were alone for a moment he tried and no words would come.

And all this time Violet worked feverishly at trivial duties about the house realizing the struggle that was going on in his mind, trying to nerve herself up to encourage it and go on with her part and yet, despite herself, shrinking back every time he came near her and talking nervously of nothing in particular whenever he started to speak. Then fate stepped in and precipitated matters. It was in the form of a flat-boat poled slowly up the stream with a rescue party aboard. Mert heard them shouting his name and went out to find them nosed against the bank.

"You all right in there, Mert?" asked a young farmer who lived down convenient to the gap. "Is there anything that we can do for you?"

"No. Nothing," Mert answered. "We're all right. When you come back you might stop and take—a young—lady over to the Flanderses. She got stalled here the night the storm broke—got tipped over out in the river and couldn't get back. Martha has been here with us."

The party, grinning furtively, pushed on up the stream, and Mert, full of desperate determination, stalked into the house. Martha was in the kitchen and Violet was set-

ting the table for dinner. He strode up to her abruptly, gasped helplessly for a moment, then blurted:

"Violet, they're coming to take you away in a little while. I don't want you to go. I'm going to hunt up somebody that's honest and sell my oil rights as soon as I get out of here. Then I'll have enough to make you and your father comfortable. I—I love you. Will you stay?"

This was Violet's cue, the one she had been waiting for. She summoned all her will power to take it and failed. Suddenly she knew for all time that she could not go on with it. A moment she looked at him piteously, then turned her back to him, covered her face with her hands and wept bitterly.

Mert stood helplessly by for a dozen seconds, then clumsily put an arm around her shoulder.

"Don't take it that way, little girl. Tell me that you care."

She gently drew away from him.

"Don't," she sobbed. "You mustn't say that again, Mert. You won't want to when I tell you what I've done."

She controlled herself with great effort, wiped her eyes and faced him bravely at last.

"Mert, in a minute you're going to hate me again even more than you ever did before because this time you are going to have a real reason. I've been a fraud from start to finish, just trying to get you to say something like this to me. But I can't go on with it. I thought I could, but I can't. I'd be haunted all the rest of my life by your eyes as they looked just now when you told me that.

"Listen till I'm through. I don't want you to think I'm altogether bad. I want you to know why I've done what I have. My mother died when I was ten years old. My father never got over it. When I was fifteen he became an invalid, as he is now. I left school and went to work as a stenographer to help support him, for he had very little money left. The doctors said he could be cured if we could afford expensive special treatment. But I couldn't get the money.

"Then last spring a man came to the office where I was employed and told me that if I would do a little detective work for him he'd pay me well for it. He wanted me to come out here and get acquainted with you and find out all about you, find out just why you wouldn't sell your oil rights, get you—get you interested in me and make you want to make a lot of money and then persuade you to sell. He promised that if you sold as a result of my work he'd give me a thousand dollars and that if the well turned out big I'd get ten thousand dollars. I could hardly bring myself to do such a thing at first, but he persuaded me that it would be for your best good in the end, and when I thought of what it would mean to father I consented at last.

"Then when they got me out here they led me on from one trick to another. I didn't tell just the truth about that apple contract. It was a trick contract that gave them your oil rights as well as the apples. But when you told me of the proof you had that these men were crooks and were so grateful to me for helping you out and told me about your own invalid father I tore up the contract.

"But they got after me again and showed me that they had me in their power. So they planned to have me wrecked here so that you would rescue me and I could work on your feelings so that you'd—fall in—in—love with me. It didn't work out so that you rescued me but it's worked out this way after all and I won't go on with it. I'm going back to the city and go to work. I won't go any farther with it even to save my father. He'd rather have me kill him."

Mert listened aghast to this confession, his face gone deathly white. When she was through he still stood and stared at her speechless. She faced him searching his face for a moment, then turned away.

"All aboard for Flanderses," called a voice down on the river. The rescue party had returned.

Without looking back at Mert who made no effort to stop her, Violet went out and got into the boat and sat with averted face while the men poled away.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The House of Too Many Windows

by Charles Divine

JOHN BRETT had thought the winter would never pass. But suddenly, one March morning, he got out of bed and stood comfortably at his open window overlooking the back yard of New York dwelling houses. He felt the warm, sunlit air drift against him as if it came direct from Arcady—despite the intervening clothes-lines.

He drew in his breath, exultant.

At last! A day had come when he could carry his folding camp stool to the Palisades and finish the picture he had started in October.

He hurried immediately into his studio to get his painting paraphernalia together. He paused to gaze at the canvas of the unfinished picture—a lovely old house, built in a strange style that betrayed both Colonial and Moorish influences, set in a walled inclosure graced by statuesque Lombardy poplars and deserted by everything but time.

"An old-world garden!"

Brett sighed. The scene had captivated his fancy for so long that he had dreamed many adventures around it. That was his way with pictures; they were more real to him than reality, and he peopled them with human beings more alive to him than his actual acquaintances. Some of these acquaintances thought him eccentric, but they were usually bond salesmen who couldn't see gold except where it glittered!

When ready for the street, garbed in a hiking costume of old army breeches and a sweater, he tucked the materials of his poor profession under his arm and ran impatiently down the stairs into Waverly Place. An hour later, after doing penance in the dead air of the subway, he was rewarded by the sight of the sparkling Hudson and the smell of the soft, fresh wind. The trip across the river on the ferryboat was inspiriting, and while making his way up the winding road on the Jersey side he felt a feverish desire to be at work on his picture again. He hated to paint so photographically, he told himself, but this old house was worth it.

From Fort Lee the road soon led into the countryside, where, at the next turn, stood his deserted mansion. He turned into the lane, and his eyes traveled eagerly to the house.

He stopped still in his tracks. The building had undergone a ghastly change.

"What have they done to it?" he asked himself, struck with wonder.

The roof was gone and all of the walls, even that one with the many horseshoe-arched windows. Only the floor and the foundation remained, together with a section of the veranda, hanging awry, and the

tall tower at the corner. Then he saw the figures of some men clad in blue denim, and a cloud of dust arose where they moved.

An unreasonable fury filled him. Iconoclasts! Those workmen were tearing down one of the quaintest specimens of architecture within sight of New York, a veritable *bijou*, extremely rare in these days of stucco, destructibility, and speed.

He was glad that the tower still remained standing, for that was the only portion of his picture as yet unfinished. Watching, he observed that the workmen were preparing next to attack this last pinnacle of structural beauty.

He hurried forward, indignant.

"It's a crime to tear down a house as unusual as this," he said to the nearest workman, who peered at him quizzically from under heavy eyebrows powdered with plaster dust. "I had almost finished painting a picture of it—all but the tower. Can't you let it stand a day longer?"

The housewrecker advised Brett to go back to New York and pour his troubles into the "tin ear of Mr. Ellsworth," whose address in a Broadway office building the workman readily volunteered.

Brett reflected that he had often hired models to pose for him, but never an inanimate building. Yet this particular dwelling, once the finishing touches were made on his canvas, would be the best thing he had ever done. It might live. A whimsical idea came to him.

"If you'll let that tower stand until the sun goes down I'll pay your salary to-day."

"Come across!"—laughingly.

But Brett stood still, recalled to the impracticability of his proposal by the thought that he had only a dollar in his pocket for lunch. The workman smiled at the chagrin he saw on his face.

Brett turned back toward the road.

"Don't go away mad!" counseled the workman jocosely.

"I wonder what this man Ellsworth would say?" murmured Brett to himself.

II.

Two hours later, back in New York, Brett stepped off the elevator of a building near City Hall Park and opened a door on the ninth floor marked "James Ellsworth, Real Estate Dealer and Contractor." Two stenographers looked up. One of them, noting the visitor's careless costume and mistaking the burdens he carried under his arm for a peddler's stock in trade, announced blithely:

"You can't sell anything here! We don't want any bric-a-brac or statues of the Venus de Milo!"

Brett deposited his painting things on the floor and smiled at her.

"I agree with you," he said, surveying her frankly. "Such a statue would be a superfluous duplication here."

For a moment she lifted her blond head, bewildered. Her fingers paused at the typewriter and her jaw ceased its chewing gum activity, while Brett announced that he wanted to see Mr. Ellsworth on an entirely different matter.

"What name?" asked the girl, pleased by his voice and the compliment she vaguely sensed.

"John Brett."

"The plumber?"

"No, the painter."

"Oh!" The girl entered the inner office and came back with a nod, holding the door open for him.

Brett advanced into a room lined with filing cabinets and occupied in the center by an extensive desk, at which sat a man in a gray suit who squinted at him severely and cried:

"You're wasting your time coming to see me now. I won't have any houses ready to paint before August."

Brett looked down on a head shaped like an egg and equally bald.

"You've got a house I want to paint to-day," he said, a trace of merriment on his lips. As he went on to explain about the old structure at Fort Lee, he felt a glow of pleasure at his singular request and the surprise it would probably create in the grim-looking real estate dealer. Brett enjoyed a scene like this. An immediate effect was produced in the other.

"Well, I'll be—say!" Mr. Ellsworth sat back in his chair, astonished, and jammed his fists against the edge of his desk. He

broke into a torrent of indignation, as if Brett had insulted his common sense. "Why, you admit you can't pay me for the time I'd lose laying off those men. Anyway, my client, Mr. Leonard, who owns that property, won't stand for any delay."

"Do you realize you're demolishing something as individual as—well, do you know Greco's villa in Toledo?"

"Never been in Ohio!"

"Not Ohio—Toledo, Spain."

"Well, if it ain't in this country, I should worry about it."

"But a real estate dealer ought to know the earth as well as be close to it."

Mr. Ellsworth looked puzzled.

"That tower comes down to-day," he insisted gruffly.

For a moment Brett stood preoccupied, thinking aloud.

"It's lucky I fixed a vanishing point in my picture."

"A *what?*"

"Vanishing point." Brett looked up. "But that's technical; you wouldn't understand it."

"I understand you're taking up a lot of my valuable time!" Mr. Ellsworth pounded his fist on his desk. "And as for the vanishing point, I wish you were close to it." His eyes, glaring at Brett, surveyed the artist's unconventional attire. "We've got work to do here."

Brett flushed, but controlled his temper. He turned to the door and walked out.

As he entered the outer office a girl in street dress rose from a chair where she had been waiting and started toward the door Brett closed behind him. At the sight of her he paused and caught his breath. Their eyes met.

To Brett beauty did not lie in perfect contour and regularity of profile. He was more moved by imperfection of line, where it emphasized character, and that was what he suddenly glimpsed in this slender young woman whose face was of a loveliness far removed from such an ordinary type as the blond stenographer. She had animated brown eyes, and, in singular contrast, lips almost sad in their full curves.

He stood aside, his heart beating faster. He delayed the picking up of his painting things after the girl had passed, and heard her talking excitedly to Ellsworth, expostulating and imploring. The real estate dealer's voice came to him sharp and unyielding. For a moment the girl's tones rose high, full-throated: "He always intended I should have that house."

Brett heard no more.

When he reached the street again the noon hour crowds were swarming in Broadway, clerks and other office workers pouring out of their multitudinous caves, hurrying like animals to dive into other holes in the stone cliffs, to stuff food into themselves. Others, already fed, strolled more leisurely, enjoying the sunshine. At a corner a crowd stood around a soap-box orator haranguing the public on the benefits to be derived from a certain marvelous tonic.

"The body can only assim-a-late food, air, and water," shouted the orator, coatless and bareheaded, his shirt open at the throat. "When the body is sick, stagnates or goes stale, we give it a tonic to wake it up, to react against disease. Now, gentlemen, isn't that a fine theory?"

"Indisputable!" commented Brett to himself. "But what about brown eyes for a tonic to wake you up?"

He crossed toward City Hall Park, threading his way through the talkative throngs until he reached a point of comparative solitude, where he leaned against the park railing and watched the pageant of moving legs and hats. Some youthful clerks were scooping up the last vestige of melting snow from a corner of the park and making snowballs with which they pelted two helpless urchins inside the railing. Their aim was good. Seeking in vain to escape the fusillade of snowballs, the gamins ran from side to side, harassed everywhere. The smaller one was struck several times in the face, until at length a snowball caught him sharply in the eye. He let out a cry of pain. The youthful clerks laughed.

Brett felt a surge of anger; it was the sport of Nero in the arena, watching slaves being torn to pieces. He started to walk toward the clerks when he suddenly stopped, attracted by the sight of a young woman who paused on her way to the subway station to help the injured boy climb through

the fence. Brett saw it was the girl he had passed in the real estate office.

She bent over the boy and wiped the snow from his face. Then she opened her bag and took out a fresh handkerchief, giving it a flutter to open its folds. She put it in the boy's hand and urged him to hold it against his injured eye. Then she hurried on.

Brett approached the boy quickly.

"Here!" he cried, seizing him. "Give me that handkerchief and I'll give you mine. It's bigger."

As he straightened up after the transaction he heard an accusing voice:

"Why did you take my handkerchief away from him?"

Brett found himself looking into the girl's brown eyes again. This time they were snapping.

"I gave him mine in place of yours," he explained.

"Yes," said the boy, surprised, displaying his hand. "He gave me a dollar, too."

"I—I wanted it for a souvenir," stammered Brett. "To remind me of you—that is, that there is some chivalry still left in this city."

She blushed. Her eyes were still animated, but now they were also warm.

"And quixotic men are still left, too?" She smiled, and they walked along together. Her eyes discovered the objects under his arm. "You paint?" He nodded. "I try to sculp," she went on. "I'm just home from Paris, and—"

"You wish you were back there!"

"Yes. Don't you?"

He nodded. Paris was still close to his heart, but too far from his pocketbook. All at once he realized that he didn't have money enough in his clothes to risk inviting such a wonderful creature to lunch with him. A moment more and they were at the subway entrance.

"You're going this way, too?" she asked.

He didn't even have subway fare left.

"No," he replied, disconcerted.

She glanced at him swiftly.

"Then good-by." She nodded and ran down the steps.

Brett stood still, buffeted by creatures plunging avidly into the black maw of the subway, where the girl had now disappeared.

Too late he realized that he had left a hundred problems unsolved: what her name was, where she lived, why her lips were sometimes sad, what she could have in common with a grub like Ellsworth. He looked at her handkerchief, a square of fine linen with the initials "M. L." in the corner, and his imagination began immediately to construct names and a castle of dreams for her.

His thoughts were still full of her as he walked back to Greenwich Village and mounted the stairs to his studio. After making a lunch of a quart of milk and a box of crackers, he set up his easel and fell to work on a portrait. A little while later a knock at the door interrupted him.

A man in a gray suit entered and removed his derby. Brett had continued to ply his paint brush, but now he paused with the brush suspended upon the canvas, while he gazed at the bald egg-shaped head and narrow eyes of Ellsworth.

"You're probably surprised at my visit," said the other. "At first I was going to telephone, when I found your name in the book, and then I decided to come up myself. I spoke a bit unfriendly, I'm afraid, when you called at my office this morning."

Brett waited, wondering. He couldn't believe that this man had called to see him merely in order to apologize for his earlier manner.

"Well?"

Ellsworth glanced about the room, at the pictures on the wall, the built-in bookshelves, and the divan, all the while fidgeting, ill at ease.

"You see, Mr. Brett, after you left this morning I had a talk with my client, Mr. Leonard—he's the one, you know, I said owned that house on the Palisades. I told him about your picture. He wants to buy it. He sent me to get it. Is that it?"

He circled around Brett until his eyes fell on the canvas reposing on the table, and then his glance grew unnaturally bright.

Brett was perplexed.

"Why does Mr. Leonard want it? He hasn't even seen it?"

"That makes no difference. It's a sou-

venir of the old house—used to belong to his uncle, Amos Leonard. You may have heard of him—rich old duffer who died in South America recently." Ellsworth took out a pocketbook bulging with bills. "How much do you want for it?"

Brett's eyes brightened at the sight of so much wealth. He hadn't had a sale since the Sanderson Galleries disposed of one of his pictures in January.

"I hadn't set a price on it yet. I sometimes get two or three hundred dollars for my things." He mentioned his top price, expecting his caller to protest. "But this is the best I've done."

"Well, say four hundred, then," announced Ellsworth, and Brett gave a start. The real estate dealer began confidently to remove bills from his folder, and paused to study the picture again. "Before I take it away with me, will you paint out one of those windows?" He put his finger close to the canvas. "Daub over that top window sticking out there all alone."

Brett stared at him, displeased.

"Why? That's a beautiful window."

"Just do as I say," insisted Ellsworth. "The other windows below it are all right—those six in a row—but that top one I don't like."

"You said your client wanted a souvenir of his uncle's house," retorted Brett, who realized with growing annoyance that the art of the picture meant little to Ellsworth. "Here you have it just as it was in real life."

"That top window's only the garret," scoffed Ellsworth.

Brett flushed.

"It's a jewel! Do you see the curve of the arch, the fluted pillars of the casement? Why"—he turned away, exasperated—"it's something exquisite in itself and at the same time in harmony with the whole façade. If you wanted a picture of a beautiful woman you wouldn't ask to have one of her eyes blackened—not unless you had a sinister motive." The thought suddenly caused him to eye his caller suspiciously.

"There's the money," declared Ellsworth, putting some bills on the edge of the table. "I'll wait." He began to pace up and down nervously.

Brett studied him out of the corner of his eye and decided that there was something very peculiar in the request. Though he needed the four hundred dollars badly, he made no move to touch the painting, but stood in front of it, reflecting. Ellsworth's manner puzzled him, conveying a vague sense of villainy. His thoughts went back to the scene in Ellsworth's office that morning, and the girl he had encountered there. Could she be connected with this house in some way? He recalled her words, in expostulation with the real estate dealer: "He always intended I should have that house." The initials on her handkerchief were "M. L."

Brett turned to Ellsworth with a casual air.

"Is Mr. Leonard a young man?"

"Oh, sort of." Ellsworth continued to pace back and forth.

"Did his uncle leave any other heirs?"

"Um—nothing to speak of."

"Isn't there a Miss Leonard?"

Ellsworth suddenly halted and squinted at Brett narrowly.

"Why do you ask?"

"I just thought I'd heard of one."

"Look here!" Ellsworth walked toward him brusquely. "Are you going to change that picture? I'm in a hurry."

"No, I guess not."

"What!" Ellsworth's jaw dropped.

"I've never altered any of my pictures before. Commercial artists do, but—"

"I'll give you five hundred dollars!"

"No-o-o," said Brett slowly, impressed by the effect of his refusal.

"Six hundred," offered Ellsworth.

"No."

"Seven."

"No."

"Damn it! How much do you want? I'll make it a thousand. That's a small fortune. Now finish it quick for me."

Ellsworth took out a cigar and lit it, as if the business were concluded.

Brett's mind reeled. A thousand dollars! It was indeed a small fortune. He saw the money in Ellsworth's hand. It would mean freedom, the opening of a gate from poverty to Paris—and hence Paradise! Yet he could not shake off the feeling that

there was something sinister in the transaction, something treacherous which he ought not to countenance. If he could only discover "M. L." first, and learn what light she could throw on the mystery.

"I have decided," he said, turning to his caller; "I will not change the picture."

"Then give it to me the way it is."

"For somebody else to alter? No. I'm going to keep it."

Ellsworth grew red in the face.

"Then why didn't you say so in the first place?"

"But I didn't come to you begging you to buy it. Be reasonable." Brett smiled. "By the way, Miss Leonard's first initial is 'M,' isn't it?" Ellsworth looked startled. "What does it stand for? Mary, Margaret—"

"None of your damned business!" Ellsworth jammed on his hat and started for the door. "You'll be sorry you didn't take my offer." He opened the door and paused. "If you change your mind, call me up."

He went out, slamming the door.

Brett sat down to think. It was necessary after having rejected a thousand dollars. Good Lord! But here was something to unravel! When an uncultured boor like Ellsworth was anxious to pay a thousand dollars for a painting he'd never seen before, there was something rotten in the state of Denmark — or the estate of the late Amos Leonard. Brett felt that he would like to investigate it; more than that, the thought of the girl "M. L." demanded it. The quickest way he knew of getting any information was to go to his friend, Walbridge, a reporter on the *Morning Press*.

So, grabbing up his hat, Brett went down to Park Row. He found Larry Walbridge drearily engaged in "pasting up" a list of patrons of some philanthropic society who couldn't give succor to the poor unless their names were spelled correctly in print.

Glad to assist Brett, Walbridge went to the "morgue," the room where clippings were filed, and came back with an envelope containing a brief printed paragraph about the death of Amos Leonard in Buenos Aires.

"He is survived by a nephew, Baxter Leonard, of five hundred and one Park Avenue," announced Walbridge, reading from the clipping, "and a niece, Marjorie Leonard, of one seventeen Remson Street, Brooklyn—"

"That's it!" cried Brett. "Marjorie—what number Remson Street?"

"One seventeen. But you don't seem to be as interested in the nephew as the niece. Baxter Leonard's quite a cut-up."

"Know him?"

"No, only his reputation — the dance clubs he frequents and the money he spends up and down Broadway—but where are you going?"

Brett was already taking his leave.

"To the wilds of Brooklyn," he replied, on his way to the door. He heard Walbridge's voice calling after him.

"Better take a guide!"

III.

"MARJORIE LEONARD?"

"Yes," said the girl at the apartment door; then she added, with a start: "Oh, it's you?" She turned back. "Come in."

Brett followed her into a pleasantly furnished room.

"I'd planned a very sensible speech to explain my sudden appearance—" He glanced around and discovered some modeling stands in a corner draped with gray cloth—"but somehow, now that I'm looking at you again, I forget it."

She smiled, watching the play of expression in his agreeably eager face.

"You came to see my things."

She led the way to the corner and began withdrawing the draperies from various figures of clay. But he was watching her eyes rather than her work. However, it furnished them with a topic of conversation that would have led to endless ramifications if Brett hadn't soon broached the subject that had brought him there.

She listened with growing amazement.

"I suspected Mr. Ellsworth was deceiving me," she said. "And Baxter Leonard, too—they're working together, I suppose. Mr. Ellsworth is going to sell the property for Baxter, and I'm sure it's mine."

"The property is yours?" He caught his breath. "That fine old house they tore down?"

"Yes, but I had nothing to do with tearing it down. Baxter did that. You see, when Uncle Amos first went to live in Jersey he built a house far back from the river, nearly a mile; a queer house, half Colonial and half Moorish. But, a few years later, discovering a swamp near his land, and a glue factory about to be built within easy smell, he abandoned the house and built another. The second house was like the first, except that it was farther east, overlooking the Hudson."

"That's the one I painted." Brett leaned forward eagerly.

"Yes. Well, when Uncle Amos went to South America—he was always keen about traveling—he let the two houses fall into decay. They were like a legend to me when I was a child. After I began to study art Uncle Amos used to say he would give me the house above the river when he died, and I could turn it into a studio. Later, after my parents died, I went to Paris to live with an aunt. Then Uncle Amos died in Buenos Aires. On his deathbed he scribbled a brief will bequeathing one of the properties to me, the other to my cousin Baxter. When I got the news in Paris I heard that Uncle Amos had intrusted the carrying out of his will to Baxter, who was a lawyer just beginning to practice when Uncle Amos saw him last." She added dryly: "Baxter has changed since then."

"And he's stolen your property from you?"

She nodded, sadly, and explained that when she arrived from Paris two days ago she went at once to Baxter, who gave her the deed to the land near the swamp and kept the river estate for himself. The latter was worth fifty thousand dollars; the other was lucky if it ever brought five thousand.

As she went further into the details, Brett grew more and more excited.

He began to pace up and down the floor, suggesting ways of circumventing the real estate dealer. He looked around the room until his eye fell on the telephone.

"Will you make a fight? If I help you?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Fine!" He picked up the telephone and called Ellsworth's office. When finally he got the real estate man on the wire, at his home, he said: "I've changed my mind, Mr. Ellsworth. I'll come down to-morrow with my picture. And will you have Mr. Leonard there? What time? All right."

He turned to Miss Leonard jubilantly. "To-morrow at eleven the fight takes place. And I'll get my friend Walbridge to be on hand to help you, with a good lawyer he knows. What do you say?"

She moved to the window and looked thoughtfully out at the roof-tops, where towers and chimney-pots were fading in the twilight.

"I don't know what to say. You've set me to dreaming of wealth again—and traveling in Italy."

"Look!" He came up behind her. "The first stars are coming out, like white jewels, and yet the sky is as full of color as a palette of cobalt blue. And the air is warm. It's like a spring night in Venice."

She sighed.

"You make me feel as if I had already won back that fifty thousand dollars' worth of the Palisades. In view of that, I think I ought to take you out to dinner to celebrate. There's a delightful little French restaurant around the corner. Would you like to be taken to a French restaurant by an American girl on a Venetian night? Sounds cosmopolitan, doesn't it?" She laughed.

"I might add to the mixture of nationalities," he replied, thinking of his low funds, "by suggesting that we make it Dutch!"

IV.

WHEN Brett and Miss Leonard, accompanied by Walbridge and Mr. Hastings, the lawyer, entered the lobby of the Broadway building the next morning, it was decided among them that the painter should be the first to confront Ellsworth in his office. So, a few minutes later, Brett, with

his painting under his arm, led the way into the real estate dealer's private domain.

Ellsworth and his client were already waiting. Baxter Leonard, a sleek young man with a complacent air, sat lounging sidewise across an armchair, his long legs dangling. At Brett's entrance he merely turned his head, while Ellsworth, looking up from his desk, permitted a thin smile to cross his lips. But when he saw the figures appearing behind Brett, the smile faded.

"What's all this?" he demanded, getting to his feet. He looked at the group apprehensively.

"Miss Leonard is interested in art, too," explained Brett. He noticed that Baxter Leonard stirred abruptly out of his idle attitude and rose, his face suddenly pale. "And this," went on Brett, formally, "is Mr. Hastings, Miss Leonard's lawyer; and Mr. Walbridge, a reporter on the *Morning Press*."

"But—but—" Ellsworth glanced, dismayed, from one to the other. "What do we want of a reporter here?"

"Merely in the interests of truth. However, Mr. Ellsworth, if you think the same interests can be served without Mr. Walbridge's presence, I'll ask him to step out of the room." He turned to his friend. "Do you mind, Wally?"

Walbridge nodded and went out.

Brett elevated his painting to a position of prominence on the corner of Ellsworth's desk and stood holding it there.

"Exhibit B," he announced cheerfully.

Ellsworth sat down again, his face grim.

At once Mr. Hastings stepped forward and began speaking.

"This matter should be quickly disposed of, now that my client enjoys the benefit of proper advice. Miss Leonard is the rightful owner of that piece of the late Amos Leonard's property which stands in Fort Lee, overlooking the Hudson, whereas the other parcel of land mentioned in the will, standing far back from the shore, is the one which belongs to Mr. Leonard—"

"That's not true!" broke in Ellsworth defiantly.

"Bunk!" commented Leonard, leaning over the back of the armchair.

"My client," continued Mr. Hastings evenly, "can produce letters showing that it had long been her uncle's intention to give her the property overlooking the Hudson. Secondly, we can prove that the house actually bequeathed to Miss Leonard was the one close to the river— No! don't interrupt me, please!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings as Ellsworth started to protest. Baxter Leonard moved nervously around in front of his armchair and sat down. Mr. Hastings took a paper from his pocket. "Wait till I'm through," he advised. "I have here the deed to the property farther back from the river. This deed I will hand you, Mr. Ellsworth, in exchange for the one which rightfully belongs to Miss Leonard. It is known to her and others that when Amos Leonard abandoned his first house and built the second, he had it constructed exactly like the first except in one detail—the windows. He had seven windows facing the south instead of six. He was very particular about that."

"Crazy!" muttered Ellsworth.

"Not at all," objected Mr. Hastings. "He found that as he grew older the sunlight became dearer to him. That's very natural. And when he came to make his will on his death-bed, he found that the simplest way to differentiate between his two properties was by their windows—'to my niece the property on which stands the house with seven windows facing the south; to my nephew, the house with six windows.' Brief and succinct. A man doesn't waste breath on his deathbed. I am telling you this, Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. Leonard, to show you that we understand our case thoroughly. And, thirdly"—Mr. Hastings quickened his voice—"we can prove that Mr. Baxter Leonard, with your coöperation, Mr. Ellsworth, was in an unreasonable rush to tear down both of Amos Leonard's old houses as soon as he heard the terms of the will, thus destroying all evidence of their respective windows. The identification of the house in question is established, curiously enough, but beyond any doubt, by a work of art entitled—by what title do you call your picture, Mr. Brett?"

Brett smiled grimly.

"The House of Too Many Windows."

Ellsworth squirmed in his chair.

"Exactly," commented Mr. Hastings. "And, fourthly, Mr. Baxter Leonard had no right to tear the house down—not both of them. The unlawful destruction of property is a crime. I have here a warrant, already drawn up, demanding Mr. Leonard's arrest. The circumstances have already been explained to Judge McClellan, who is waiting in court prepared to sign the warrant. He became very interested in this unusual attempt to deprive a girl of her inheritance—just as Mr. Walbridge of the *Morning Press* is interested."

"Threats!" gasped Ellsworth.

Baxter Leonard sat holding onto the arms of his chair. His face was white, his hands trembling.

"You—you can't scare me!" he cried hoarsely.

"We prefer to settle this matter outside the courts," said Mr. Hastings, "but it seems you are going to force us into litigation."

Ellsworth suddenly hunched forward in his chair and pointed at Brett's painting.

"Do you think that proves anything?" he demanded scornfully. "Just because there are seven windows in it?"

Brett faced him.

"You were extremely anxious to purchase this proof yesterday. I was almost persuaded you had become a connoisseur."

"It might be a picture of *any* house."

"But there are a dozen witnesses, good citizens of Fort Lee, who watched me at work on it last October, who leaned over my shoulder with good intentions and spoke of the picture's verisimilitude—that means its truth to life, Mr. Ellsworth."

"Hah!" snorted Ellsworth. "You can't pull that on me. Why"—his voice rose to a shrill cry—"you might have painted it only this week. When there wasn't a window left in the house!"

Head thrust forward, belligerent, he squinted at Brett triumphantly.

In answer Brett slowly rubbed a finger across the painting and, leaning over the desk, extended the finger dramatically toward Ellsworth's nose.

"See? The paint is dry. Experts will testify that this picture was done at least six months ago."

There was silence in the room. Ellsworth's jaw dropped, and he stared at his visitors discomfited. For a moment no one moved, then Brett turned to Mr. Hastings.

"Shall I deliver the warrant at the judge's chambers?"

The lawyer nodded. "Yes, and take Miss Leonard with you."

They started for the door, but a cry halted them.

"No, no!" Baxter Leonard sprang to his feet.

They watched him as he stood speechless, afflicted with a choking in his throat.

"Give it to her," he said weakly.

"What?" cried Ellsworth, glaring at him.

"Yes," nodded Leonard, and sank back in his chair, breathless.

Ellsworth's hands moved grudgingly toward a drawer. There was a crestfallen look on his face as the exchange of deeds took place; then he slammed the drawer shut bitterly.

Miss Leonard, however, stepped forward smiling.

"At last!" she cried happily, as the lawyer put the paper in her hand.

"My congratulations," he offered. "I've enjoyed this immensely."

Brett gave a sigh of relief. He tucked his picture under his arm and moved with the others toward the door, pausing for a last glance at Ellsworth and Leonard slumped down in their chairs. Ellsworth seemed to have sunk the lower.

"Poor man! My art has been an awful blow to him."

He followed Miss Leonard out of the office, sharing her elation. They stopped in the hall, and her animated brown eyes looked into his, enraptured.

"What can I say to you?" she asked, putting out her hands.

"Well—" He glanced swiftly around at the severe walls and passing tenants, before his gaze returned to her eyes and lingered there joyously—"this is hardly the place for it!"

The Further Adventures of Zorro*

Part IV

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WILD RIDE.

THE pirates evidently had decided to make the fight at some little distance from their huts and adobe houses, so they rushed forward, shrieking their battle-cries, brandishing their weapons, shouting and cursing to give themselves courage. The great voice of Barbados rolled out above the din in a multitude of commands. The shrill voice of Sanchez echoed him.

The *caballeros* advanced in a perfect line, their shining blades held ready, grim and silent now, their minds intent upon the bloody business confronting them. Señor Zorro, they could see, was making his way down the slope toward them as speedily as possible, shouting that he was coming, still singing bits of his song between his shouts.

The pirates had a few firearms, but little ammunition for them. And they were more used to fighting hand-to-hand with naked blades. Yet they discharged their firearms first as the *caballeros* advanced, and took a bloody toll. The *caballeros* had nothing but their blades, for they had come from Don Diego Vega's bachelor supper, and they had worn no firearms to that affair.

There was a moment of silence pregnant with dire possibilities, the lull before the storm—and then the two forces met with a crash! Blades clanged together, men gasped and fought and fell.

The line of the *caballeros* was broken almost immediately, and each found himself the particular foe of three or more pirates. Yet they fought like maniacs, silently at times, right merrily at times, feeling that they were doomed, but determined to do what damage they could before the battle went entirely against them.

And then there was a sudden tumult on the opposite side of the pirates' camp, and into it and among the huts charged the crew of the trading schooner, the captain at their head.

But the pirates were so great in numbers that they were disconcerted only for an instant. From the huts and the adobe buildings poured men Barbados had been general enough to hold in reserve. The crew

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of the trading schooner was overwhelmed. The men of the sea fought valiantly, but they died with their captain.

And now Señor Zorro had reached the bottom of the slope, and, blade in hand, rushed to join his friends. His sword flashed as he entered the fight and tried to turn the tide of battle. His shouts rang out above the bedlam.

"Ha!" he cried. "At the scum, *caballeros!* They cannot stand against proper men!"

"Ha!" roared the great voice of Sergeant Gonzales, as he fought off two of the pirate crew with his long sword. "To me, Señor Zorro! We'll carve a pathway through the swine!"

But Señor Zorro did not hear him. He had seen that his old friend, Don Audre Ruiz, was sorely pressed, and he fought his way quickly to Don Audre's side. His blade seemed to be half a score as it flashed in and out and downed one of Don Audre's opponents. Like a man possessed, Señor Zorro pressed forward again, straight at the pirates in the foreground.

"*Atención!* A *caballero's* near—"

He sang it as he fought, stopping the song now and then for an instant to grunt as he made an unusually hard thrust. The men before him broke and fled, and Señor Zorro, with Don Audre at his side, seized the minor advantage of the moment. The other *caballeros* rallied and followed.

"The ghost!" one of the pirates shrieked. "It is the ghost from the sea!"

"Ha!" Señor Zorro cried, and cut down another man. "Ha, scum! So you fear ghosts? Have at you—"

"Pirates, eh?" Sergeant Gonzales was crying, puffing and blowing out his great cheeks as he fought. "Stand, pirates, and fight like men! Is this a fight or a test of speed, dolts and fools? Meal mush and goat's milk!"

"A ghost!" another man shrieked.

Barbados whirled around in time to see Sanchez, a look of terror in his face, about to retreat. He took in the situation at a glance.

"It is no ghost, fiends of hell!" he shrieked at his men. "'Tis this Señor Zorro somebody has saved from the sea! At him! Fetch him to me alive! Does a ghost fight with a blade that runs red? Get the fiend!"

His words carried weight. The pirates gathered their courage and surged forward again. The other men came running from the huts and the adobe buildings, now that the crew of the trading schooner had been handled. The *caballeros* found their line broken once more, found that they were being scattered.

Still side by side, Señor Zorro and Don Audre Ruiz fought as well as they could. But here in the open they could not get their backs against a wall. However, they did the next best thing—they stood back to back and engaged a circle of foes.

The fight swirled around them. Señor Zorro's face wore an expression of anxiety now. He knew, fully as well as did Don Audre Ruiz, that this wonderful show of courage and blade skill was availing the *caballeros* nothing. Slowly but surely, the pirates were traveling the road to triumph.

Señor Zorro was of gentle blood, and could have died as well as the best of them, a song upon his lips and laughter in his eyes. But he felt at this juncture that his life was not his own to throw away recklessly. Did he die with his friends, the *señorita* would have none to give her aid.

He would have to live, to win free if the tide of battle was against him, and then take his chance at being able to return and rescue his lady. He glanced around quickly as he fought. More than half the *caballeros* had been wounded or slain. And still more pirates were rushing forward, it appeared, with the intention of making an end of things.

And now there came an added menace. Among the huts there was a ramshackle corral, in which the pirates had put a number of blooded horses stolen from *hacienda* owners. And now some of the fighting men crashed against the insecure fencing and demolished it, and the animals, frightened at the din of battle, rushed through the broken place and into the open.

The fighting men, the clashing of blades, the shouts and screams seemed to infuriate the beasts. The smell of blood was in

their nostrils. The horses charged wildly through the throng, upsetting *caballeros* and pirates alike. One noble stallion brushed aside the foes of Señor Zorro and Don Audre Ruiz, but separated them also. Their enemies rushed toward them again before they could get together—and they were no longer back to back.

Their case was desperate now. Each was surrounded and overwhelmed. Señor Zorro fought with what skill he could, keeping a wide circle with his flashing blade. He heard the voice of Sergeant Gonzales roaring in the distance. He heard, also, the thunderous voice of Barbados.

"Alive! Take them alive!" the pirate chief was screeching. "There will be rich ransom! Ransom and torture! Take them alive, fiends!"

Sanchez echoed the command, and the pirates shrieked in answer that they understood. And Señor Zorro and his friends understood also. The pirates would have rare sport baiting *caballeros* who were not ransomed speedily enough to suit them. Revenge and profit would be their lot.

The *caballeros* wasted no breath in speech. They had heard, and well they understood the meaning. They fought like maniacs, and maimed and slew their men. But there was no chance of ultimate victory, for the numbers against them were too great.

Here and there in the open space a chorus of fiendish shrieks told that a captive had been taken, his sword whipped from his hand. Señor Zorro suddenly found himself hard pressed, but fought free and made an effort to reach the side of Don Audre Ruiz again. But that was no easy feat, he discovered.

"Get that Señor Zorro!" Barbados was shouting. "A reward to the men who fetch him to me alive! Ha! This time we'll make a ghost of him indeed!"

Señor Zorro knew a touch of despair for a moment, but he fought it off quickly. If he were captured, the Señorita Lolita would have no protector, and would be at the mercy of these fiends and Captain Ramón. Were it not better to escape, to make an effort to return later, than to fight until death at the side of his friend?

"Audre!" he cried.

"*Si?*"

"Can you win free?"

"The curs surround me!"

"One of us must win free!" Zorro cried. "There is the *señorita* to be considered!"

"Get away, Don Diego, my friend!" Audre Ruiz shouted. "Save yourself, and the saints bless you—"

"I will return!" Señor Zorro shouted the promise. "Let the beasts take you, Audre! Alive, you may be of some service! Dead—you are gone forever!"

Señor Zorro did not listen for an answer. Two determined pirates were before him. But they hesitated in their attack, because they were eager to take him alive and so gain the reward that Barbados had promised. And their hesitation gave Señor Zorro the opportunity he desired.

He hurled himself forward, stretched one man on the ground and put the other in momentary flight. Others rushed at him from the side, and for an instant, as he turned, he had a vision of Don Audre Ruiz being disarmed. And then he whirled again, darted swiftly away, fighting to clear a path.

Down toward him rushed the big stallion, still frightened because of the din of battle. Señor Zorro swept another man from before him and sprang at the horse. He went upon the animal's back, lurched sickeningly for an instant, and righted himself. His balance regained, he kicked at the flanks of his mount. It was all that he could do. The horse was without saddle or bridle, without even a halter.

The animal hesitated, and Señor Zorro kicked again with what strength he could. And the horse, suddenly terrified, sprang forward like some supernatural beast. The pirates went down before him and before Señor Zorro's blade.

Up the slope the big stallion started, almost running down Sergeant Gonzales and the pirates who had already taken him prisoner. Past Fray Felipe he sprang, and Señor Zorro saw the aged *fray's* hand raised in blessing.

Like a wild animal the stallion dashed at a group of the victorious pirates, who shrieked and scattered to either side.

Señor Zorro rode erect, his sword flashing, and he was laughing wildly, like a man on the verge of hysterics.

"*Señores!* Have you ever seen this one?" he screeched.

He leaned to one side as the plunging horse went forward, locked his heels in the animal's flanks. He grasped one of the pirates and lifted him from the ground, whirled him around and sent him flying through space.

He would have guided the animal back and made an effort to disconcert his foes further, but the horse could not be guided. And so Señor Zorro rode on up the slope and away from the pirates' camp—rode his fiery, unmanageable mount straight at the fringe of trees on the top of the hill.

From the distance came Barbados, fiendish, cursing, because the man he most wanted to capture had made an escape.

And Señor Zorro answered it, also from a distance, with a burst of song:

"*Atención!* A *caballero's* near—"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOPE IS CRUSHED AGAIN.

SEÑORITA LOLITA PULIDO passed into the store room of the adobe building with her head erect and a look of pride in her face, as has been said. But when the heavy door was closed behind her, and she heard a bar dropped into place, she changed swiftly.

For a moment she leaned against the door, listening to Barbados and Inez, his woman. Then Barbados went away, and the woman also, and the *señorita* dropped upon a stool that happened to be in one corner of the room, and buried her face in her hands.

There seemed no hope left. Señor Zorro, Don Diego Vega, her beloved, was at the bottom of the sea, she supposed. She was in the hands of these pirates, being kept a prize for a man she detested and loathed. There seemed no way of escape.

But the *señorita* had determined her course. She would die rather than be shamed, she told herself. She would join Don Diego in the land of to-morrow, be his celestial bride. The blood of the Pulidos coursed her veins, and told her to do that.

It was dark in the store room, but presently the door was opened and the woman Inez entered with a small torch made of palm fiber and tallow. She fastened the torch to the wall, went out again, and returned with food. A jug of water, some poorly cooked goat flesh and a pulpy mass, the like of which the *señorita* never had seen before, constituted the meal.

"Eat, wench!" Inez commanded. "Eat, and drink your fill of the water! A dainty morsel you are, but there be some men who like women of a different sort. Ha! 'Twould do you no good to make merry eyes at my Barbados!"

The *señorita* scarcely understood, for she had not been taught to make eyes at any man. She drank deeply of the water, for she was thirsty, and she wanted to eat, but did not like the appearance of the food.

"Too dainty for pirate fare, eh?" Inez sneered, rubbing her fat nose with a forefinger. "Wait until real hunger gnaws at your stomach, pretty wench, and then you'll eat!"

The *señorita* got up from the stool suddenly and stepped forward. Her hands were at her sides, her chin was raised, there was pleading in her face.

"You are a woman," she said, softly. "In your heart there must be some sympathy for other women."

"Not much," Inez acknowledged. "Few women have shown sympathy or kindness toward me. I was a poor girl working on a *hacienda,* and listened to the lies of a handsome traveler. And when my fault was discovered it was the women who turned their backs. A woman of your class, wench, kicked me out!"

"That is the way of the world," Lolita told her. "Still, you must have in your breast some inkling of pity. Would see the thing happen to me that is going to happen if I cannot avoid it?"

"Ha!" Inez laughed. "What would you?"

"Help me get away!" the *señorita* begged. "Help me to be free, and in some manner I'll get up El Camino Real to Reina de Los Angeles. I have friends. In time

I'll send you more money than Barbados will get from Captain Ramón."

"And Barbados would take the money from me, slit my throat, and find him another woman," Inez replied, laughing coarsely. "I know nothing of his business deals with Captain Ramón or any other. Nor do I care to know them!"

"Have you no pity?"

"I have nothing to do with it," the woman declared. "I have orders to give you water and food and a light, and I have done so. That is the end."

Before the *señorita* could speak again the woman had gone out and closed the door. Señorita Lolita heard the bar dropped into place once more. She went slowly back to the stool, and managed to eat a few morsels of the goat's flesh, after which she drank more of the water.

By the light of the torch she inspected her prison room. There was nothing in it except some old casks that once had contained olives and tallow. There was but the one door, and only a single window, and the window was small and had bars of metal across it.

Escape was impossible, the *señorita* decided. She went back to the stool again, and sat upon it and buried her face in her hands once more. The future seemed to hold nothing but death and disgrace, and she knew how to choose between them, if the chance was given her.

Tired, exhausted by the events of the day, she found sleep descending upon her. She left the stool and curled up in a corner on the floor, determined to keep awake. But she could not. Her head nodded, and after a time she fell asleep.

A din awakened her. The torch had burned out and the light of day was pouring through the little window. The little *señorita* was stiff and uncomfortable. She got up and hurried to the window, and by standing upon one of the empty casks managed to peer out of it.

She could see a portion of the camp. The pirates were arming themselves and rushing here and there like madmen. She could hear the great voice of Barbados as he issued his commands. And then there was a lull, and she heard singing in the distance. Another lull and she heard a single voice raised in song:

"Atención! A caballero's near—"

Her heart almost stopped beating for a moment. But in the next instant she told herself that she had been foolish to hope. It was Señor Zorro's song, but he was dead at the bottom of the sea. And other *caballeros* knew it. It was some *caballero* singing in the distance. But that gave her a small measure of hope, for it meant that Don Diego's friends were at hand and would make an effort to rescue her.

There was another time of comparative silence, and then the battle began. The *señorita* could see none of it at first, for she was on the wrong side of the building. But she could hear the shrieks and cries, the ringing of blades, the screeches of pain and curses of anger.

She saw the crew of the schooner attack from the other side, and shrieked her horror as the pirates cut them down. And then the fight was out of her sight again.

Down from the cask she dropped. She ran across to the door and pounded upon it with her tiny fists, struck it repeatedly, until her hands were cut and bleeding. After a time it was opened, and the woman Inez stood before her, thrust her away and entered.

"What is it, wench?" she demanded. "More food and water?"

"No!" she gasped. "I—what is taking place? There is so much confusion—"

"A battle is taking place, wench!" the woman declared, bracing her fists against her hips. "Some *caballeros* came in a ship and saw fit to attack the camp. Many of them will see nothing more."

"And—and the battle—"

"How goes it, mean you? Ha, wench! The *caballeros* are being cut down, of course. We have them three to one! Some are to be taken prisoners, some held for ransom, others tortured. It will be a lesson to the men of gentle blood not to fight with pirates! Gentlemen are only gentlemen—but men are men!"

"Gentlemen are always gentlemen, and sometimes mere men are beasts." the *señorita* told her.

"How is this? Do you want me to rock your head with a blow, wench? Ha! There will be rare sport if this Señor Zorro is taken prisoner."

"Zorro?" the *señorita* gasped.

"The same, wench! You were to wed with him, I have been told. Ha! He'll not be ready for his wedding when Barbados has finished with him!"

"Señor Zorro is dead!"

"I know that he walked the plank. And the fools thought that he was a ghost when he appeared here. But somebody must have saved him from the sea. He's out there now, fighting. They will make a captive of him!"

The *señorita's* heart beat wildly. Then it had been Zorro she had heard singing in the distance!

But in the next instant she told herself that it could not be. Zorro had walked the plank with a weight fastened to his wrists. The pirates were mistaken. It was some other *caballero* who looked like Señor Zorro, who fought as he fought, and acted as he acted.

She threw aside the momentary hope, and crept toward the woman Inez again. If the fight was going against the *caballeros,* if the pirates were to be victors, she had scant time.

The *señorita* began acting as she never acted before, and though she was new to the game, her woman's intuition, her terror and her desperate need served her well.

"So the pirates are to win!" she said, laughing lightly. "And there will be a lot of ransom money and loot."

"How is this?" Inez shrieked. "You, a prisoner, seem joyful that the rescue is not accomplished."

"I am a prisoner—*sí!*" the *señorita* said. "But perhaps I shall be more soon."

"What mean you?" the woman gasped.

"Perhaps it might have been in my mind that it would be better to have a real man than wed a gentleman of noble blood. Is it not peculiar that Barbados took me the night before my wedding?"

"Ha! Can you speak with plain meaning?" the woman asked.

"Did you believe the story of Captain Ramón?" the *señorita* demanded. "I did, too, at first! And then I thought differently. You are getting old, you see, and fat."

"Wench!" the woman cried, threatening her.

"If you strike me, Barbados will punish!"

"Barbados punish me? Ha!"

"Are you so easily fooled?" the *señorita* asked. "It is plain to me what is to happen. Barbados means to have me for himself. There is no escape. So I may as well make the best of it. And since I am to be the woman of the pirate chief, I must be loyal to him. If things must be so, is it strange that I hope he gets much ransom and loot?"

"By the devils of Hades!" the woman swore. "If I thought this to be truth—"

"Can you not see that it is?" the *señorita* queried. "Captain Ramón may have dealings with Barbados, but it does not follow that Captain Ramón is to have me. That was just a little falsehood to fool you, possibly."

"Ha! So you would take my place?" the woman cried.

The *señorita* recoiled as the other approached, and held up one of her hands.

"I have no desire to take your place," she declared. "But since I cannot help myself, what else is there to do?"

"I could kill you with my bare hands!"

"And then Barbados would kill you in turn and go find himself another woman."

"Ha! I could kill him!"

"You could not!" the *señorita* said.

The woman Inez was quiet for a moment, and then: "You are right—I could not," she replied.

"There is a way."

"And how, wench?"

"Help me to escape," the *señorita* said. "If I am gone, you are in safe possession of the affections of Barbados. He will not raid again soon, will not soon have a chance to find him another woman. And you can, in the meantime, win back his love again."

"Ha! If I aid you to escape he will kill me!"

"Make it appear that I escaped myself," the *señorita* replied. "You are strong. You can tear out that window until it is large

enough for me to get through. Let him think that there was some tool in the storeroom and that I did the work."

"Ha! If I thought you were speaking truth—"

"Very well!" said the *señorita*. "Wait and see whether it is the truth."

The woman hesitated, searching the *señorita's* face with her keen glance. Then she grunted and hurried into the other room, while Lolita Pulido waited in fear and trembling, wondering what was to come now. Had the woman gone to tell Barbados the story?

But presently Inez returned, and she carried a peculiar strip of iron with one sharp end, a bit of wreckage, perhaps, from some ill-fated ship.

"Watch you at the door, on the inside!" she commanded. "Do not go into the other room. They are still fighting and perhaps there will be time."

The *señorita* hurried across to the door, hope singing in her heart again. There she watched and listened to the din of battle. All would be well if she could escape in the confusion and get away from the camp. She could reach El Camino Real and make her way along it. If she could reach San Diego de Alcála, she would find friends.

She turned and looked at the woman. Inez was tearing out the masonry and adobe around the window. The metal bars already were inside the room and out of the way.

"Be quick!" the *señorita* said. "I am small, and do not need a very large space."

"It is done!" the woman replied.

She hurried back to the middle of the room, and the *señorita* turned to look. The aperture was large enough, she knew at a glance. She could crawl through, jump to the ground, go up the slope, and reach the fringe of trees that she could see in the distance. Once more hope came to her.

"I must have some old clothes—ragged and dirty clothes," she said. "I will leave some of these."

The woman did not reply, but she hurried from the storeroom with a gleam of avarice in her eyes. She was more than willing to trade ragged garments for some of silk and satin.

Back she came, after a time, and the *señorita* pulled off her gown and put on the ragged one, shuddering as she did so, not because of the rags but because of the dirt. She streaked her face with dirt from the floor, and washed her hands in it, disarranged her hair, and threw a ragged shawl over her head.

"A woman does not wear a torn shawl, a ragged dress, and fine slippers at the same time," Inez observed.

The *señorita* kicked off her slippers and thrust her feet into the filthy sandals the hag furnished her. She hurried to the window, the woman before her. But Inez grasped her by an arm and held her back.

"Not that way!" the woman gasped. "It is too late! That way is guarded!"

The heart of the *señorita* sank again. She scrambled to the top of the cask she had used before, and peered out. Within sight there were half a dozen men guarding that side of the camp against a possible surprise. If she got through the window they would see her, block her path up the slope and toward the trees, and investigate.

"Is there no way out?" the *señorita* cried in despair.

"There is only the front."

"Then let me out the front way. The men are fighting, and perhaps they will not notice me if I go out that way, and make haste up the slope."

"All women and children have been ordered to remain in the huts while there is fighting."

"They will do no more than shriek at me to get inside again," the *señorita* said. "I can pretend to be frightened, and run. I can get away, if you'll let me out!"

"And I be blamed for it!"

"Not so!" she cried. "Bar this door. I'll slip out the front, and they will think that I came around the building. You can pretend that you believe me to be in the store room. When they open the door and find me gone, find the window torn out, they'll think that I did it, and got out that way. If anybody is punished, it will be the guards outside."

"I am afraid!" the woman said.

"And are you not afraid, also, of seeing another woman in your place here?"

The face of Inez grew purple for an instant, and her eyes blazed. Suddenly she strode across to the door, opened it, and looked out upon the fighting. She closed the door again, and turned back to face the *señorita.*

"The fighting now is at some distance," she said. "There is a chance. Wait!"

She whirled around to bar the door of the storeroom. The little *señorita* waited, trying to be calm, though her heart was pounding at her ribs. She was to escape at last! She could get up the slope, hurry through the trees—

"You must use speed!" the woman was informing her. "And if you are caught, you must take all the blame. Barbados would kill me if he knew."

"Give me a dagger," the *señorita* begged. "Then, if I am caught, I'll do that which will render me speechless!"

"Ha!"

"I mean it! Death would be welcome to the other!"

The woman hesitated a moment, and then reached beneath her ragged shawl and drew a dagger out. The *señorita* clutched it, and hid it away in her bosom.

For another moment they faced each other. And then the woman Inez lurched across the room toward the door, the *señorita* trotting along at her heels.

And hope turned to black despair once more in the twinkling of an eye! For the door suddenly was thrown open, and before them stood—Captain Ramón!

CHAPTER XIX.

DOUBLE-FACED.

THERE was a moment of astonishment for all three of them. Then the Señorita Lolita gave a little cry of mingled fright and despair, and recoiled against the wall. Señor Zorro dead, the pirates winning the battle against the *caballeros,* and before her the man she loathed and feared! The future seemed very dark, indeed.

"*Dios!*" she breathed.

But the woman Inez, after blinking her eyes at the unexpected apparition, screeched her rage and darted to a corner, where she picked up a heavy bar of iron. She whirled toward the intruder, the bar raised to strike. But Captain Ramón laughed and held up his hand.

"Do not be afraid of me, hag!" he told the woman. "I wear the uniform of the Governor's soldiery, it is true, but I am the good friend of Barbados! I am Captain Ramón, of Reina de Los Angeles!"

"Ha!" the woman gasped. She dropped the bar of iron and stood with arms akimbo. "So you are Captain Ramón?"

"*Sí!*"

"That must be true, else you would not have lived to get to this building," Inez said. "And why are you here?"

"To see the little lady standing behind you," Ramón said, smiling. "She has been kept safe, I see."

"You are to claim her?"

"What else?"

"Ha!" Inez gasped. It flashed through her mind, now, that Barbados really had no personal interest in the *señorita,* and she believed, also, that she had almost been tricked into aiding an important prisoner to escape. A glance at the *señorita's* face confirmed her suspicion, for Lolita was not acting now. Inez realized that she would have to speak quickly to save herself.

"You come in good time," she declared to the captain. "The wench has been kept in the storeroom. But an instant ago, hearing no sounds within, I unbarred and opened the door. And she had enlarged the window, and dressed in those rags. She intended escaping, *señor!* Had it not been for me now she would be gone."

"You have done well," Ramón declared. "That is the door to the storeroom?"

"*Sí!*" Inez answered. She dropped the bar and threw the door open. Captain Ramón peered inside, then turned and smiled again, first at the hag, and then at the *señorita.*

"It is indeed well," he said. "*Señorita,* you might have been injured on the outside, for men are fighting. And your present garments are scarce suited to your station in life. Your dainty face is streaked with dirt, too, and your hands soiled."

"Your presence soils me more!" the *señorita* said.

"You prefer pirates, *señorita?*"

"There are several grades of depravity," she said, "and pirates may not be the lowest."

"Ha! A biting tongue in a sweet face!" Captain Ramón declared.

"More biting than the blade you wear at your side, *señor!* Why do you not show your true colors? Why not go out and fight with your friends, the pirates and thieves and murderers, against men of gentle blood?"

Captain Ramón bowed in mockery. "If you will be kind enough to glance through the open door, *señorita,* you will perceive that the fighting is at an end," he replied. "What *caballeros* are not dead have been taken prisoners. And the women and children are mocking them. Go, hag, and mock with the others! I'll guard the *señorita* well."

He leered at the woman as he spoke, and she grinned and shuffled from the building. She was eager to get at Barbados and tell him how the *señorita* had attempted an escape, and how she, the loyal and faithful Inez, had prevented it.

"Into the storeroom, *señorita!*" Captain Ramón commanded when they were alone.

"I prefer this, *señor.*"

"Quickly!" he commanded. "We'll close the door. We do not wish to be overheard!"

"What mean you?"

"Can you not understand?" the captain cried. He thrust her before him into the storeroom, and closed the door behind him. He darted across to the window and looked out, acting mysteriously.

"If you would rid me of your foul presence—" the *señorita* began.

Captain Ramón whirled toward her. On the long, hot ride from Reina de Los Angeles, which had taken him the better part of two days, and during which he had not spared mounts, he had thought out everything.

He was playing a sort of double game, this Captain Ramón. He wished to reinstate himself in the good graces of better men, he wanted to make the *señorita* believe that he had rendered her a great service and try to win her regard openly, and he wished to aid his master, the Governor, in acquiring credit in the southland, where he had small credit now.

He had heard, on his way to the pirate camp, that Señor Zorro had walked the plank. He could take the helpless *señorita* now for his own, but if he did that he would have to become a renegade forever, live like an outcast. And Captain Ramón loved his uniform, and wealth and power.

So why not play the pirates and honest men against each other and make a double winning? He had had ample time to think it out. And so, as he faced the *señorita's* scorn, he pretended surprise that she did not understand.

"Foul presence, *señorita?*" he said. "After I have risked so much to be of service to you?"

"Of service to me?" she cried. "When I was abducted by your orders, when my home was burned and my father cut down?"

"Have the beasts told you that?" Ramón asked. "That is because Barbados knew I was infatuated with you. He believed I would thank him for doing such a thing."

"You are allied with pirates!" she accused.

"Listen, *señorita,* for the love of the saints!"

"The saints are better off your lips, *señor!*"

"Attend me!" he commanded again. "It is a game we have been playing."

"A sorry game!"

"*Señorita,* by your gentle blood I ask you to give me your ear! I have but pretended friendship with these pirates, that the soldiers may take them later, and hang them all."

"What monstrous falsehood is this?" she asked.

"I beg your attention, *señorita!* Some of them may be coming soon. I have pretended to be in league with them. They raided Reina de Los Angeles while I and my soldiers were gone. I have followed swiftly to rescue you. They think that I am a friend. But now, assured of your safety, I can act speedily. Let them continue thinking, for the time being, that I accept you as a prize. I shall ride away to San Diego de Alcála, which is but a few

miles, fetch the troopers from there, rescue you, release the *caballeros* now held as prisoners, and wipe out this pirate brood!"

"But why—" she began.

"It was the only way, *señorita*. The soldiers are few, and the pirates have been able to strike the coast where there were no troopers handy. It is a trap that we have arranged for them. Perhaps it may not seem a gentle thing to do—but one cannot be gentle with pirates."

"I wish that I could believe you," she said.

"Believe me, *señorita!* I love you so much—"

"I am betrothed," she said simply.

"But I have grave news for you. I have been told that Don Diego Vega is no more, that these beasts forced him, as Señor Zorro, to walk the plank."

"I was there," she said, her eyes filling with tears. "I saw it. Nevertheless, I am betrothed to him, *señor,* now and forever, in life and in death!"

"That is because your grief is new," the captain said. "You are young, *señorita,* you have a life to live. If you would live it with me—"

"*Señor!*" she warned.

"I can understand why you dislike me a bit," he said. "Perhaps, in the past, I did some things that a gentleman should not do. But it was because of my great love for you, because I was afraid of losing you."

"*Señor,* let us talk of other things, if we must talk," the *señorita* begged.

"Do you not realize, *señorita,* that, if I wish it, you are in my power?"

"Now you are showing your true colors!" she said.

"Not so! I am showing you that I am not taking advantage of the situation," he declared. "I intend rescuing you and the friends these pirates now hold as prisoners. I am risking my life to do it. And, if I succeed, cannot you look upon me with some favor?"

"If I have misjudged you, *señor,* I am indeed sorry," she replied. "But it is useless to talk of such things. My heart is with Don Diego Vega, in life and in death!"

"Perhaps in the future—"

"There can be no hope, *señor!*"

Captain Ramón's face flushed and his eyes blazed for an instant. But he still had his game to play, the many-sided game that he hoped would result in great fortune.

"If you could only believe me!" he said.

"Perhaps—after you have demonstrated your loyalty."

"Then I go now to talk to Barbados, then to San Diego de Alcála for the troopers. Guard yourself well until my return. I must pretend that I wish you watched, kept from escaping. A false move, *señorita,* and all of us are lost!"

"I can only do as you say," she said. "I will be guarded in any case."

"Come into the other room! I'll call the hag! And I'll return to you before I ride for San Diego de Alcála, if there are more plans you should know."

Captain Ramón opened the door, bowed low as she passed through it, and looked after her with the corners of his lips curled. Then he hurried toward the front, calling for Inez.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNEXPECTED.

CAPTAIN RAMÓN bade the woman guard the *señorita* well, and then hurried from the adobe building. Just in front of it he stopped to look over the scene. Dead men were scattered on the ground at a distance. There were more dead men around the huts, where the crew of the trading schooner had made their last stand.

The wounded were shrieking and groaning, and some of the pirates were giving them a rough surgery. Others were hurrying the *caballero* prisoners toward another adobe building, where they were to be kept. Women and children ran beside them, shrieking insults, hurling small stones. But the *caballeros* held their heads proudly, and laughed and jested with one another.

Captain Ramón darted to the end of the building, so he would not be seen by the prisoners. It was not in his mind to be suspected at the outset. The game he was playing was one of hazard, and he knew

that the slightest mistake would be disastrous.

He had planned with Barbados to conduct the raid, and thereby had gained the pirate chief's confidence. And now he had further plans. He would tell Barbados that he would draw to the camp the troopers at San Diego de Alcála. Barbados and his men could ambush them and wipe them out. Then the pirates could cross the hills and raid and loot rich San Diego de Alcála.

But the captain intended no such thing in reality. Knowing how Barbados would prepare the ambush, he would lead the troopers in such a manner that the pirates would be wiped out to a man. Then the *caballeros* and the *señorita* could be rescued, and Captain Ramón would pose as their heroic rescuer. He hoped in this manner to regain the good will of the *caballeros* and a better standing with them, and to earn the gratitude of the *señorita* also.

Word of the exploit would run up and down El Camino Real. Men whose hands were now raised against the licentious and unscrupulous Governor would think better of him because the pirates had been wiped out. The Governor, in turn, would be grateful to Captain Ramón. And he would order Don Carlos Pulido, who was not dead of his wound, to give the hand of his daughter, Lolita, to Captain Ramón. Don Carlos scarce could refuse without endangering his fortunes further.

It was a pretty plot, the plot of a master rogue willing to sell friends and foes alike to advance his own interests. Captain Ramón grinned as he thought of it, and twirled his mustache, and marched around the corner of the building and across the open space toward where Barbados was standing and shouting orders concerning the disposition of the corpses.

And suddenly the captain found himself confronted by a man, and looked up quickly to see the burning eyes of old Fray Felipe fastened upon his face.

"What does an officer of the Governor in such a place, unless he be a prisoner of war?" Fray Felipe demanded.

Captain Ramón bowed before him. "Perhaps there are things that you do not understand, *fray*," he replied.

"And perhaps, *commandante*, there are things that I do understand!" Fray Felipe said. "Perhaps years of service in behalf of humanity have taught me to read a man's face and mind. Rogue, brute, traitor!"

"You are a *fray*, and wear a gown that should be respected, but do not tempt me too far!" Captain Ramón said angrily. "Say your prayers, and leave men's work to men!"

The captain bowed again, walked around the *fray*, and hurried to the side of Barbados.

"Ha!" the pirate cried. "You must have made haste to get here in such season."

"I almost killed two horses," the captain said.

"In such eager haste to see the wench, eh? And have you seen her?"

"She is safe and sound. She made an attempt to escape, but your woman stopped her."

"I wish you joy of the wench. There is too much of the fire of anger in her make-up to suit me," Barbados declared, laughing raucously. "She ripped my forearm with a dagger and killed one of my men aboard ship. The taming of her will take more than an hour's time, *commandante!*"

"Leave that to me!" Ramón said. "There are other things to be discussed now."

"And what?"

"Step aside!" Ramón commanded.

They walked some distance, to a spot where they would not be overheard.

"You know, certainly, the meaning of all this," Ramón said. "The Governor, who hates this southland, is eager to have it troubled as much as possible, even if he is forced to sacrifice a few of his own men."

"*Sí!*" Barbados said, both in question and in affirmation.

"See that the *señorita* is guarded well, and, in the meantime, before I think of such things as love, let us attend to more serious business."

"Is there a chance of profit?"

"How would you like to raid rich San Diego de Alcála when there would be small danger?"

The eyes of Barbados glistened. He knew a great deal about San Diego de Alcála.

The town was rich, and the mission also. Wealth had been stored there since the earliest days of the missions.

"Attend me!" Ramón commanded. "You have here certain *caballeros* held as prisoners, and the *señorita* also. I'll go to San Diego de Alcála and spread the news at the *presidio*. I outrank the *commandante* there, and my words will be commands."

"I understand, *capitan!*"

"There are only a few troopers there now, the remainder having been sent to San Juan Capistrano to put down mutinous natives. I'll lead these troopers back to the pirate camp. Do you arrange an ambush at the head of the little cañon. I'll lead the men into it. You and your crew can cut them down. And then the way to San Diego de Alcála will be open to you!"

"By my naked blade—" Barbados swore.

"You must understand this thing, of course—it must look like a mistake. No man ever must think that the Governor had a hand in it, or that I did myself."

"I understand, *capitan!*"

"Then it is agreed?"

"*Si!*"

"I'll have speech with the *señorita* again, and then ride like the wind. As soon as I have departed, arrange your men in the ambush. I'll return with the troopers before nightfall. You can wipe them out, attack San Diego de Alcála to-night, return, abandon this camp, and sail away and establish another on the coast of Baja California. You'll have wealth, women; your name will be spoken with respect!"

"*Si!*" Barbados breathed. "It shall be as you say, *capitan!* And what share of the loot do you require?"

"Nothing whatever, if you keep the *señorita* safe for me."

"She shall be kept safe, I promise you!"

Captain Ramón whirled around and hurried back toward the adobe building. Inez had the *señorita* in the front room, guarding her well. She had just finished a tirade concerning the attempt of the *señorita* to engineer an escape through cunning words and implications.

Captain Ramón ordered the woman outside, and urged the *señorita* to go into the storeroom again.

"It is arranged," he said. "I ride for San Diego immediately. Do you continue to remain a prisoner, *señorita*, and save yourself from harm. Before the fall of night I'll be back with the troopers, this pirate brood will be wiped out, and you and the *caballeros* will be liberated Then you can go up El Camino Real to your father."

"If you accomplish this thing, you shall have my gratitude," the *señorita* said.

"Nothing more than gratitude?"

"I have spoken concerning that, *señor*. There can be nothing but gratitude."

Captain Ramón suddenly whirled toward her. "It is something more than gratitude that I want!" he said. "Is your heart made of ice? Mine is flaming!"

"*Señor!*"

"What whim is it that makes you cling to the memory of a dead man?" he asked. "You are young, with a life before you."

"Please leave me with my sorrow, *señor!*"

"Then I may expect better treatment when your sorrow is somewhat dulled by time?"

"I am afraid not, *señor.*"

"I risk my life in the service of you and your friends, and am to have no reward?"

"A man of gentle blood would not think of being rewarded for such a thing," she replied.

The face of Captain Ramón flushed and he took another step toward her. "I am sick of hearing so much of gentle blood," he said. "Mine is gentle enough, but it also can be hot at times. Am I a man to brook such nonsense? You owe me gratitude, and something more! One embrace, at least, here and now!"

"*Señor!*" she cried.

"Would you be so coy if the cursed Señor Zorro were here to beg a kiss?"

"More insults, *señor?*" she asked, her face flaming.

"Is it an insult for the daughter of an impoverished *don* to be kissed by one of his excellency's officers?"

"And would my father be impoverished were not his excellency a man of little honor?" she cried. "Poverty does not change the blood, *señor!*"

"More about your gentle blood, eh? And an affront to the Governor in your words, also? That calls for punishment, *señorita!* One embrace and then I ride!"

"I would rather die than have you touch me!" she cried. "You show your true colors again, *commandante!*"

"One embrace, and I make you forget this Señor Zorro!"

"If he were here, *señor,* you would not dare speak so!" she said. "You would cringe in terror, you who wear the mark of Zorro on your brow! It was for an insult to me that he put it there! It is like a coward to attack a helpless girl! If Señor Zorro were here—"

"But he is not here!" Ramón cried, laughing and leering at her. "And so—"

Again he started toward her, and her hand darted to her bosom to snatch out the dagger the woman Inez had given her earlier. But she did not draw out the dagger.

The window behind them suddenly was darkened, and the light shut off. Into the storeroom plunged a man who struggled to get free from the woman's clothes he wore over his own. As Captain Ramón recoiled and the *señorita* gave a little cry of fright the intruder's head flew up.

A blade flashed, the *señorita* found herself hurled to one side gently, and Captain Ramón found two eyes blazing into his—the eyes of Señor Zorro!

"Have you ever seen this one?" Señor Zorro demanded.

And, with his left hand, he slapped the *commandante* of the *presidio* of Reina de Los Angeles so that his head rocked!

CHAPTER XXI.

FACE TO FACE.

SEÑOR ZORRO, on the back of the infuriated and unmanageable stallion, had made his escape easily from the pirate camp. There was no question of him being overtaken, but for a time there was a grave question of Señor Zorro stopping the steed he rode.

Over the crest of the slope the animal beneath him plunged down into a ravine and galloped along it. Señor Zorro sheathed his sword and held on to the horse's mane. He bent low to avoid tree branches that promised to sweep him from the animal's back.

"*Dios!*" he muttered. "This is as bad as the battle!"

Some distance the frightened horse traveled, and then he made a great circle and returned toward the pirate camp. But Señor Zorro had no wish to return there too soon, lest he be captured in the vicinity. And so he waited until the horse, negotiating a slippery incline, slackened pace somewhat, and slipped easily from the animal's back.

The horse plunged on. Señor Zorro picked himself up, observed his scratches, and made a futile effort to brush his clothing. Then he walked to the crest of the slope and looked down toward the sea.

He was quite a way from the camp, but he could see it in the distance, see the dead and wounded on the ground, and a crowd of the pirates, with their women and children, in front of the adobe building that was being used as a prison.

Señor Zorro sat down to rest and watch. He knew that he was confronted by a dire emergency and a tremendous task, but he refused to admit it to himself. The *señorita* was down there, and she was to be rescued. And Don Audre Ruiz and the *caballeros* were there, to be rescued also.

Señor Zorro, after a breathing spell, got up and walked slowly along the crest of the slope among the stunted and wind-twisted trees, making certain that he could not be observed from the camp. He came a distance nearer, and watched for a time again. And he saw Captain Ramón!

If it had been in the mind of Señor Zorro to await the night before descending into the camp again that idea left his mind now. He hurried forward as speedily as possible, stopping now and then to listen, for fear some of the pirates may have been sent to search for him.

He did not know, could not think, how he was to enter the camp in the broad light of day without escaping discovery. And he could do little single-handed against the victorious pirate crew. Yet the plight of the little *señorita* called to him for action,

and he knew that something should be done at once.

And suddenly he stopped, for he had smelled smoke. Almost silently he crept forward through the brush, and came to a small clearing.

There he saw a hut, from the chimney of which smoke was issuing. Señor Zorro circled the hut, but saw no human being. He went to the crest of the slope again, and saw a woman struggling down it toward the pirate's camp—a woman bent and old.

Señor Zorro guessed, then, that this was the hut of some aged lawbreaker no longer active in piracy. Perhaps the ancient one was down in the camp, now that the fighting was at an end, and his ancient woman was following to see the excitement.

Señor Zorro approached the hut carefully, crept around the corner of it, and peered in at the door to find the place empty. He rushed inside and sought frantically for what he desired. There came a chuckle of delight as he found it.

What he desired and found was nothing more than a ragged skirt and a wide, dirty shawl. Señor Zorro put them on quickly, bent his shoulders, and hobbled back among the trees and brush. It was a disguise that would serve for the time being.

Beneath the skirt was the sword of Zorro, ready to be whipped from its scabbard. Señor Zorro felt confident as long as the blade was at his side. He left the fringe of trees at some distance from the hut, and made his way down the slope.

As he came nearer the camp he was doubly cautious. The horses had lost some of the fright, and were grazing. The pirates, for the greater part, were gathered around the adobe building where the *caballeros* were being held prisoners. The women and children were there, too, only some of them were still scattered around the camp, looking at the dead and wounded.

Señor Zorro perceived that he had arrived at an opportune time. Nobody would give any attention to a woman stumbling along toward the scene of excitement. The pirates, undoubtedly, imagined that Zorro had ridden far away, perhaps to San Diego de Alcála for help.

He approached nearer. There were two large adobe buildings, and he supposed that the *señorita* was held prisoner in one of them, but he did not know which.

Then he stopped suddenly, and bent his shoulders more. For he saw Captain Ramón talking to Barbados, saw the *commandante* turn and leave the pirate chief and hurry into the nearest adobe building. Señor Zorro guessed that the *señorita* was there.

He hobbled forward again, alert to keep a certain distance from any of the pirates or women, for he realized that they knew one another well. He reached the corner of the building, and began to circle it, listening intently for the voice he hoped to hear.

He heard it. Pretending to be picking up something from the ground, Señor Zorro bent against the wall and listened. He heard Captain Ramón's statements, heard the *señorita* reply, listened with a grim expression on his face while the *commandante* begged for an embrace.

It would be perilous to enter that building now, Señor Zorro knew. Ramón would call the pirates, but perhaps he could be silenced first. However, there could be no hesitation. The *señorita* was there, being affronted, and was to be spared insult.

Señor Zorro saw the window, and guessed that he could manage to struggle through it. He raised his head and glanced inside. He saw the *señorita* recoiling, the *commandante* approaching her.

Señor Zorro hesitated no longer. He sprang up and scrambled through the window. He tore at the woman's clothing that clung to him, got free of it, and whipped out the sword of Zorro. He pressed the *señorita* to one side out of harm's way, and confronted his enemy.

His open hand cracked against Captain Ramón's head. And then he stepped back, on guard, giving the renegade officer his chance, though he little deserved it.

"You are alive!" the *señorita* gasped.

"Ha! Very much alive!" Señor Zorro replied. "Stand back against the wall, *señorita,* and turn your pretty face away. This is not going to be pleasant for a dainty lady's eyes to watch!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Radio Romeo

by

Jack Bechdolt

CLICK!

Squeak, eek, eek, eek, e-e-e-k!

Brrrrr! Sput!

Juliet Mercer adjusted the tiny tuning coil worn on her wrist much as women of a previous generation carried watches.

Her practiced fingers needed no eyes to guide them in finding three hundred and sixty meters, the wireless wave length for public entertainment programs.

The sputter died away. The ether clarified.

The golden voice of John McCormack, singing the lullaby from " Joselyn " flooded the balcony that drowsed in the perfumed shadows of a rare June night. Tones of velvet depth, of silvery clarity, throbbing with the passion of a quenchless fire made articulate the mystery and wonder of summer time and youth.

The cabinet radio telephone receiver stood in the room opening off the balcony.

The singer himself was at the radio broadcasting station KDKA in Pittsburgh, or it might have been Station WGI, Medford Hillside, Massachusetts. By the marvel of wireless telephone he sent his song broadcast through space in order that thousands gathered in their homes about the loud speaking receivers, or wearing the humbler telephone headpiece familiar in the early days of wireless telegraphy, might listen and find pleasure.

To all intent and purpose McCormack sang for Juliet Mercer alone; sang as though he were there in the flesh beside her on the balcony of that Long Island mansion that overlooked the wide sound. The girl stretched her slim length on a wicker lounge. Her arms were clasped behind her head, which was covered with curling hair of Titian red, short to a saucy straight line at neck length. She made a straight, slim, flat little figure in a frock of shimmering light silk, her square, boyish shoulders and round, brown arms bare.

Godard's music reached its period. The singer's voice died on that wonderful high note, faint, sweet as the silver bugles of fairyland.

Juliet Mercer stirred and sighed.

A sigh is the voice of the heart, but there was something in the heart of this very modern Juliet of nineteen that was too deep, too stirring, too poignantly wonderful for even a sigh to voice.

Juliet would have sighed again had not the loud speaking telephone receiver in its cabinet near the window sighed for her. But the echo of her sigh was masculine in gender.

" Juliet! "

A man's voice, eager, possessive, stabbed the ether, annihilating time and space. The speaker was miles distant, but like the singer he seemed to stand beside her.

Juliet snatched up a small enameled case that lay among the cushions. It looked like a vanity case, and in fact had a compartment containing the usual powder, lip stick, and little mirror. It was also a radio telephone transmitter.

Juliet plugged two silken cords into sockets in the wicker lounge, making connection with the sending aërial on the roof. Meantime the man was repeating impatiently, "Juliet! Juliet Mercer! Hello, hello, hello. Juliet. Sweetheart!"

Juliet spoke into the transmitter, her voice fluttering even as was her heart.

"Yoo-hoo! Mr. Kingsland! You scared me half to death—"

"Listen, Juliet! Why so up-stage? *Mister* Kingsland! I told you my name is Hubert—"

"Did you? I forget. And anyway, I never met you. Why, I've never even seen you! Besides—"

Kingsland sighed gloomily.

"Perhaps I'd better sign off. If I'm only a distant relative—"

Juliet relented hastily. "Hubert! You know I didn't mean it! But listen, you gave me an awful start. You sounded as if you really were beside me—"

"I was listening to the broadcast program. When I heard McCormack I knew you'd be listening, too. Juliet! You know I seem to think exactly as you are thinking, to feel the way you feel—"

"Honest, Hubert?"

"Uhuh! It—it's kind of uncanny, don't you think. Kind of—"

Juliet wriggled ecstatically. Her voice fairly sang. "Uhuh! Isn't it simply wonder-ful!"

"Uhuh! Listen, dear—"

But here another voice interrupted.

In resonant tones, deliberate, dull, the lovers' words were drowned out:

"By means of intensive fertilization, says to-day's bulletin issued by the Federal Farm Service, an increased yield in rutabagas of thirty-five bushels to the ton—"

It was the public news announcer at Radio Station WJZ in Newark.

"Curses!" cried Juliet.

Kingsland's voice managed to be heard above the broadcasting service:

"Tune to our private wave length, dear! Got it?"

Click!

Sput-sput-sputter!

Juliet spun the tuning dial to seven hundred and sixty-seven meters, their own secret wave of communication.

Even radio lovers prefer some privacy.

Talking as they had been before on Wave three hundred and sixty, they might as well have stood at Broadway and Forty-Second Street.

"Hubert? Hello, Hubert? Hello, hello, hello—"

"Yes. Yes, hello! Hello—try a hotter tube—a little hotter yet—that's better! Got you now! Gosh, isn't it great to be alone! You were saying—"

"Dear me, I don't remember! I wish that stupid broadcasting station would stay out of the air—"

"Juliet!" Kingsland was deeply hurt. "How can you say that when it was the broadcasting station that brought us together? Why, we'd never have known each other if it hadn't been for good old Wave three hundred and sixty! Now listen, honey, this is going to be serious—"

Juliet interrupted with a nervous scream. "Oh, Hubert! Father's coming!"

II.

THEY had never met, these young lovers. And yet they loved. Their radio passion laughed at space and time.

The wireless telephone and the other marvels that came with it into every typical American home made common such love stories as this. Cupid's darts were put aside for the singing spark that circles the world and will some day laugh even at the grim chill of interstellar spaces.

They had never met, and if Juliet's father had his way they never would.

Hubert Kingsland was the young president of Ross-Radio, the mammoth corporation that manufactured and marketed the new Kingsland driverless motor car, one of the many marvels of the radio telephone age.

This was a car which eliminated all chauffeurs. It needed no human hand to

guide it. It was becoming immensely popular with people of wealth who often do not care to drive their own machines.

An outgrowth of the first successful experiments in driving and controlling automobiles, submarines, torpedoes, and airplanes by means of the wireless telegraph spark, the Ross-Radio was a luxurious vehicle which its owner could order from the garage by merely speaking into his or her radio-telephone.

The car would roll to the door as though guided by an expert chauffeur, but empty as the day it was assembled.

Then it was equally simple to notify the Ross-Radio central control station whither the owner wished to be driven, settle back among the cushions and ride in security, safe in the knowledge that the all-seeing eyes of the wireless control staff would guide one in and out of traffic to one's destination.

The elimination of the chauffeur was not only a saving in money, it avoided many embarrassing situations. Parents of wealthy heiresses jumped at the opportunity of sending their daughters out in cars from which all trace of good-looking, fortune-hunting young chauffeurs was removed. Hubert Kingsland was making an immense success of this newest development in wireless electrical communication. He first saw Juliet Mercer at a charity bazaar. The instant his blue eyes met her brown ones across a room filled with people a spark leaped between them as the shrieking, vibrant vital Marconi spark leaps through ether at the touch of the master's key.

In a flash Hubert Kingsland's heart was short circuited. The wonder is that the high ampereage of that jolt did not burn out his coils on the spot.

This was love. He needed no broadcast to tell him that.

His immediate reaction was to seize a passing stranger and demand of him the girl's name. When he heard it he groaned.

The daughter of Kendrick Mercer, multimillionaire radio magnate, was not for him!

Kendrick Mercer was Kingsland's powerful business rival. Kingsland had forestalled Mercer's hired staff of experts in the practical application of the telegraph spark of the Ross-Radio car. Kendrick Mercer, czar of Radio, Inc., vowed to punish the interloper.

Mercer never forgot—and never forgave.

His rugged, vital personality repelled and was repelled by his young rival with that same unreasoning, cosmic force that actuates like poles of magnetism when they approach.

Knowing that he dared not accost this wonderful girl, Kingsland had stood at the bazaar for an hour and looked across a room at her, his heart starved with longing.

That night he tuned his radio transmitter to three hundred and sixty meters, the public broadcasting wave. All over the United States—in city homes, on isolated farms, on ships at sea, and even in the silent desert—listeners gathered before the receiving instruments to enjoy the daily programs of stories, lectures, music, and news sent out on that same wave length.

Interrupting this program, indecorous as a drunken man in church, came the frantic call of Kingsland, "Juliet Mercer! Juliet—"

His high potential sent the call around the world. Leyden, Holland, reported hearing it. It was picked up in the Transvaal; in the mountains of Indo-China.

For three days Kingsland called in vain.

Juliet Mercer, surfeited, weary of the public amusement programs, was not listening at her radio telephone.

Then it chanced that Mme. Lillian Kosalsky, the world's best known beautiful woman was scheduled to talk from Station WJZ in Newark, her subject being, " How I Eat and Keep My Girlish Figure."

With a lover's inspiration Kingsland knew that even his lovely Juliet could not forego listening to this. Thus he found her again. Since that day he had wooed Juliet by radio telephone.

Their meetings were clandestine, tuned to Kingsland's secret wave length, seven hundred and sixty-seven meters.

Juliet had told a white fib when she said she never had seen Hubert Kingsland. She had looked at him that very morning.

It would be ridiculous to expect the daughter of the inventor of the telekinetescope, now in general use, not to take a peek at her mysterious wooer.

The telekinetescope was Kendrick Mercer's adaptation of a principal used in telegraphing the first photographic portraits from Paris to New York in 1921.

Knowing the location of a given person or scene it was possible to concentrate this instrument and bring a distant happening before one's eyes.

That morning Juliet had stolen to her father's experimental laboratory in the grounds of the estate, taking advantage of his absence on his daily constitutional of one hour.

She focused the telekinetescope on Hubert Kingsland's apartment in Gramercy Park and her eye intruded upon Kingsland doing the Daily Dozen.

With maidenly modesty she blotted out the picture and waited until the young man had shaved, bathed, and dressed and was eating his bachelor breakfast.

She studied him then thoughtfully, deliberately—a slim, purposeful, modern girl making up her mind about a young man who nightly crowded the already overcrowded ether with protestations of his love.

Hubert Kingsland glanced up from his breakfast, his eyes meeting hers. Though it was but a counterfeit of him she saw presented on the screen of silver glass, between his eyes and hers she felt the leap of that same vital spark that had shocked Kingsland's heart a few days before.

Juliet knew she loved Hubert Kingsland.

III.

Silence. Not even static whispered in the ether.

Juliet, tense on the wicker lounge, listened with beating heart for her father's footstep. In his bachelor apartment in Gramercy Park, Manhattan, Hubert Kingsland listened.

Kendrick Mercer had been shut in his laboratory for the last nineteen days. He was working out a new invention. He cut himself off from all intercourse, even from all radio communication when he wrestled with the cosmos for these secrets that made him rich and powerful.

Except for his constitutional of exactly one hour, taken each morning, he remained a voluntary prisoner—a prisoner of ambition.

But at any moment he might finish the task. Juliet lived in terror of that moment.

Suppose he had finished now? Suppose he had heard!

The golden moon made faint luminosity. A breeze whispered secrets to the honeysuckle on the balcony. There was no other sound.

"Juliet!"

Kingsland's whisper was tense and fearful.

Loverlike he feared the worst from this dread silence.

Juliet whispered back, "Hush! I think it's all right. I want to be sure—"

They listened.

Juliet said presently in a more normal tone, "False alarm! Papa's been caged up in his library so long you never can tell when he'll break out. And it's been so dull here? He won't let me go out a step without him, won't let me see anybody he hasn't approved beforehand. I'm sick of it! Sick of the house and the books and the horses and dogs and the grounds, and sick to death of the fellows that father thinks are fit company for me! Oh, Hubert, if only *you* could—"

Kingsland broke in firmly:

"See here. I've got to talk to your father—"

"No! No, no—"

"Yes, I have. And I'm going to! Do you think I'm satisfied to spend my life miles away from you? Think again! I'm going to tune to your father's special wave length the moment he gets through this work of his, and I'm going to say to him—"

"Hubert! You mustn't! Oh, he—he'll do something awful if he finds out. Promise me—"

"No promises! I'm sick of this, I tell you! Good Heaven! Don't you suppose I want to see you, to stand near you, to touch your hand, your hair, your lips—"

"Now, Hubert, you must promise me—"

"See here, I love you, Juliet—"

"Uh-huh!"

"You love me, don't you?"

"I— Uhuh!"

"Sweetheart!"

Kingsland's voice rose in ecstatic shout.

Crash!

The loud speaking radio phone receiver had been struck a blow by a heavy fist.

House and balcony sprang aglow at the turn of an electric switch. Juliet Mercer cowered speechless in the presence of her irate father.

IV.

"JULIET, who is that young man?"

Kendrick Mercer radiated cold, venomous rage.

The radio millionaire was like some high power wire that has grounded on a wet pavement. A deadly aura surrounded him. It was suicide to touch him.

The blow of his angry fist had smashed the carved Rennaisance cabinet in which the loud speaking radio receiver was housed.

A big man, just turning fifty, he stood bristling, the white hair bushing out in disarray about his finely modeled head.

For all his wealth, Kendrick Mercer came of common stock. He began his electrical career as motorman on a Manhattan crosstown line where he learned to swear outrageously at newly arrived aliens who understood but six words of English. Even truck drivers kept out of the path of his street-car!

Then came Opportunity in the first public furor over the radio telephone.

Mercer invented the only practicable loud speaker that would work with the cheap galena crystal receiving sets. His fortune was founded on this early success.

Later, with all the intensity of a character typical of the land of opportunity, he had applied himself to the mastery of the secrets of the wireless wave and ranked himself with the world's foremost electrical inventors.

But in moments of intense excitement he reverted to his cruder, early days of the street corner and the street-car.

"Who is that fresh guy?" Kendrick Mercer roared.

His daughter knew the weapon to combat that tone. She raised her brown eyes and let them play over his angry features coolly, almost insolently. She feigned a calmness she was far from feeling.

Her voice was icy as she said, "Pardon me, father, you were saying—"

"Come here!" Mercer ordered.

Juliet did not stir, except to raise her delicate eyebrows in twin arches of faint, unpleasant surprise at his rudeness.

Mercer added with more polish, but in anger unabated, "I want to talk to you, Juliet. Please come in here."

Juliet rose, concealing her elation at winning the first skirmish. "Very well, father."

Mercer indicated a chair and his daughter seated herself. "Now," said he firmly, "I want to know the name of that young man who had the nerve to call you 'sweetheart' with all of New York, Long Island, Connecticut, Jersey and part of Pennsylvania listening in. Come, what's his name—"

"Really, father—"

"What's his name? I'll teach that big boob to get fresh with my girl on a public broadcasting wave—"

Juliet said firmly, "Will you please listen! That was not wave three hundred and sixty. It was his own private wave—"

"A private wave! Oho! So this young man has a wave length all to himself, eh? Well—well, who is it? Who is this exclusive Johnny with a wave length of his own? Spill it, girl, spill it!"

"I will tell you the man's name," Juliet answered with dignity. "But first I think it's time we had an understanding. Father, I'm old enough to manage my own affairs. I want to tell you that I resent being treated longer as a mere child. I'm not a scandal-walker nor a dumdora, and I very much object to being caged up in this house and having all my men friends handpicked for me. I'm a woman and I have a right to choose my own companions—"

"I'm the best judge of your affairs," Mercer answered grimly. "Come clean, Julie. What's that fellow's name?"

"I'm not trying to conceal his name," Juliet replied. "I'm not ashamed of knowing him—yes! and loving him, too! Because I do love him; you hear? I do! You might have known all about him any time during the last two weeks we have

been acquainted if you hadn't shut yourself up with that old invention. And I want to say—"

"Suppose you say his name, instead?" her father insisted.

Juliet faltered.

He had her cornered.

"It is—he is—if you must know it, he is Hubert Kingsland—"

"Kingsland! Did you say *Hubert* Kingsland?"

"I said Hubert Kingsland—"

"Kingsland, who makes the driverless flivvers?"

"Yes, father, Hubert Kingsland, the head of Ross-Radio—"

"God!"

The single ejaculation came from Kendrick Mercer's lips with passion that was terrible.

He eyed his daughter silently, a strange, wild gleam in his cold gray eye.

Juliet waited trembling.

V.

KENDRICK MERCER'S enforced calm was far more menacing because of its suggestion of tragedy to come. And the look on his face was a look of triumphant hate.

A smile, unholy in its glee, twisted his firm, thin lips.

"Hubert Kingsland!" Mercer repeated.

"Yes, father. We—we love each other dearly—"

"Bah!"

"I say we do! I love him. I will marry him whenever he names the day."

"Bah, again! Puppy love. Idiocy! How often have you met this man—"

"We have never met."

Mercer started. "What—"

"No, we have never met. He saw me, from across the room, at the charity bazaar. We have talked over the radio phone. And this morning I looked at him through the telekinetescope. I—father, I tell you frankly, I mean to meet him soon—"

Mercer agreed with suspicious enthusiasm.

"There, you said a mouthful!"

It was Juliet's turn to stare.

"Yes," Mercer nodded, smiling that evil smile. "You're going to meet him soon. Here. To-night. You're going to meet him just once—"

"Father! What—"

"And once will be a plenty," Mercer went on. "You hear? A plenty! When I get through telling this Hubert Kingsland where to get off in his relation to this family you needn't be worried about ever seeing him again. You won't! That poor fish is through—"

Juliet had turned pale. Her lips moved stiffly.

She stammered, "Wh-what—what d-do you mean to do?"

Mercer only grimaced. Then his gaze softened, for he loved his only child.

"Juliet, I'm doing this for your own good. Maybe it hurts now, but, Julie, your old man knows best! Don't look at me as if I was going to murder you, kid—"

"What are you going to do?" Juliet whispered.

"Come with me." Mercer rose and took her arm, firmly but not unkindly. "I'll show you something."

He led his daughter out of the house, across the artfully landscaped lawns now bathed in pallid blue light from the full moon, into the low, one-story building of stone where he conducted all his experiments in radio.

Mercer stooped before the silvered glass screen of the telekinetescope. He brought a chair for his daughter.

Juliet noted that an apparatus she had never seen before had been arranged on a low desk beside the screen. It looked very much like the old Marconi-sending apparatus, with telegraph key, coils, condensers, bulbs and lead wire to the antennæ high above the roof of the laboratory.

The girl was about to ask the meaning of this when her father began to speak again.

"Hubert Kingsland is through. From to-night on, Julie, he's a dead one—a dud. He's not the man for my little girl—"

"Father!"

"Believe me, your old man knows best! He's not the man for you. I don't ask great riches from my future son-in-law, Julie. I've got enough for all of us. But I do

ask that he should be an ordinary success—"

"The very idea! Hubert Kingsland is making millions out of Ross-Radio. Everybody that can afford one is buying his driverless cars. Everybody. Why, in a few years he will be a bigger success than you are—"

"Nope." Mercer shook his head, smiling coldly. "Looked that way for a while, I grant you. Looked as if he had me out on a branch and was sawing the branch off. But not now! No, not any more, Julie! I'm here to tell you, my girl, that Kingsland from this night on is going to make about as much noise in the world as the lone clam in a boarding-house chowder. And this"—Mercer laid his hand lovingly on the new apparatus standing on the desk—"this is the torpedo that will sink him!"

"What is it?" Juliet gasped.

Her father did not answer the question. Instead he said: "Tune up to Kingsland's wave length. See if you can reach him—"

Julie shrank back with a little cry of alarm.

"You're going to hurt him—kill him—"

"Stuff! Do I look like a gunman or a thug? I won't touch him—"

"Then talk to him yourself."

"No, I want you to. I want you to ask that young man to do you one little favor. Just have him order around his Ross-Radio car and sit down in it and wait—"

Juliet cried tearfully, "I won't! I won't see him hurt! You—you murderer—"

"Murderer nothing! Do what I say. I give you my sacred promise all I'm going to do is bring that young man out here and talk to him a few minutes. After that—"

"*Bring him here?*"

"I said bring him here—"

"Why, you can't. Not unless he wants to come. If I asked him—"

"Listen, Julie, you won't have to ask him. You needn't ask him anything except to go sit in his driverless flivver. I'll do the rest—"

"Do you think you can make Hubert go anywhere he doesn't want to go?" Juliet demanded scornfully.

"Don't think at all. I know it—"

"Hunh! You can't kidnap him. Why, the Radio central control station was made especially to prevent things like that! They don't kidnap millionaires any more—not when they ride in Kingsland patent cars. Why, they give them a special insurance policy against kidnaping. You try to bring Hubert here against his will and see what the central control station does to you!"

"All right! If that's so, you haven't anything to be afraid of, have you? Will you ask him what I tell you?"

Juliet hesitated.

"If he's a better man than I am this will prove it," her father argued.

"I—I don't think—"

"And if he's a better man than I am, you can do as you damn please about marrying him, so there—"

"Father, I—"

"Afraid your smart young *Romeo* is going to get the worst of it, are you?" Kendrick Mercer sneered.

"Never!"

With scorn of him patent in every move, Juliet plugged in her radio transmitter and spun the tuning dial on her wrist.

The battle had begun!

VI.

CLICK! Sput-sput-sputter!

"Hello, hello, hello. Hubert—yoo-hoo!"

Juliet's girlish voice stabbed the ether in musical notes.

Silence. No answer came back. Again she called, and yet again. But no answer.

"Out flirting with some other girl!" Kendrick Mercer sneered.

His daughter shot him a glance of proud defiance.

"Hubert! Hubert Kingsland. Hello, hello—"

Never had she called Hubert Kingsland before and failed of instant response.

Juliet trembled with premonitions of some tragedy.

"Hey, wait!" her father cried. "We'll see if he's home. The telekinetescope!"

Mercer's fingers spun the adjustment dial of the far-seeing camera eye. "Where does this mutt live?" he growled.

"Gramercy Park, No. 16."

Mercer consulted the Manhattan map, over which red compass lines radiated, found the sector by cross reference and switched on the power.

On the silver screen a brown-stone house appeared as if by some magic. Mercer turned a dial. The exterior of the dwelling faded and a reception hall followed, then a drawing room, a library, an alcove off the library. The telekinetescope was searching the place room by room.

"A-a-h!"

"Aha!"

They exclaimed simultaneously at the presentiment of the cozy little alcove off the library. The lights were turned low. A young man sat before a carved radio receiving cabinet, listening.

He was a handsome, athletic chap of less than thirty years, who wore a silken house jacket in place of the dinner coat he had discarded for comfort this warm evening.

His attitude suggested complete absorption in the message coming from the radio telephone. Once he looked upward and sighed dreamily, and the hot ash of his cigarette burned a hole in the expensive rug at his feet.

Juliet sighed, ecstatically.

"It's he, father. That's Hubert—"

"I damn well know that!" Mercer growled brutally. "Seen the pup often enough! What's he listening to—"

"Father! You can't help but like him, now that you've seen him?" Juliet clasped her hands in agitation. Her brown eyes grew wide with appeal.

Mercer shook his head with ominous purpose.

"Don't look any better than the rest of 'em to me! No, Julie dear! I tell you this fellow's a dead one. Hey, wait! I've guessed it. He's listening to the public broadcast likely. Call him on Wave three hundred and sixty!"

With trembling fingers Juliet adjusted the tuning dial. The loud speaker in the laboratory vibrated suddenly with the tones of a violin, a violin on which some master miles distant in the broadcasting station was playing with consummate art, Chopin's Nocturne in E flat.

Juliet called again, "Hubert, yoo-hoo!"

Father and daughter saw, in the telekinetescope, the young man start from his chair. A smile illumined his face. He snatched up a radio telephone transmitter and the laboratory rang with his instant response, "Sweetheart!"

"That's a heck of a way to talk to a decent girl with all Long Island listening!" Kendrick Mercer roared. "For cat's sake, put him on his private wave length if he goes on like that. What 'll the neighbors say?"

Juliet gave the instruction and they saw Kingsland adjust his tuning dial.

"Well, go on, tell him!" Mercer exclaimed.

Juliet hesitated. She turned an appealing gaze on her grim old father.

"If he's the guy you think he is, he'll do that much for you—unless, of course, he's scared—"

"I—I forget the message—"

"Just ask him to order his Ross-Radio to the door and go out and sit in it, that's all."

Juliet spoke into the transmitter: "Hubert, will you do something for me?"

"Will I? Just you say—"

"Order your car to the door—"

On the silver screen they saw Kingsland's instant obedience as he spoke into another transmitter, connected with the central control station.

"Now go out and get in it. And—and wait—"

Kingsland ran to a closet, donned his coat and a light topcoat and started from the library.

"Hubert!" Juliet's voice rang anxiously. "Sweetheart, you—I—"

"Enough!"

Kendrick Mercer snatched the transmitter out of his daughter's hand. He also pulled a switch that disconnected her with the aërial.

"Now watch!" he bade her, adjusting the telkinetescope rapidly.

They saw Kingsland emerging from his house. A Ross-Radio of the popular roadster type was rolling up to the curb as he came out. It was driverless, moving under control of the Kingsland central station.

Hubert Kingsland without hesitation jumped into the car and sat down.

He looked puzzled, but not afraid.

His perfect love included also perfect faith in Juliet.

"Ha-ha!" laughed Kendrick Mercer.

In the laboratory the grim old man pressed his finger on the telegraphic key.

A spark of high potential screamed into the night.

"Watch, watch, my girl!" Mercer bade, pointing at the scene in the telekinetescope.

They saw the roadster leap from the curb at full speed. It swerved violently into the street, rounded the corner of Gramercy Park on two wheels, rounded again into Twenty-First Street, skidding violently on a bit of wet pavement, and shot up Fourth Avenue.

The telekinetescope, adjusted rapidly by Mercer to follow the car's flight, widened its vision, taking a bird's-eye view of the city streets.

Kingsland's car, reduced to toy size now, shot on, its headlights gleaming into the night.

Behind him, around him, before him on the avenue and the cross streets, other automobiles crawled about, little black bugs with luminous eyes.

Kendrick Mercer's hand, on the telegraph key, sent sparks crashing across the ether.

Juliet shrieked.

"Father! Father, what are you doing! Father—"

Mercer broke into hoarse laughter.

"Watch!" he then burst out loudly. "Watch, Julie! Where's Kingsland's control station now? Why doesn't it interfere? Why? Because it can't. It can't! Beaten, by Heaven! Lashed to the mast! Licked to a frazzle. I'm the boss of Kingland's car now. You hear? I'm the boss—"

"Father! You mean—"

"Watch, girl! You'll see. Kingsland goes where I direct him after this. All his cars are under my control. Hubert Kingsland is my meat. I have discovered the master spark!"

Kendrick Mercer roared with exultation.

"Mine!" he declared. "My meat! He goes when I say and where I say, and no control station can guide him now. I beat him at his own game!"

VII.

KENDRICK MERCER talked on, his voice hoarse with exultation.

"I have found the master spark. The high potential that controls it all. With it I can blanket Kingsland's cars, stop them dead, start them, take them away from his control stations whenever I choose. In my hands Kingsland is helpless as a child!

"To-morrow morning when the world knows this Ross-Radio will go to the wall with a smash they can hear clear down to hell. I'll junk every car they have built! I'll ruin Kingsland. Ruin him!"

Juliet stared aghast at the grim old inventor. Girl that she was, she knew enough about radio to understand this staggering announcement.

Mercer's master spark controlled the Kingsland control stations themselves. Screaming through the ether it overrode Ross-Radio power and put the Kingsland cars completely at the mercy of Kingsland's rival.

Kendrick Mercer started to exult again, "I told you this pup was a dead one—"

But Juliet's scream interrupted. Juliet's hand clutched at his arm.

"Father! Watch the road. Look out!"

In the telekinetescope they saw that the roadster, speeding north on Manhattan Island, had reached the point where Fourth Avenue runs abruptly into Grand Central station.

Here the driveway makes a turn west, then north, then east again, to round the huge granite structure. In his madness Mercer had left the car unheeded. It was dashing straight for the looming granite cliff. A second more and all would be over.

Kendrick Mercer blanched. His hand shook violently as he seized the control key, swerved the roadster west, north, east, and finally into the avenue's continuation.

On the silver screen of the telekinetescope they saw violent agitation in the southbound traffic as the car rounded the corners at top speed, swerving erratically,

scraping fenders and wheel hubs and missing disaster by a cobweb's thickness.

Fifty-Ninth Street! The roadster whirled eastward, rushing toward Queensboro Bridge.

They saw it shoot into the traffic way. A tiny figure sprang out to halt it — a bridge traffic policeman!

The roadster shot past him. The man barely saved his own life by jumping.

The roadster was near the Long Island City shore now. Mercer, his eyes glued to the rapidly shifting panorama in the telekinetescope, turned on Juliet a face gone suddenly as pale as paper.

Julie!" he gasped. "I don't know the way to Flushing!"

Kingsland's roadster stopped with a suddenness that sent it skidding against the bridge railing.

Passing cars veered in erratic lines to avoid collision.

Kendrick Mercer chattered: "Well? How about it? Think, Julie, think! I can't keep him standing there all night. That speed cop will telephone ahead—they'll get him—"

Juliet's face was white as her father's. She pressed her hands to her throbbing temples.

"I know!" she cried. "The route book! Wait!"

She raced across the room to a shelf of volumes, scientific reports, textbooks, all manner of stuff. Her trembling hands began throwing them to the floor. With a glad cry she recognized the blue bound volume she sought and began pawing over its multitudinous pages.

"Route 421, Binghampton to Oneonta, no, no! Route 553, Buffalo to Niagara. Dear God! Here! Sea Cliff to Long Beach — I'm getting closer — reverse of Route 86, not that! At last! Here, listen, father!

"Long Island City, east end of Queensboro Bridge — that's where we are now! Straight out from bridge with trolley, that's right, follow the trolley. Now, now, oh, yes! Immediately turning left on Crescent Street, five-tenths mile. Four corners, turn right on Webster Avenue—right, father—turn to the *right!*"

"Well, well, damn it, I'm trying to, ain't I? That flivver cut in. I can make it, though—"

They saw the roadster wheel erratically, barely missing an oncoming trolley car.

"Father! Look out—that limousine—"

Beads of sweat started to Kendrick Mercer's pallid face. His master spark stuttered orders to the radio car.

"There!" he cried. "Now which way?"

"Out Webster, under Elevated. End of avenue, meeting trolley, turn left on Jackson Avenue—"

"Hey! Watch yourself, you big stiff! Watch your step!"

Kendrick Mercer was bellowing at the phantom presentiment of a moving van, lumbering in the roadster's path.

He swerved the roadster past the huge vehicle and its right side wheels went into the ditch.

Juliet cried, "Father! Don't pass to the right! Always to the left, always—why, father—why—"

The girl's words ended in a shriek of terrified surprise. A new discovery left her speechless with horror.

She gasped finally, "Father—you—you—never—drove—an — automobile — in—your life!"

VIII.

TRUE! Every word of it!

Kendrick Mercer was driving a motor car for his first time.

This powerful roadster, snatched from the guidance of Kingsland's radio control staff was his first venture on the highway.

Mercer had chauffeured a street car. Then he was a young man, living in a little flat, just married.

On the roof of the flat building he had stretched a bare copper wire, one of the hundreds of thousands of amateur receiving aërials all over New York at the time.

In his hours off duty he amused himself with his ten dollar crystal detector radio telephone set.

One day he devised the Mercer loud speaker. A few days later he was a millionaire through his invention.

He was too busy then to learn to drive an automobile. He hired chauffeurs to do it.

The man who had discovered a spark that would ruin the powerful Ross-Radio automobile control system himself had never mastered the art of driving. And Hubert Kingsland was speeding in the roadster along Jackson Avenue completely at his mercy.

Juliet recognized fully her lover's peril. She, too, was helpless. Only her father understood the new wireless control.

Lucky for them all that Jackson Avenue is long and there was time to recover from this shock.

Mercer regained a little courage.

"Well, I'm driving now, ain't I?" he growled. "You see me—"

"But father! Listen, please! Stop him! Oh, stop him before something awful happens—"

"Never!" her father snarled. "I said I'd bring him to this house, and I will—"

Juliet grasped his arm and pointed to the silver screen. "Look! Motorcycle police—the speed cops!"

Down the dimly lighted road, in pursuit of the roadster, they saw the lights of two motorcycles. They were gaining rapidly.

Now they were but a block distant—a half block—twenty feet—ten feet—

Kendrick Mercer laughed savagely. "Look!" he cried.

The master spark shrieked again. The motorcycles dropped back, baffled.

They wabbled to the side of the road. Stopped!

"Burned out their magnetos by my spark." Mercer laughed. "Which way now, Julie? Here's Flushing Bay on the left."

"Cross drawbridge over Flushing Creek, that's right. Cross Main Street— Oh! look out for that ash wagon! Look out—"

The slow moving vehicle was blocking the roadster's progress. Mercer slowed the roadster to a crawl.

In his excitement he did a curious thing then. He leaned forward, as if from a window, and filled the quiet laboratory with language that choked the air.

His right hand grasped the telegraph key as it used to grasp his street car controller. His right foot thudded at the floor as if to sound the warning gong.

For the moment Kendrick Mercer forgot he was driving a motor car by radio control. He lived again his days of the Eighth Street crosstown line.

"Holy cats!" he exclaimed suddenly and blushed a deep red, "I forgot this thing didn't run on rails!"

With a sheepish grin he swerved the roadster to the left and shot past the ash wagon.

IX.

STRAIGHT through Flushing along Broadway the roadster sped at the command of Kendrick Mercer's master spark.

From the route book Juliet read: "'Fork, Park in center; bear right under R. R. on Broadway'—Father, sound your horn!"

"Good Lord! Forgot the darn thing had a horn!"

Mercer sent another signal by his wireless control key that actuated the roadster's siren.

"Now on to Bayside. Straight through. Join trolley from left, nine eight, and follow tracks across drawbridge, ten three, Douglaston Manor, straight through with trolley— Do you have to speed like that, father?"

Mercer wheeled on her with a growl.

"Who's driving this car, me or you? Maybe you think you can do better!"

Juliet's terrified gaze was on the moving picture of the roadster, careening down the lonely road under the big moon, bounding horribly when it struck holes in the paving, wabbling from side to side under her father's unpracticed steering hand.

There rode Hubert Kingsland, her lover, at the mercy of an unskilled driver! How would it end?

"Mind that route book!" her father snarled.

With a start Juliet turned her eyes to the page. "Fork, papa, keep right. That's Manhasset coming. Bear right with trolley on North Hempstead Turnpike. Now watch closely for the stone clock tower at three corners—there! Turn left, leaving trolley. Please don't speed so! Please— Oh, oh, oh!"

"Cats!" Mercer groaned.

The master spark snapped and the roadster slued violently, off the road, on again, sideslipping with brakes set. Its fender brought up with a bump against the barrier set across the highway.

Mercer backed the car away gingerly.

In the headlight glare they read a sign:

ROAD UNDER REPAIR

Detour ☛

As they stared and hesitated, two more police motorcycles appeared from behind, rushing toward the roadster.

"Damn those cops!" Mercer swore. "Must have telephoned ahead again!"

He swerved the roadster about. It shot past the oncoming motorcycles at top speed.

The motorcycles checked their flight, wheeled and came on in pursuit.

"Where's that detour?" Mercer growled. "Where in heck—"

"There! See the sign on the tree? Quick!"

The roadster left the turnpike for a country road. It bounded over ruts, lurching from side to side. Behind it the motorcycles held on.

"Damn them!" Mercer swore. "Now watch!"

He pressed the control key, sending the radio signal that would cripple the pursuers.

The spark missed!

Mercer's fingers rattled the key frantically. Something was wrong! The motorcycles held on with grim purpose.

Over a wooden bridge, up a long hill, past farmhouses where all was dark, past country homes, a few lights still glowing, the roadster fled and the police came on behind.

From behind a hedge a dog sprang out, jaws open.

The rush of wind from the roadster sent it flying to the ditch. They saw it rise, shake itself, speed home again, tail between its legs.

The motorcycles were gaining.

Kendrick Mercer's seamed, worn face was twisted into a mask of agony. Sweat streamed off his forehead. His fingers hammered at the control key, trying, but ineffectually, to send the spark that would stop pursuit.

The cosmos had laid some new trap of static to humble this mortal who presumed to steal its secrets. Mercer could control the car, but not the pursuers.

The roadster's speed was frightful! Down a long hill, the white highway gleaming in vague phosphoresence before them. Past a blacksmith shop, a general store, round a turn—

What was that?

Juliet screamed.

Kendrick Mercer slowed Hubert Kingsland's car to a crawl rapidly as he dared, stopped it dead.

Too late!

The roadster had passed the warning crossed boards that said:

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!

RAILROAD CROSSING

It stood motionless, straddling the iron rails. Behind it a mechanical barrier descended slowly. Before it across the tracks another barrier closed. And round a bend came a blinding glare of light, the headlight of the oncoming locomotive.

The headlight's glare made day of the darkness, showed the pursuing motorcycles halted outside the barrier, their riders dismounted and gesticulating at the helpless car; showed Hubert Kingsland, seated in the roadster, in the path of destruction.

"Jump!" Juliet screamed. "Hubert! Jump—"

He could hear her now. Her radio was disconnected. Hubert Kingsland did not know Juliet screamed at him. Lacking orders from her he sat still, ready to prove his faith in Juliet to the moment of death itself.

Kendrick Mercer swayed giddily. His eyes started from their sockets. His nerve-

less hand clawed at the signal key. He shook so that he could not master it.

Then with a mighty effart he regained selfcontrol.

The master spark screamed.

Kingsland's roadster leaped from the rails at full speed. It crashed through the barrier that closed the tracks. It sped on into the night.

The Long Island express roared its flying tons across the very spot the roadster had stood scant seconds before.

X.

JULIET had fainted.

Her last conscious glance saw Hubert Kingsland helpless in the path of the Long Island express. Then came merciful oblivion.

Her father picked up the route book, which had fallen from her nerveless fingers.

Kendrick Mercer held the book in his left hand, reading its directions aloud to himself. His right hand clicked the control key. Of necessity now, he had slowed the roadster to a more moderate pace.

Painfully, mile by mile, he traced out the highway and brought Kingsland nearer and ever nearer his mansion.

Mercer had aged frightfully during that awful drive. His legs trembled so he could scarcely stand. The spark he clicked from his control key was faint, jumpy. The conduct of the roadster was equally erratic.

When the car barely missed collision with a picket fence Mercer gasped and shuddered pitifully. When it overturned a peanut wagon on Main Street, Northport, the aged inventor almost collapsed.

But the telekinetescope showed him Hubert Kingsland, his business rival, sitting unmoved, disdaining to show fear, armed with his perfect faith in the woman he loved.

And Kendrick Mercer was spurred on by shame to match that love-inspired courage as best he might.

Mercer worked on doggedly. He had lost all track of time, of distance, everything except the killing task of driving Kingsland's roadster by means of his master spark.

He groaned and shuddered. Would the end never come?

A motor siren sounded loudly, startling him to attention. Ruber tires ripped through the gravel of the drive leading to the laboratory.

The inventor started up with an exclamation of astonishment. Could this be—at last—could it possibly be Kingsland!

The siren roused Juliet from her swoon. She pushed aside her father as she sprang to the door.

She sped into the night, to the side of the roadster, leaped into it to enfold the astonished passenger in her arms.

Kendrick Mercer tottered up to them.

The inventor had to grasp the car's fender to keep from falling in a swoon.

The lovers clung fast to each other, and Kendrick Mercer swayed on his feet, breathing noisily, wiping his fear-bedewed face with a feeble, shaking hand.

Juliet turned suddenly on her father. Her brown eyes burned with defiant anger.

"Stand aside!" she said harshly. "Don't you dare harm him. I love him—he loves me—we are going to be married the minute we can find a minister, and don't try to interfere again!"

"Wait!" Mercer gasped.

The lovers, out of the car now and about to leave him, turned back.

"Kingsland, your hand, boy!"

Kingsland, astonished, offered his hand. Kendrick Mercer shook it heartily. He did more. He drew Kingsland to his arms, hammered his shoulders with affectionate blows.

"Kingsland!" Mercer exclaimed, "I meant to ruin you. You dared make love to Julie—my girl! I was going to smash you flat. I discovered the master radio spark that would junk the whole Ross-Radio concern in twenty-four hours—"

"So that's what you did to my car!" Kingsland exclaimed.

"That's what I did. And I meant to do worse to you, but no! No, you hear? Boy, to-night we've demonstrated the greatest discovery since the radio telephone. We did it together, you by your courage, me with my spark. For that help you deserve the best I've got—and the best I've got is

my girl, Julie. Take her—and God bless you both!"

With a happy cry Juliet sprang into her father's embrace. All three of them embraced, too happy for words.

Mercer burst out finally: "Kingsland, we've got to join forces. Your control stations were good within a fifteen mile radius. My spark will work a hundred miles, maybe a thousand. With your cars and my spark we'll start a business that'll stand the whole world on its head. Together we'll be the kings of everything radio. We'll give the world the biggest news—"

Juliet stopped him there.

"Bother, with your old radio!" she exclaimed, slipping her arm through Kingsland's.

"Radio! That old stuff! Hubert and I are going to be married! Father, that's news which is something of real importance in this world!"

The Fear-Sway

Part V

by *Kenneth Perkins*

Author of "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JENNIE LEE FINDS HER HOME.

THE trail to Peter Gaunt's ranch led directly into the Gila's territory. The little, stove-in, hook-nosed pony Sugg was riding had traveled the trail many times before and, now urged on by whipping and followed by Jennie Lee's pinto, it galloped over hill and cañon, across mesa and dry wash and rutted creekbed for a killing afternoon's ride.

During the ride a tragedy of a curious emotional sort approached its climax within the heart of the captured girl. She had dreamed dreams of this little old ranch, picturing it as it had been years before during the happy years of her childhood. She remembered the red tiles, a brilliant and beautiful contrast to the green of fan palms and the deep blue of the sky. There was always the memory of a tinkling fountain in the patio, the pungent smell of the tortillas frying on hot stones, the sharp touch of pepperwood mingled with the sage of the desert wind. There was the sound of that wind through the branches and always a thrumming guitar of Pedro or some other of the stable mozos during the siesta. The tragedy was this: she was going back now

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to the real background of those dreams, helpless, frantic, in the depths of despair.

The wild country which surrounded the old hacienda did not tend to mitigate her feeling of hopelessness. The long wind-swept plain was deserted, shorn of all forage, naked of any relieving contour except bowlders that grew larger and more formidable, cactus more gaunt and hideous. And then at sunset came the uplands of the ranch where a gently rolling prairie formed what had once been the grazing lands of Peter Gaunt's herds.

Suddenly came a breath of that heavily laden desert wind. The fragrance of the buckeye and the purple sage evoked a thousand old memories. It was through the sense of smell that she was first thrilled—that sense which is more poignant and powerful and lasting than any other. Jennie knew she was riding home.

From then until she caught her first glimpse of the little tiled buildings; she forgot the fact that she was in bondage.

"A stop here for a while so you can see your old birthplace," Sugg said with a soft laugh. "And then with fresh mounts we will make for the border."

In the growing dusk the little cluster of adobe houses, the corrals tucked away in a grove of Spanish sycamore and madrone trees, all presented a picture of serene beauty. The road wound down the face of a hill and passed before a small adobe wall to that part of the main ranch which the Mexican servants termed the portales. Jennie remembered how once she had climbed along the top of that wall hunting for nests of swallows. She had fallen; she recalled that her wrist was paining now as it had pained then in her mishap. She clutched at it where Henry Sugg had twisted it that afternoon, and the horror of this home-coming came back to her.

They rode through the portales and the girl could see old tiled roofs, not the brilliant red against blue sky, but a dull, shabby gray because of the darkness. She looked down the long emparrado as her captor ordered her to dismount. Many a time she had run up and down that veranda under the checkered shade of vines. Now the emparrado seemed strangely shortened and the veranda narrow. The vines had been torn by the wind and lay strewn dust-covered and gray on the flagstone. She looked around dazed at the wreck of her dreams. She saw the forsaken fields in which her servants had grown melons, squashes and Mexican persimmons. They were now like a weedy kitchen-yard littered with refuse, a waste of charred stubble surrendering to rivulets of sand.

Sugg watched Jennie standing with the twilight still revealing the strange mute tragedy of her face. He could not refrain from asking, cruelly:

"How does the old home strike you now, little queen?"

She turned upon him fiercely.

"You and your men have ruined this place! But it will come back to life. Tom Drury will crush the Gila Monster that has been crawling over this flagstone walk!"

"But enjoy it as much as you can in its present state," the Gila laughed. "Before morning we will be on our way to Mexico. Will your Tom Drury have time enough to restore the place by then?"

"Perhaps!"

"In that case we will stay just long enough to eat a good big meal before the tedious journey. We will take old Domingo's two ponies, which will be fresh, and then ride southward. I will buy you a hacienda ten times larger than this, tucked away in some cañon in Sonora or perhaps Lower California!"

"It won't be more beautiful than this, even as it is now in the dusk!"

The Gila pounded on the big oaken door and waited.

"In a week you will forget this place!" He laughed. "You will wipe it from your memory. It will never have existed!"

"I will forget it as it is now. But I will never forget it as it was then!"

The door opened. A little old Mexican with a gray steel-like beard held up a jack-lantern, its light falling on the faces of the two outside.

"All righto, Mex!" the Gila shouted. "Open the place up for the bride and bridegroom."

"Who are you?" the man cried fearfully.

"It makes no difference who I am. But

this is the granddaughter of old Peter Gaunt. Light the candles and prepare us a meal. And pronto! We are on our way to Mexico for a honeymoon."

The old man and Jennie Lee stared at each other. A light came into the girl's face. She remembered the caretaker who had transferred his allegiance from Gaunt to the outlaw band. It seemed to her as if the man had shrunk, shriveled up as palpably as a sausage that is burned and wrinkled over a fire.

"Domingo!" she exclaimed incredulously. "If it is little old Domingo, you will remember Jennie Lee!"

The old Mexican peered from under his knitted white eyebrows.

"Yes, I remember the *maestro's* little girl who ran and played in the patio."

"Then you will help me. I am in trouble!"

Sugg interrupted impatiently:

"You will get us a dinner. Put tamales in the fire. Get some of that wine from the cellar."

"There is little wine left, *señor,*" Domingo pleaded. "The Gila has drained the stock. There is no Val de Peñas left—"

"But the Juarez wine?" Sugg suggested. "And a little of your own mescal."

"Who are you, *señor,* that I should give wine to you?"

"He is the Gila!" Jennie cried. "He has brought me here, prisoner."

"Do not ask who I am again, Mex," Sugg replied, showing the servant a six-shooter.

Domingo stared at Sugg's eyes, the square mouth, the gleam of teeth behind the smile. He had never seen the Gila unmasked. But now he believed what the girl had said.

"I will get you your supper, *maestro!*" he cried, panic-stricken. "There will be tamales and some tarts with wine."

He toddled into the dark house, lit a match, then candles in an old iron candelabrum. The musty room was diffused with a soft pleasant light. Old Mission chairs were drawn up before a table. The Mexican put some persimmons and tangerines in a gourdlike bowl and hobbled away.

Now that the servant had gone, for the first time Jennie felt the utter hopelessness of her situation. There was not a soul for twenty miles about—not a soul in the world, for all she knew, who could guess that she had been brought here. The trembling dog of a servant—her last hope—had revealed himself as one of the Gila's most abject henchmen!

Sugg clanked across the floor, threw down his gloves, ordered the girl to sit beside him, and, lighting a cigarette with one of the candles, he threw himself into a chair.

"Now, then, cheer up, little *señorita,*" he said, smiling through a thin blue mist of smoke. "I have fulfilled your most earnest desire—you are home. You've been wanting to come back here ever since you left. So why not join me in a merry little party? What more can you ask than this?"

"Nothing," she answered. "If Domingo takes time enough to roast those tamales, I am satisfied."

"You are still hoping that Drury will miraculously appear?"

"Yes."

"Even though he is up in the mountains, hemmed in by your grandfather's men, hounded by my own gang, lost up there in that jumble of volanoes and mesquite?"

"I put my faith in Tom Drury at the start—and I was right then. This time I am right, too. He will come."

"And I put my faith in my own strength against him at the start. I was right. If he comes, let him come. It will be another fight—the Gila Monster against a poor gullible beast of a cowpuncher. Let him come. I will enjoy my supper and wine, and this little homecoming of yours, just the same."

He stretched out, tipping his chair back comfortably and putting his spurred feet upon the old oak table. "A delightful homecoming!" He began to fill the air with smoke clouds and rings.

Jennie sat immobile, with the same rigid, white-faced expectancy. A host of memories passed through her brain. For a while she forgot the dim candle-lit rooms, the web-smeared rafters, the owl hooting at those who had trespassed on *his* domain. She forgot the shrunken appearance of everything, from the dried gourd to the wizened servant, the narrow corridors, and the voiceless fountain in the patio. These things she felt

would suddenly be touched into life by some miracle, like an old castle awakening from a goblin's spell. Fountains would play. She would again hear the guitar twang softly at some lively Spanish fandango. Again the sound of laughing servants would drift in from the end of the patio. And there would always be that soft dull lowing of the herd, the mooing of cows separated from their young in the calf-pens, and that sound beloved of all ranch-people—the vaqueros singing to ward off herd-madness. Then always as a constant obligato to the noises of a big ranch, there would be the thud of hoofs on soft earth, the shouting of cowboys in their steer-roping and bronc-busting, and the ever-present, ever-merry jingle of spurs.

In those few moments of waiting, while old Domingo was gone for the jugs of Juarez, Jennie's imagination carried her completely away. She was certain that part of what she had thought was coming true. The sound of the wind in the pepperwood was the same as of old. It fitted in with her picture, and there was the jingle of spurs.

Henry Sugg took his feet from the table. He stood up and bawled out to the servant, bidding him with an oath to hurry about his business. Jennie jumped to her feet, shocked at the terrific crack of Sugg's whip on the dusty table. Sugg was looking at her. She stared back at his face and saw his smile fade, leaving only the surprised stare of a beast. She awoke from her fantasy to find that one thing she had conjured up in her brain was a triumphant glorious truth.

It was the sound of horses' hoofs beating into her consciousness, slowly, like a sound in the morning when one awakens, a sound mingled with the waking dream.

CHAPTER XXV.

PETER GAUNT SEES RED.

WHEN old Peter Gaunt led his posse up the side of the cañon after having successfully closed in on both sides of the escaped prisoner, he was considerably puzzled over the turn of affairs.

Why shots had been fired by Tom Drury and the outlaws, and why they had climbed the cañon walls in the direction of Desolation, was a question the chief could not for the life of him solve. When he galloped into the main street of the ghost town, the answer to the riddle was more obscure than ever. He had seen from the vantage point of an adjacent hill that Drury had entered Desolation in company with two of his outlaws, one of whom for some reason or other had lost his horse.

The posse tore madly down the street in a smothering column of dust. It had barely reached the dance hall when Marty Lingo yelled.

Despite his hoarse screams the riders were too anxious to press their chase after Drury, who was now galloping out of the lower end of the town alone. Marty had no desire to be left in Desolation with the two captured bandits. His one experience at the hand of Henry Sugg, who had but a short while before bound and gagged him, had given the little old man's nerves a good racking. And now he did not relish the handling of these desperate criminals, particularly with night coming on before he could take them down to the plains to his ranch. To be sure, one was wounded, but the giant negro was not a pleasant proposition to deal with, even alone.

Marty yelled at the top of his lungs. He leaned out of the dance hall window, frantically waving his arms.

Gaunt saw Marty with a drawn six-gun. He recalled the fact that he had delegated him to chaperon Jennie; he shouted to his men to ride on and continue the chase for Crater and the fugitive as far as their mounts would carry them. Meanwhile, in company with half a dozen of the riders who had lagged behind, he rode back to the dance hall to find out the cause of Lingo's panic.

"What's the matter, Marty?" Gaunt asked. "And where's my gal? There ain't nothin' happened to *her?*"

"You just come in here, chief, I got something to show you which it will open your eyes till they hang out'n your haid!"

Gaunt dismounted and entered the pavilion.

"What and the hell!" he gasped.

"That's what I said, chief, when I seen

'em first. Chief, I want for you to get something straight—we ain't got time to argufy and I cain't be showin' you proofs—but that thar Tom Drury you're goose-chasin' is a innocent man. It's damned lucky for the whole crowd of us that we didn't rope him up and then ax his pardon after! Chief, the guy you're wanting is Henry Sugg."

"How come these coyotes to attend a dance in this here hall?" Gaunt interrupted. "And who throwed a gun on that thar greaser lyin' on the floor with his arm wound up?"

"They was invited to this here dance hall by Mr. Tom Drury, chief, and let me tell you he sure did make 'em dance! They're two-thirds of the Gila's gang—the other third is lyin' daid down in the cañon somewheres and—"

"But my little Jennie Lee! Has she gone gallivantin' along with that thar two-gun man?"

"Now keep your shirt on, chief, while I explain everything: the girl's went—and with her went Henry Sugg! Henry Sugg, chief, is the Gila—don't laugh! I'm speakin' the honest-to-God truth. He bolted out'n the co't room as soon as he seen that Drury held a high card and was goin' to play it. And he hid, chief, while you went shaggin' after Drury, and when I came back for to get the gal here in the co't room, this son-of-a-goat, Sugg, sticks me up. And masked he was! Damned skunk! He gags me, binds me, and then goes in and says to the gal, 'Howdy! We got the town to ourself,' says he, 'and wouldn't you like for me to take you home to your rancho which is in the center of my litle kingdom,' says he, 'and be my queen, and then we'll shag over to Mexico?'"

Peter Gaunt's face, which seemed burned to an indelible scarlet by the sun and wind, the veins standing out black and purple like twisted wires, suddenly turned as colorless as a gravevn image.

"Kidnaped my gal, did he? Kidnaped my little Jennie Lee—the damned ——"

The old man exploded into a roar of oaths which made the two bandits slink back trembling against the side of the dance floor.

Gaunt rushed out to his horse and screamed to his men to follow him.

"Dammit, chief! Wait till I tell you—Tom Drury's went after him!"

Gaunt had vaulted to his horse and sat for a moment completely breathless. The words of little Marty Lingo made a profound impression on him.

"Tom Drury knows!"

"Damned right he knows! When he come ridin' into town with these two blotchers, I told him everything, and he untied me and freed me. He knows, judge! And he's gone after the skunk, ridin' that thar Crater like hell-fire!"

"What horses did Sugg and the gal have?" Gaunt asked excitedly.

"I'm thinkin' they must have taken the gal's own hoss and one of the old nags which these here coyotes had tethered in the brush. It's all the horses that was around here then. Tom's got Crater. He can catch 'em easy."

"Yes, he will catch them!" Gaunt shouted, a note of triumph replacing the desperation in his voice. "But we've got to ride after him like hell! Drury don't know the way, and if Sugg's the Gila he knows the way only too damned well."

"But Drury's got Crater. He'll ask the way as he rides along. Like as not the gal's safe," one of the Vigilantes put in.

"For all that we are goin' to ride till our old horses drop beneath us," Gaunt cried. "Two of you men take these here bandits down to Marty Lingo's ranch. It 'll take two to handle the damned murderers. Marty, you hop on a nag and come along with me and kick hell out'n your mount all the way."

"Say, chief!" Marty said as they galloped down the street. "Some of our gang have rode on after Tom Drury without knowing the truth. What if they catch up with him and pot him?"

"Catch up with him!" Gaunt broke out in such a spasm of laughter that he had to catch onto the pommel of his saddle to keep from falling off. "The hell of a chance!"

Marty suddenly joined in the guffaw, crying, "When them two Gila monsters meet—*zowie!*"

But Gaunt had plunged too far ahead

on the trail to have any pleasure or enjoyment in any of Marty's further comments.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DRURY'S RIDE.

TOM DRURY had followed on the trail of the Gila and Jennie Lee at a pace merciless to both man and horse. Crater was able to cover twice as much ground as the little ponies the Gila used, but in his ignorance of the country Drury took a trail twice as long. Lengthy detours to inquire the way detained him. First he overtook a flockmaster bringing home a large herd of sheep.

"The old Gaunt rancho?" the herder repeated, dumfounded. "Ain't no one rides over to that there country these days, mister. The Gila drove every peaceful man out'n them parts."

"I'm not a peaceful man," Drury shouted back. "Tell me the trail to Gaunt's ranch or I'll drag you there with me at the end of a lariat."

"Over this here hill and down the cañon beyond," the herder hurried to answer. "There you'll find a creek which you can cross anywheres, being no drop of water has flowed there for three years. At the western end of the cañon are three little mesas. Go south of the first one and there's a mucker's outfit, cabin and all. From there a trail leads across desert country to old Gaunt's cattle run. If you cain't find it, ax whoever you see at the mucker's outfit. They'll tell you unless you're filled up with lead afore you get there. After you get to the Gaunt country you'll have lead bouquets throwed out on you from any cactus big enough to hide a man's shadow—"

But Drury had wheeled his horse and galloped off toward the hill. He heard nothing of the last of the herder's words.

Sunset brought Crater limping with his rock-beaten feet down into the cañon creek across a big expanse of sand and bowlders, down the slope of the cañon to the first of the mesas the flockmaster had mentioned. Drury galloped up to a little shack from which beamed the soft rays of a jack-lantern.

He drew his gun and banged open the door.

The mucker dropped the shotgun he had taken down upon first hearing the sounds of the approaching rider and held up his trembling hands.

"How do I get to Gaunt's rancho, stranger? Quick to your answer or you'll ride there with me!"

"It's west an hour's ride across the desert," the old man stammered weakly. "And what the hell do you be scarin' a poor ole man for? I ain't got no money! There ain't no dirt around here you could build a tin whistle with. That's why the Gila ain't got me. You poor cuss! He'll git you all righto if you go across that thar desert."

"And when I get across, which trail?"

"You'll see some hog-wallows and rollin' hills!" the mucker replied. "That's Gaunt's old cattle run. Cut straight up the middle of 'em. They look like a island in a sea. That's the place. And I'm wishin' you no bad luck, but I don't expect to ever be scared by *you* bustin' in on me agin!"

Drury mounted on the instant, and tearing away through the gorge which separated the two northernmost mesas, came out on the horizon of the desert.

Loping and galloping over the big adobe stretches, his horse steaming and hot beneath him, he reached the rolling prairies of Gaunt's range. The stars came out and twinkled brilliantly, casting a blue haze over this gentler landscape and revealing the cluster of tiled buildings which constituted the Peter Gaunt hacienda.

Drury reined in his horse.

This time he could not clatter down past the adobe walls and through the portales, banging open the door with blustering rashness. Now was the time to pause and play his game with utmost canniness. Lights winked dimly from the filigreed windows of the sala.

The starlight revealed a single and almost conclusive proof that Drury had not ridden here in vain: two ponies were standing unsnubbed at the gate of the adobe wall.

Walking his horse down the hill, Drury came to the end of the wall. He dismounted. He held Crater's nose, to prevent him

from neighing to the two ponies, but this precaution was futile.

The two little pintos, frightened at the appearance of the man and the big horse, shied out into the road and then broke away in a canter, their hoofs thudding noisily on the old rocky path.

Without wasting any time, cursing the luck which had betrayed his arrival, Drury led his horse around the wing of the house, where he was in the complete protection of a dark cloister.

He was convinced that Crater would champ and paw at the flagstone, revealing the presence of his master. The best way to avoid this, Drury concluded, was to leave Crater to himself and then to continue circling the house alone. At the back he might be able to find an entrance. Once inside of the house he felt that he would have his antagonist at his mercy.

Accordingly he crept around, keeping constantly against the old adobe wall. He came to the patio which opened at the rear of the house. He felt secure now. Sugg, who had no doubt heard the galloping horses, was probably in the front of the ranch trying to puzzle out what had happened.

Drury did not pause a moment. He removed that most awkwardly conspicuous part of his attire—his sombrero.

He crept into the patio, darted from arch to arch, avoided the dry vines littered across his path, and kept as much as possible in the indefinite darkness afforded by the old walls. Moonlight would have been an easier danger to escape; there would have been definite shadows; but the sky, now ablaze with stars, cast an intangible glow over the little patio, so that Drury felt himself open to view from all sides. If a man had entered the courtyard there would have been no safe hiding place.

Presently a man did enter.

Drury heard the footsteps approaching a door which was partly obscured by an overhanging balcony. If some one came out of that balcony Drury could not fire without waiting to ascertain who it was. On the other hand, he himself could be seen almost at a glance.

As he heard the latch of the door turn he rushed toward it. In a leap he caught the rusty iron rails which served as a balustrade about the balcony. The door opened.

Drury had swung himself, as if pole-vaulting, out of sight on the little ledge above. An owl screamed, beat its wings in the intruder's face, and then flopped out into the open, winging into the dark.

Below a grizzled, bearded old Mexican looked up, startled, saw the owl, and resumed his walk across the flagstone toward the kitchen. In another moment he returned bearing jugs. Drury then looked for an entrance into the sala.

A little door led out onto the balcony. He tried it. The lock was rusty. Every move he made brought out loud groanings from the old warped wood. He held his breath, waited, tried again, and gave up.

Looking over the wall he descried a faint gleam of light almost at his feet. A little window with rusty filigree of iron opened into the upper part of the dining room. Drury realized that his boots and spurs could have been seen through that grating.

He stepped back frantically. For a while he waited, and the hum of excited but unintelligible voices came to him. His feet had been seen, he was convinced. By whom, he did not know. While waiting breathlessly for a move on the part of his enemy, he saw that the little gratelike window had a counterpart on the other side of the door. Light glowed from it. Drury judged that the window opened into the same room as the other. He crept toward it, inch by inch. The voices had been hastily silenced. Drury felt that every move he made was loud enough to be heard all over the patio.

The nerve-racking moment which Tom endured, passing from one window to another, was suddenly broken by a woman's scream.

Tom abandoned all caution. He fell to his hands and knees, and hardly knowing whether or not he would stare into the muzzle of a gun, he put his head down to the filigree of iron and peered through.

He looked directly down into the sala. He saw the long oaken table, the Mission chairs, the jugs of wine and the steaming dishes.

Jennie Lee was in front of an overturned chair. The Mexican servant was with her. That was all Tom could see of the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STARLIGHT AND SPURS.

WHEN Sugg had first heard the sound of horses' hoofs beating on the rocky road in front of the ranch, he felt at first a surge of anger sweeping over him. His game was being thwarted—and at the last minute. He realized that he had given himself away as the Gila. There was no longer any possibility of his posing as a respected citizen and a Vigilante. First the girl knew him, and now this old servant, Domingo. Peter Gaunt, Tom Drury and the rest would be on his trail as soon as they found out what had happened to Jennie Lee. His only move now was to cross the border with the girl and forever leave the range over which he had ruled. In fact, he regretted now that he had ever stopped at the Gaunt ranch, even for the all-important meal before the long ride.

Domingo came in crawling, frightened at the new impatience of his master. Sugg ordered him to stay in the room, watch the girl, and under no condition let her leave the table. Sugg rushed out onto the veranda, with gun drawn, fully expecting to meet a horseman galloping into the garden. What he saw surprised him—and relieved him.

The complacent smile came back to his mouth. He felt again that he was complete master of the place. Half a furlong down the road he saw his two ponies cantering away into the darkness. After all, the terrifying sound of hoofbeats had only been caused by his own ponies. This incident was no longer significant. He cared no more for the wornout mounts. He expected Domingo to supply him with fresh ones.

What had scared them he did not know. He looked up and down the road carefully, and could see no trace of man or beast. With a shrug of his shoulder and a satisfying conjecture that some coyote had probably frightened the two pintos, he returned to the house.

Jennie was again plunged into despair at the suave grin on Sugg's face. There had been no fight, no shooting; scarcely two minutes had elapsed, two minutes of nervous tension, waiting for the sound of guns.

"Our mounts took it into their heads to gallop off into the sage. Those were the hoofbeats you heard!" Sugg laughed. "We are alone, you and I and the Mex, and twenty miles of desert all about us. So we might as well enjoy our little supper in peace."

The servant opened up the husks of the steaming tamales, poured the purple wine, and hobbled out.

Disregarding the girl's refusal to touch food or wine, Sugg fell to his dish ravenously. A gulp of wine, and he paused in his eating to stare at the statuesque figure before him.

"There is little use of your starving yourself, señorita! To-morrow, when we are trailing south over the deserts of mesquite, you will feel sick and irritable. Drink with me. Enjoy life—and—" He paused in the middle of the sentence and the twinkling cajolery left his face.

Jennie turned her head, as if she had heard again a single call—a cry or a bugle, or the sound of a charge which meant deliverance. But this time it was indistinct and unintelligible. She thought she heard the champing of a horse. She visualized a big black pacer, impatient at the deathlike silence of the night outside.

"It's these shutters banging in the wind," Sugg laughed, taking another gulp of wine. "Come on and eat. The journey before us is long and tiring. By all means drink some of this Juarez! It's wonderful."

But Sugg did not finish his own cup of wine. His tamale, which was half eaten, lay open, spicy, cooling; the pungent chili sauce glazed over with grease. Something had taken away Sugg's appetite, so that it was as impossible for him to eat as it was for the girl. Also it was as impossible for him to drink any more wine as for a mad dog to drink water.

He had seen a man in the patio coming through the arches. He looked up. The servant emerged from the darkness; he appeared behind the girl, full in the soft glow of the candlelight.

"Did you just come in from the kitchen, hombre?"

"Yes, señor."

The Gila shrugged his shoulders again and gulped wine. Jennie could see that it was partly a shudder.

"Go out and get us some more of this."

The servant disappeared. As he walked down the patio Sugg stared at his crooked old back and his hobbling gait. An owl fluttered out into the patio and winged its way over the frightened Domingo's head.

Jennie looked up at the little filigreed window which opened from the roof of the sala. In a glance she had a curious impression of starlight and spurs.

Sugg looked up at her, bore into her with his sharp, narrowed eyes, and then fell again to eating. This time, Jennie noticed, he was only pretending to eat. A terrific fear had gripped Sugg. He felt as if beset on every side by presences.

Sounds stirred, shadows lurked and moved with the wagging of the candle flames. The only high point of light was the girl's face, and across it there flitted continually a gleam, elflike, mocking. Sugg felt sure that his mortal enemy had come, had entered the house, was perhaps lurking in some dark corner from which at any moment there would come a streak of white light, a deafening fire.

He looked around, no longer trying to hide the apprehension written on his blanched face—the gray lips, the wet forehead, the widened eyes. He scrutinized every corner of the big sala, the rafters, the windows, the musty old drapery in the corner, the crucifix, the pitch-black doors. From a dozen different places the onslaught might come.

A moment of maddening silence. The Mexican hobbled back across the patio, opened the door, and entered.

Sugg jumped from his seat and dashed to him.

"What's the matter, maestro? What has happened?"

"Did you see an owl out there in the patio?" Sugg asked.

The Mexican looked up at the distorted face. Was it possible that the Gila was afraid of an owl? The Gila, who had never shown fear even when fighting a dozen men!

"An owl came from the eaves of the house, señor, and flew over my head. It is a bad owl, señor, and keeps me awake at night with its hooting. When it returns in the morning I will find its nest of owlets up in the eaves and have done with them."

"It does not matter," the Gila said. "I do not believe in omens."

He turned and looked again at the table, the pungent dinner, the beautiful girl whose face was still lit with that new elfin smile. He was afraid to go back into the light. He let the servant take the jug to the table and pour more of the purple Juarez into the master's cup.

Sugg resolved firmly he would not go back to that table. He was thoroughly convinced that Tom Drury was in hiding, ready to hurl his revolver shots at any time he saw fit. If the fight would only start, Sugg thought to himself, the suspense would be broken; there would still be a little of his nerve left to fight back. But it was this terrific expectation that was breaking him, an expectation of death leaping at him out of the darkness.

Sugg determined that if he never found out anything else in his whole life, he would at least find out now where that gunshot was coming from. If he could only discover that, with impunity, the spell of fear would be broken. He would be able to pick a point of advantage, and at any rate carry on the duel with half a chance of success. Thinking of a plan by which he could make Drury fire and reveal himself, he called the servant to him.

"Look here, Domingo," he said, drawing him into the vestibule, "I am going away into Mexico to-night, and with me I will take this woman. You have been a faithful henchman of mine, and I owe you much, especially since all the other servants of old Peter Gaunt left this place, whereas you stayed, pretending loyalty to Gaunt."

" It is to you I have been faithful, maestro," Domingo replied, groveling.

" And I am going to reward you," Sugg answered. " I will give you money, but above that I will give you a reward that no other of your fellow servants could ever dream of attaining. That woman was once your mistress, as a child. Now that she is grown to beautiful womanhood she can't help but inspire an adoration in your old carcass—an adoration, not only of a servant for a mistress, but of an old Mexican renegade, who has been drinking a little too freely, for a beautiful woman—"

" Or of a devotee for a saint, señor."

" Now what the hell! You don't get my point at all. As a parting gift to you I am going to let you have one single reverent kiss. Go out and claim it now of that beautiful señorita."

The Mexican's eyes glowed with delight.

" But, then, maestro," he objected, " she knows that I have not been faithful to her father. She will not let me kiss her. She will repulse me."

" Perhaps. That is the most agreeable part of a kiss—the struggle with the woman who refuses you."

" But if I struggle, maestro, you will—"

" I will do nothing. I will stand here and laugh to myself and say, ' Good for Domingo, the old cowdog! To-night old Domingo is being born again! He is a youth, with the wine-heated blood of youth in his veins.' "

" And the money, señor?" the avaricious old Mexican hinted.

" Yes, yes, dammit! I will give you any sum. But it will seem ridiculous compared to this reward you are to claim of the señorita."

Domingo stepped out of the darkness of the little vestibule and went to the table where Jennie was sitting.

" I am sorry that you are going away in the morning, señorita," he said.

She looked up at him, surprised at the sudden absence of servility in his voice.

" I am not going away," she retorted coolly.

" But the maestro says you are, and I am sorry that you did not come home to the scenes of your childhood to stay."

" I have come to stay, and I don't want you here talking to me. Go away."

" I will not go away, señorita," he said with a smiling assurance.

She raised her eyebrows, startled, and paled slightly at the look of defiance in the servant's face.

" Look here—why are you standing there grinning? What do you want? I have no reason to talk to you. Go away, I said."

" The masetro has given me something as a favor, something which is beyond price—"

" Who is your master?"

" The man who—" Domingo checked himself. He realized that the girl had tried to corner him and make him admit that he had forsaken her grandfather for the service of the Gila. " Señor Peter Gaunt, the American—he is my master."

" If you won't go away, at least don't stand up there and tell me lies. Your master is the Gila! If you had been a faithful servant of my grandfather's you would have killed this man who has brought me here against my will."

" This man has been good to me. He has promised me a reward which is greater than a reward of money. And I have come now to claim it."

" What are you talking about? You must have been filching some of this Juarez which is part of our stock. Are you drunk? What is it you want?"

" A kiss, señorita."

She screamed and jumped up. The chair fell over.

The Mexican reached across the table and caught her arm.

" A kiss, it is mine! It has been promised me! I will have it!"

She struck him full in the face, so that he recoiled, abashed.

" Then you think you will fight me?" he cried. " You think you are better than old Domingo because I was like a peon for many years to old Gaunt. You think you are better because you are white and a gringo. No, you are no better than Domingo. You are a slave now to the Gila. From now on you are the same as Domingo, who is a servant. You are—"

He never finished the big speech he was uttering. In the very climax of it a terrific bang and the whiff of gunpowder drowned his last words and thoughts.

He fell forward, lying face downward among the clattered dishes.

Sugg did not watch the Mexican sink on the boards. He watched the little filigreed window which emitted the sharp flash of the revolver. He had played a preliminary move which gave him the advantage he had lost. He was now ready to fight.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CRATER BLOWS UP.

WHEN Tom Drury looked down into the sala from the balcony, he realized that the chances of the duel favored the Gila for the moment. The two men, although unable to see each other, were no longer in the dark.

Tom jumped up from the window, still bearing in his mind the fleeting glimpse he had had of that scene: the circle of candlelight, the white-faced girl, the Mexican tumbled across the table. He also caught sight of the streaks of light which had been hurled up at his little window from a dark corridor.

The bullets spattered the adobe window sill just as he leaped away.

To peep through that window again would mean certain death, and he knew it. He waited.

The Gila concluded that his enemy had no intention of exposing himself again, at least not in front of the window. A moment's wait, and he decided to run into the patio where he would have a clear view of Tom on the balcony. He paused, directly under the arch of the door through which he was passing, as a man who is about to take a high dive pauses before the final leap. It would be a dangerous move, fatal unless executed practically with one stroke: a dash out into the open, a sudden turn, and then the fire.

But Tom, in that second of hesitation, had guessed the Gila's move.

He leaned over the balcony. Instead of firing haphazard as the Gila leaped out into the open, he threw himself with all his weight upon Sugg's shoulders. The unexpectedness of this assault, upon a man who had been expecting a gun duel, brought him smashing to the ground, his gun gone, his enemy raining merciless blows upon his head, mouth and temple.

Twistling convulsively, like a trapped puma, Sugg scrambled to his feet and ripped out viciously at Drury's head. Drury had lost his gun in his leap, and he tore in now for the sort of fist fight he loved.

At this stage of the fight Jennie Lee ran out into the patio.

The scene which met her eyes was not one of horror, as she had expected. Instead it was the glorious combat of two giant men, one fighting to enslave her, the other fighting to free her and give her back her lost home. Both men were unarmed, both fighting for their lives in a primitive combat, every move of which thrilled her to a hysteria of excitement. Every blow which thudded into her lover's jaw was like a blow upon her own body, and every smash that was returned on the heart, the neck, the mouth of her enemy, brought a cry, almost a scream of triumph from her choking throat.

Shielding himself for a moment from the terrific sledge-hammer blows of his antagonist, the Gila suddenly shot up a miraculous cut which caught Drury on the jaw. He sank to his knees. He felt a bony hand crash into the side of his head, sending him spinning to the earth in a perplexing flurry of light.

The Gila sprang back. Finding himself momentarily free of another assault, he dropped to the ground and groped for his revolver.

As his hand found it, Drury came to himself. He saw what had happened and leaped wildly on the Gila just as the latter had regained his feet and turned to fire.

The gun barked out into the empty air. For a moment Sugg lost the balance and technique of the fist fight; he felt Drury's huge fist crash into his mouth. He reeled back and fired again, blindly.

But for that one stunning blow Sugg would not have fired so foolishly into the

air, like a drunken buckaroo shooting up a town. His last bullet gone, he whirled forward madly, swinging his arms, reaching frantically at the great figure which loomed between him and the stars.

Another blow, and a drunken, pleasant feeling came to Sugg at the base of his brain. He felt the bone and flesh and fist against his teeth. There was a shock, a curious vision, unaccompanied by any semblance of pain, as of some one who had come to slay him with his own jawbone.

He was lying face upward on the flagstones and greaseweed. The stars shone in a soft whirlpool of decreasing speed. A huge form was standing above him. Yes, he remembered, it was Tom Drury who had come to save the woman. Drury would kill him. He could do it now with his bare hands.

Sugg's mind cleared. At all hazards he must get up and run, or else that form would pounce upon him. For a moment he waited, holding his breath as a man in a nightmare; then he stared around. He felt his strength coming back, and with it the consolation that the stars had stopped their whirling, and the flagstones their rocking under him. He turned from the nightmare which still hovered over him, and found himself facing the open patio.

Drury moved a step closer. The Gila sank again to the flagstone, as if unable to get up. It occurred to him that Drury was only waiting for him to get to his feet before finishing him. While he lay prostrate, still pretending that he was down and out, a plan formulated. At the open end of the patio he saw a horse. It was Crater, the damnable beast that had started Sugg's fear fit by champing just outside the walls of the dining room.

"And yet he is an unbeatable horse," Sugg thought. "Drury will never catch me if I get on him in time."

Suddenly he bolted. He ran at first low to the ground, then leaping up like a man in a sprint, hurdling the fountain, and dashing to the open end of the patio.

Drury picked up his gun and followed.

What happened then was by the dim glow of the starlight. It was evident to both Drury and Jennie that Sugg had caught the reins of the big black gelding and was trying to mount. It was also evident that Crater objected to the advances of this rider.

Sugg realized the danger of trying to mount the horse, but he had no other alternative. The big gelding struck out at him viciously with his forefeet. It did not deter Sugg from his purpose. He knew something about outlaw horses; he took a flying tackle at the pommel without pausing to gather the reins.

He found himself in the saddle, gathering in the slack before Crater had had time to know what was happening.

The big bucker stood snorting for a moment, and then leaped up into the air in the first move of his sunfishing tactics.

It was a move which Drury knew would be simple and easy until he came down again. When he saw that the horse had made up his mind to give this new rider a fight, Drury calmly replaced his revolver in the holster and called to Jennie.

"Crater is fighting for us," he cried, "and he's the greatest outlaw of them all! Look at that high dive!"

The big gelding twisted in the air and thundered down on his forefeet, so that Sugg felt his ribs crash into the saddle horn. His head began to rock, and his mouth to bleed. With another convulsive twist the man-killing horse sent his rider half out of the saddle.

Sugg grabbed frantically for the pommel as he jolted back into his seat. It was as if he had landed on a catapult. Crater stood still, and the rider, two of his ribs already broken, his back throbbing as if some one had "cracked the whip" with his spine, hurtled out of the seat.

He struck against the comfortable eternal oblivion of the wall.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"WELL, THAT SETTLES IT!"

TOM DRURY and Jennie walked back into the patio together. The feeling of the air had suddenly changed as precipitously as the oppressive murkiness changes after a terrific cyclone.

From the girl's point of view the ranch itself seemed to have changed. The blue monotone of the starlight created a picture, not of hideous dark walls, broken tiling, and staring eyelike windows. The ranch was transformed almost miraculously into a place of serene beauty.

There was still the dilapidation, the broken shutters, the littered vines. But it was not a dilapidation of hopelessness. It was the same old place, its wreckage obscured by the misty light and beautified. In Jennie Lee's heart the place which had but a few moments before been under a hideous spell, was now born again, as in the old Indian legends when mountains and cities were under the domination of the cold hand and bad mind. The hills were freed of the Thunder God, the "years which the locusts had eaten" were restored to her!

She breathed in deeply of the old beloved fragrance, the desert wind laden with its mesquite, the nearer spicy odor of the pepperwood, the bay, the madrone trees. This and the tremendous relief after the tension of the past hour, brought the tears streaming down her face.

She turned to the big cowboy and cried:

"What can I give you in return for this?"

There was no reward greater for Tom Drury than that he should be present at this glorious moment when she again found her home.

He did not immediately answer her question. "Weep for joy. Weep all you want!" he said at length. "The home is yours, and there is no one who will molest you here again. It's not only the Gila whose account is settled, but his whole gang. The two living members of his gang are taken prisoners, and their guard is Mary Lingo, whose ranch they raided last night."

"Then the range is free!" she cried. "And your reward! What reward is it that you want for what you have done?"

She saw that he hesitated.

In the silence they both heard a distant rumble, which increased to a steady undertone, growing louder with the climax of their own talk.

"You said you had come out here for a bigger career," she went on. "For the kind of job that takes bigger, stronger men. You will be foreman here. I will tell grandpa that—but what a pitiable reward for what you have done. You must ask more than that. That is not enough."

"There is a reward," he answered. "A reward I have hoped for; but now that the time has come for me to tell you of my desire, it seems too great a thing to ask."

"Nothing is too great, nothing too audacious."

"I could not have done any of it without you," he replied. "It was you who saved me from that band of riders that you hear now galloping toward us."

"It's my grandfather and his posse. They fell into the trap the Gila had set for them. They are stern men, quick in their judgment, ready to kill without a second thought. I understood them. I saved you from them, but that was nothing compared to your deeds—"

"Then if I can stay here as your foreman for a while, and the place is fixed up again with the fountains playing, the fields green, the herds again roaming over the range—and I am no longer a stranger to you or to Peter Gaunt—then I will say what I have desired to say from the first. And then you will be able to give an answer."

As the posse thundered down the road she replied quickly:

"I am able to give an answer now. I know. I put my trust in you when, in the eyes of every one, you were the bandit they sought. I knew you then, and I was right when they were all wrong. I know you now. There is no other proof needed of your worth."

"You know I love you. I want you for my wife—but—" He paused and tightened his grip on her two hands. The posse clattered into the court. "How about—"

"My grandfather?"

"He will not give you to a stranger—"

"He will think as I think and do as I wish. Ask him."

They walked through the house to the front court, where the riders were dismounting and rushing up to the veranda.

Having no assurance but that the posse was still after him, dead or alive, Drury snapped out his revolver to defend himself.

"Don't throw that gun, Drury! Don't throw it on us!" old Gaunt cried. "We got the whole dope straight. Marty Lingo told us. Come here, gal!" He held out his arms. "You been through the hell of a time. Tell me what's happened!"

"Henry Sugg won't bother us any more!" she replied. "He tried to ride Crater and was thrown. His head hit against the wall."

"Where is he?"

"At the end of the patio. The fall killed him."

A gasp of relief went out from every man. The posse clattered up to the veranda.

"Then the range is cleaned out proper!" Gaunt cried. "We got the rest of the Gila's gang back to Lingo's ranch."

"There's nothing more to be afraid of, grandpa. The place is ours. We're home —and home to stay."

"Blowfly Jones, you go and tend to the Gila."

"And to Domingo," Drury added. "He was giving the girl a little trouble. He's in the sala at the dinner-table, where his trouble started."

"Look here, Mr. Puncher-boy," Gaunt said to Drury. "We made the hell of a mistake regarding you, and, further and more, we owe you somethin' aside from apologies!"

"I'm to be foreman here," he replied quietly.

"Who the hell told you that? It's my ranch—not yourn!"

"The girl told me."

"All right, that settles it!" the old chief snapped back. He turned to his posse: "Boys, this here cow-gentleman standin' before you is to be foreman of the ranch. Now you men come in. We ain't none of us et all day and our horses are gauntin' with hunger and thirst. Two of you men shag into the chuckhouse and fix us up a meal. Two of you scout around for what's left of my old Juarez stock. Damned if we won't celebrate till we all get roarin'!"

The posse broke out into loud whoops and laughter.

"The rest of you tend to your mounts," Gaunt interrupted. "If you have to walk home you won't be whoopin' her up so loud."

"And light all the candles in the house," cried Jennie. "Let the place come to life again as it was in the old round-up days."

"We'll light the old place up like a church!" one of the boys shouted. "And ourselves too!"

"It's to be an engagement supper!" Jennie cried excitedly.

"Where do you get that!" Gaunt cried. "Engagement supper? What the—"

"Tom Drury and I," she said.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Mr. Peter Gaunt, I—I want to ask for the hand of your gal—" Tom stammered.

Gaunt turned to his granddaughter, his face reddening. Whether his uncomfortable condition was due to surprise, anger, or apoplexy, was not evident.

"What are you handin' me, gal—engagement supper! Do you mean to stand there and tell me—"

"Tom Drury is asking you for my hand."

"Mr. Puncher-boy, you stick around as my foreman for a few years—"

Marty Lingo interrupted.

"What the Sam Hill do you think you're goin' to do with them two lovers, keepin' 'em apart for a few years? Can you beat that, men! He wants this here buckaroo to stick around and punch his cattle, like in the Ole Testament Jacob's uncle made him punch up his drags for six years before he could have a look-in with the gal he wanted to marry!"

"Marty, rather than have you give us a speech like you did in co't this afternoon, I'll consent to anything. Boys, congratulate this here buckaroo and the gal. Bein' as she's made up her mind and nothin' I can do has ever yet unmade it, I hereby give my consent to the fact that we call this here approaching feast an engagement supper!"

The men broke out in a whooping cheer. They accompanied old Gaunt, Tom Drury and his fiancée into the house, and soon the place was aglow with candles and echoing with shouts, laughter and the merry jingle of spurs.

(The end.)

Movie Mad

by John Holden

ONE could see at a glance that Roy Sweeney did not belong in the homestead country any more than a cat belongs in a barrel of molasses. Homesteading is a game for huskies like Bill Bradley, who is my neighbor and looks like the heavyweight champion. Even I myself have often felt that my 170 pounds are utterly inadequate to the task of converting six hundred and forty acres of wild land into a life-supporting ranch.

So we settlers were surprised one fine morning to find in our midst the frailest looking specimen of young manhood that I had seen in months. His face was handsome enough in a feminine way, but he was built on the general specifications of a lath and apparently possessed about as much stamina as a week-old calf. His countenance was pale, his thin fingers were cigarette stained and shaky, and his eyes indicated a too intimate acquaintance with the outlaw, John Barleycorn.

Ordinarily a chap of that type has about as much ambition as an inch-worm, but it quickly appeared that that desirable quality was the one thing that our new neighbor possessed in superabundance.

When I rode up to where his load of lumber was dumped on the ground he was laboring like a beaver at the task of nailing together the foundation timbers of his shack, and I could see that what he knew about the carpenter's trade could be written on a postage stamp with a typewriter.

"Good morning," I said to him. "I guess homesteading is a new game for you, isn't it?"

He admitted that it was. We introduced ourselves and he said he was glad to see me. He looked as though he meant it too, but he hardly paused in his work as he talked.

"I suppose the lure of the open air and the freedom of the prairie got you?" I remarked.

"Oh, no; nothing like that," Roy Sweeney replied. "I hate the lonesomeness, and if this is what you call freedom"—he was sawing a board like a man pushes a stalled motor-car—"then I hope I get a little slavery now and then by way of variety."

"Once you get your shack built and your fences up it won't be so bad," I endeavored to comfort him.

"They say one can get used to anything," was his cheerful response.

I helped him by holding two pieces of two-by-four while he nailed them together and then I remarked:

"Your real reason for homesteading this land, I suppose, is to acquire title to it from the government and then sell it for the five thousand dollars or so that it ought to bring you?"

"You said it," he replied. "Once I get my title you bet you'll never see me in the homestead country again. I'm a city guy and when I get through here I'm going to remain a city guy."

I wanted to inquire what extraordinary reason he had for engaging in a task that was about as easy for him as pushing a bowlder uphill is for a child, but, being too modest and backward for my own good, I did not do so. I gave Roy a few labor-saving hints, which he seemed to appreciate, and then I was compelled to ride home and do some work of my own, though it seemed nothing short of cruelty to leave that puny fellow to his self-imposed task of erecting a shack without knowledge and without help.

As the succeeding days passed it became apparent that Roy Sweeney's ambition had lasting qualities. He continued to work as willingly as a fish swims. His shack, when completed, resembled a huge packing-case more than a house, but it was weather-proof and that was all that really mattered.

He went about his other duties in the hardest possible way too, but he got results. I thought about him and the tremendous ambition that must be behind his determination to acquire six hundred and forty acres of good land, and the more I thought the more interested I became until finally I explained Roy's case to Bill Bradley, whose ranch adjoins mine.

Bill, like myself, started as a homesteader and is now a regular rancher, but a more successful one than I ever hope to be. I don't know how Bill does it, but things seem to get accomplished for him more easily than for anyone else. He owns not only his original homestead but an additional five hundred acres of good grazing land as well, and cattle cover his acreage as thickly as hair on a dog's hide. He said he owed his good fortune to his avoidance of women, but I doubted that, though it was a fact that Bill nursed a grudge against the whole sex. Why, I do not know. Physically, as already stated, he could take three such fellows as Roy Sweeney and keep tossing them in the air, like a juggler tosses three balls.

"If the kid is such an odd specimen as you say, of course I want to see him," Bill replied when I suggested that we should ride over to Roy's place.

Bill smiled when he sighted the new settler's shack, but when Roy opened the door and we entered the little dwelling Bill's smile changed to an aspect of surprise and alarm. I was surprised, too, though not being a woman hater, I was not alarmed. It was Roy's peculiar scheme of interior decoration that excited our emotion.

In the homestead country it is a common enough custom to decorate shack walls with pictures cut from magazines, but never had I seen one that was so absolutely plastered with them as was Roy Sweeney's. And they were not all pictures of different subjects either. Each and every one of Roy's pictures was that of a beautiful girl. Not only that, they were all pictures of the same girl!

"Nice collection you've got," I remarked when I had introduced Bill Bradley as a shining example for all homesteaders, and Bill had welcomed Roy to the cattle country in a manner that, doubtless due to the pictures, was somewhat lacking in his customary cordiality.

"Do you like them?" Roy's face lighted up as does that of a connoisseur when he exhibits his art treasures.

"Sure I like them," I said, noting at the same time that Bill said nothing. "Who is she?" I examined one of them more closely. "Gloria Garden, the movie actress, eh?"

"Movie star," Roy corrected quickly.

"I've seen her," I said. "In pictures I mean."

"Did you like her?"

"Certainly; who wouldn't?"

Roy turned to Bill. "Have you seen her too, Mr. Bradley?" he queried.

"No, but I've read about her." Bill seemed to realize that his tone was too snappy, for he added more gently: "You're acquainted with the young lady, I suppose?"

Roy looked uncomfortable. "Well—er—in a way I suppose I am."

"Your fiancée maybe?" Bill grinned as he said that. I suppose he could not help it. The idea that a celebrity like Gloria Garden could be engaged to a moneyless homesteader like Roy Sweeney did sound a bit absurd.

"Oh, Lord, no!" Roy looked shocked.

"You must think an awful lot of her to keep so many pictures of her tacked up."

"I do. Why shouldn't I? She's the finest girl in the world."

"Where do you get them all?"

"Out of magazines and newspapers." Roy waved an eloquent hand toward his home-made table, on which reposed six different periodicals, all with pretty girls on the cover and all devoted to motion pictures.

Bill looked at them. "You must have a business interest in the movies to subscribe to so many magazines."

"No; I get them just for the sake of the pictures."

Bill stared at Roy and then gave me a glance which stated as plainly as words that in his opinion our new neighbor was slightly balmy.

"You mean to say that you pay for all those magazines just so you can cut out any pictures of Gloria Garden that may happen to appear in them?"

"That's it exactly."

"You make me think of that story about the rube that waited outside the movie house to meet the star," said the big rancher with a grin.

But he got no answering smile from Roy. The latter remained gloomily silent for a moment; then he made the remark that cleared up the mystery of his attempt to win a five thousand dollar homestead from the government.

"If it wasn't for Gloria I wouldn't be here," he stated seriously.

"Good!" said Bill. "It's a pleasure to know that for once Gloria Garden has inspired a man to do something worth while."

I butted into the conversation then and we got to talking about cattle and crops, and in a little while Bill and I took our departure.

"Talk about idiots!" exclaimed my companion when we had ridden a little distance from the shack. "Did you ever see any one so absolutely insane in all your life?"

"You mean Roy?" I did not hate women as Bill did and in consequence could understand the young fellow's state of mind in a measure at least.

"Of course. He doesn't even know the woman! Said he supposed he was acquainted with her, in a way, which means that he's written her a bushel of silly letters and her secretary has acknowledged receipt of them. That's the way he knows her, the poor fool."

"You've got to admit that she's done him some good in causing him to take up this homestead," I argued. "The outdoor life will make a new man of him."

"Physically maybe, but not mentally. She'll put him in the asylum, that's what she'll do. And if he does sell his homestead for a good price after he gets title to it what do you suppose he'll do with the money? I know. Blow it all in trying to get acquainted with her. My stars! I've read about men going crazy over the picture of a woman, but I never expected to see it in real life. And yet there's a case that's worse than anything I ever read about!"

"You don't understand anything about love," I replied. "Maybe Roy will win Gloria in the end. Stranger things have happened."

"A shrimp like him? Don't make me laugh."

"He's good looking enough and a few months of outdoor life will set him up physically."

"Well, suppose for the sake of argument that he does win her? What will he get? Something I wouldn't want, you bet. A bundle of extravagance that will land him in the poorhouse in a year. But he won't. Hasn't got a chance in a million. Don't be ridiculous, Tom."

I admitted that perhaps I had been.

I remained at Bill's comfortable ranch-house for the excellent supper that his Chinese cook prepared—better than any darned woman could cook it, he said—and we had quite forgotten Roy Sweeney and his mad infatuation for a woman he had probably never seen, when suddenly the matter was brought to our attention again in a somewhat startling manner.

We were sitting on the veranda when I noticed a cloud of dust in the distance and then an unskillful rider galloping toward us. Presently we could see that it was the new homesteader. He pulled his mount back on its haunches before the ranch-house, flung himself out of the saddle, and came walking briskly toward us. His jaw was set like a vise, a determined glint was

in his eyes and his hands were clenched. He stopped in front of Bill and I could see that he was quivering with anger.

"Look here, Bradley," he snapped. "I thought over what you said about Gloria Garden after you left and it came to me that you were insulting her. You said it was a pleasure to know that *for once* she had inspired a man to do something worth while. That's the same as saying that usually she inspires them to do questionable things and that is a reflection on her character. I won't stand for it. Do you get me? You've got to take it back!"

The little fellow's attitude would have been comical had it not been so tragic. He looked like a pygmy defying a giant. Big Bill Bradley, who could have picked him up and flung him off the veranda with one hand, smiled. In fact, I could scarcely keep from smiling myself.

"What will you do if I don't?" Bill inquired in a mild tone.

"I'll smash you on the jaw, that's what!"

"With those little hands of yours?"

"Yes!" Roy stepped closer and shook his fist in Bill's face. "Will you apologize?"

Bill's grin expanded. "No, I don't think I will just yet," he remarked casually, and in leisurely manner he rose to his feet.

Roy made no reply; just swung his futile little fist upward at Bill's face.

Of course it did not land. Bill caught it in the air, then grasped Roy's other hand as well, and held both of them in an iron grip. He stood looking at the squirming fellow for a while and then he spoke.

"I *do* apologize, Roy," he said in the friendliest tone he had used as yet in speaking to the new settler. "I would have done so at first, but I wanted to see if you really had the nerve to swing on a man twice your size. You had, and I admire your grit. I'm sorry I said anything that could be construed as the slightest reflection on Miss Garden's character. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

He dropped Roy's two hands and held out his own big one. Roy looked at him in amazement and I could see tears starting to his girlishly pretty eyes. He blinked them back, gulped heavily, and said: "Yes, yes, it's all right." Then he turned and walked toward his scrubby little pony.

"If I can help you in any way just let me know," Bill sang out after him.

We heard the single word "Thanks!" Then Roy climbed awkwardly into his saddle and was off as abruptly as he had arrived.

"The poor little chump!" said Bill. But this time there was more affection than contempt in his tone. "Vamped by a picture! Wanted to fight for a woman who probably wouldn't raise her little finger to save him from hell. Oh, well, it takes all kinds of people to make a world, doesn't it?"

I agreed that it did, and we discussed Roy's chances for winning success as a homesteader. They seemed to be against him.

But as days grew into weeks the frail fellow appeared to be making good. Bill Bradley may have had something to do with that. When his own plowing was done he offered to do Roy's on credit, and in other ways he took a kindly interest in the new settler. Occasionally he tried, in a tactful manner, to get Roy's mind off Gloria Garden, for he was still convinced that Roy's obvious infatuation for her would be the ruin of him in the end.

"I dare say Miss Garden is a perfect woman, just as you claim," he remarked to Roy once when I happened to be present. "But still you've got to admit that a good many actresses are not exactly that."

"I never said Gloria was perfect," said Roy. "She isn't. She thinks only in terms of money, and she's got a heart that can be as hard as a rock at times. That's why I'm here. But, with all her faults, she is still the finest girl that ever was born!"

"Oh, you've met the lady then?" Bill queried.

Roy looked confused and uncomfortable again, as though he had said something he had not meant to.

"I can't tell you the whole story just now," he said.

It was about three weeks later that Bill Bradley and I found ourselves one evening in the city nearest the homestead country, about sixty miles from our ranches. We

had driven in Bill's yellow runabout that has the concealed seat behind, and after we transacted our business we decided to remain over night and return in the morning. In this city the lights in front of the picture shows are just as bright as in other cities, so what was more natural than that we should stroll past the movie houses?

What we saw in front of the Orpheum, however, did not seem altogether natural in view of our acquaintance with Roy Sweeney.

First, there was the announcement of a photoplay in which Gloria Garden was starred. Nothing unusual about that, of course, but that was only part of the announcement. The thing that caused us to stand stock still and stare and mutter exclamations of wonder was the further announcement that, at nine o'clock that very evening, Miss Gloria Garden herself, in the flesh, would be present and would address the audience. She was on her way to Yellowstone National Park for a brief vacation, we read, and her presence in the Wyoming city was a fortuitous accident, of which her many local admirers would doubtless be pleased to take advantage.

"If Roy Sweeney were only with us!" Bill Bradley exclaimed.

"It's too late to run out and get him, I suppose," I ventured.

"Absolutely. But let's give this Garden woman the once over ourselves. I'm curious to see her since she is the one that Roy Sweeney is crazy about."

So we entered the theater, saw the picture, and at nine o'clock got an eyeful of the famous star herself.

"A beautiful girl all right," Bill admitted as she stood in the spotlight. "The innocent face of an angel, too; but we all know how little that means. All the home wreckers have it. Look at the way she rolls her eyes, trying to vamp every man in the audience. Heaven help the one she marries!"

Bill continued to appraise her in that manner, not that he knew anything against her personally, he explained; but just because she was a movie actress, and he had a poor opinion of all actresses.

"Imagine a woman like her, with the income of a corporation president, reciprocating the juvenile affection of a boy like Roy Sweeney," he said. "And yet the kid seems to think he can make a hit with her by gaining title to a homestead that isn't worth, at the outside, any more than her salary for one month. Tragic, I call it."

We left the theater, and as we sauntered down toward our hotel, with Bill still talking about Roy and his crazy love affair, an idea struck me with all the force of a hammer on an eggshell.

"Let's call on Gloria Garden and tell her about Roy!" I exclaimed.

Bill stared at me, then slowly the idea gained weight in his mind. "Do you think she'd receive us?"

"Why not? Any woman is interested in learning that some man is hopelessly in love with her. Let's try anyhow."

So we sent our names up to the famous star, and somewhat to our surprise, received word that she would see us in the ladies' parlor immediately. We went there, and in a moment Gloria Garden appeared.

I could understand then, even better than at the theater, why it was that Roy Sweeney had pictures of her tacked up all over his walls. She was the sort of girl that might well win the heart of a man of stone. Of medium height, she possessed the daintiest figure I had ever seen in real life. Her lustrous brow eyes were even more fascinating than they appeared in her photographs, and no picture machine on earth could adequately represent the burnished copper of her hair. She was by long odds the most beautiful girl I had ever laid eyes on.

But if Bill Bradley felt the lure of her personality he certainly did not show it. He ran true to his woman-hating form.

"We just dropped in to tell you something that we thought might interest you," Bill said in the easy manner of a man who, though he may hate women, nevertheless knows how to talk to them. "We are ranchers, and out our way there is a new settler who has the inside of his cabin literally covered with pictures of you. Claims you are the finest girl on earth—which of course you may be. Personally I think, though, that it's a shame to see any man so absolutely and hopelessly enamored of

any woman. I was wondering if maybe you couldn't do something to stop him making a fool of himself."

Gloria Garden laughed, and the sound of her voice was like the music of running water.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "How can I stop any man collecting pictures of me. They are in all the magazines, and the magazines are read by—"

Suddenly she stopped and her mirthful expression was replaced by a serious one.

"Who—I mean what kind of a man is it that has those pictures?" she demanded.

Bill and I looked at her in amazement.

"A young fellow," he replied. "A city chap. He doesn't like homesteading, but—"

"What's his name?"

"Roy Sweeney."

For a moment the world-famous girl stood staring at Bill, as silent and still as a statue of Tragedy. Her beautiful countenance was as pale as chalk.

"Can you take me to him?" she asked in a hushed voice, like that of a little girl who inquired if her broken doll can be mended.

"Why—er—yes." Bill was obviously confused by this astounding request. "We'll start first thing in the morning."

Gloria clutched his arm.

"Can you take me to him *now?*" Her tone was as fiercely intense as the growl of a tigress.

"Yes—but wouldn't that be unconventional?"

"Not in this case. Can we start now? How can we go? In a car? How far is it?"

Bill gave her the desired information, and in two minutes we were getting his machine in shape for the journey back home.

"Some girl! eh? Sort of surprised you, didn't she?" I asked.

"By Jove, yes!" he said. "Say, she's a regular woman, isn't she? A ball of fire. If Roy Sweeney really knows her, and it sure looks like he does, it's no wonder he fell for her. Almost any man would."

"Even a woman-hater like you perhaps," I remarked.

Bill made no reply.

I suspected something then and my suspicion was confirmed as we sped homeward at forty miles an hour over a moonwashed road that was as smooth and level as a board track. I was seated in the back seat where I had nothing to do but watch Bill and Gloria. His manner, as he leaned over toward her, and his painstaking efforts to make her journey swift and safe were eloquent to me of a changed attitude toward at least one member of the conquering sex. After twenty miles the situation was as plain to me as the white ribbon of the road. Bill Bradley, like Roy Sweeney, had succumbed to the charm of Gloria Garden!

Poor Bill! He who had pitied Roy for loving a woman—he had no chance to win—was now in the same tragic predicament that he thought Roy had been in. Worse! For in Roy's case no one knew that Gloria loved some one else, while in Bill's it was obvious that she did love some one else.

It was nearing morning when we arrived at Roy's shack and thundered on his door. He answered sleepily, and presently a light shone inside, the door opened, and he appeared in his pyjamas.

But Gloria Garden cared nothing for pyjamas. She threw herself upon that insignificant looking fellow, and hugged and kissed him with a fervor I had never seen in her photoplays. I watched Bill Bradley closely at that point and was not surprised to see the corners of his mouth droop into a woeful little smile. That was the final bit of evidence. He was in love with Gloria and the sight of her embracing man was like a dagger thrust in his heart.

"Why, oh, why, did you leave me, Roy?" Gloria asked after a moment.

"It was that last calling down you gave me that did it, Gloria," he answered. "No fellow that had a spark of manhood in him could hang around after that. You remember what you said, don't you? That I was a loafer, a cigarette-smoking failure, a worthless hanger-on around the studios, that the money you gave me then was the last I would ever get from you, that I would have to get out and rustle and show a little manhood or you would have nothing more to do with me. It did the trick, Gloria. I resolved to avoid temptation and make money and recover my health all at

the same time by taking up a homestead. I woke up to the fact that I was nothing more nor less than a sponge on the best sister that any man ever had, and I resolved to show you—"

"What's that?" Bill interrupted in a tense voice. "What was that you called her, Roy?"

Roy had apparently forgotten the presence of Bill and myself, but now he turned to us.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said. "Allow me to introduce my sister, that I think more of than I will ever think of myself. Kitty Sweeney is her name, though she's better known to the world by her movie name of Gloria Garden. I suppose I should have said I was her brother long ago, but I was afraid that if I did some one would write and tell her where I was, and I didn't want her to know until I had accomplished something."

The change of expression that took place on Bill Bradley's face then was something, I think, that no actor on earth could have accomplished. He turned to the girl.

"I'm glad to know that, Miss Garden," he said.

"I'm glad that you're glad, Mr. Bradley," said Gloria, and she held out her little hand to big Bill. "I'll be visiting Roy for a few days," she added. "Won't you come around to see me—both of you?"

I had an idea that she did not really care whether I came or not, but I did not feel bad about it. Bill Bradley seemed to have a good chance to win her, and that was enough to make me happy.

"The Firemen are Fighting the Flames"

by Burton Harcourt

I WAS at the back winder of the second story bedroom on the right-hand side, an' I should imagine Casey was somewheres between the kitchen an' the silver cupboard when the flames begun to crawl out from under the eaves. From where I was crouchin' I could see 'em better than anybody, I dare say, an' I know I was the first person to give the alarm, because the minute I seen the flames I whistled three times like a kildee to tell Casey to beat it out of the house.

Then I started down the veranda post just as somebody yelled "Fire!" I don't know who it was, but I know I went up the post again like a frightened squirrel when they did. It was some fool that was passin' in the street, of course.

I took one look at the smoke that was crawlin' out from under the roof an' scrambled back to the winder on the right-hand side, an' tried to decide what the mischief to do. I was in an orful predicament because I couldn't climb down with that jackass in the street shoutin' "Fire!"—an' I was bound to be seen where I was.

I opened the winder and jumped in.

The woman in the bed—I never dreamed there was anybody in the bed till I lit on it—screamed murder an' kicked frantic as I jumped on over the bed to the floor an' made for the door. I had presence of mind enough to yell " Fire!" as I went.

" Help!" screamed the woman behind me.

" Fire!" I yelled again an' bolted into the hall.

Doors begun to slam somewheres in the house, an' as I fell over a hall rack I begun to feel sorry for Casey.

" Fire!" somebody shouted downstairs.

" What!" I said to myself. " Can that be Casey?"

But just then I fell over somethin' else an' forgot all about Casey. I ran like a rabbit an' bumped against the banister.

" Help!" screamed the woman in the bedroom I'd come through.

" Fire!" they was yellin' downstairs.

But I made straight for the room where the maid told Casey the butler said the jewels was. An' I got there without as much difficulty as I had expected an' without carin' two hoots what would result from the screams at the back of the house where the woman I stepped on was hollerin' for help.

I got to the room where the safe was without any mishap but a bruised shin, an' I turned on the little flashlight an' got the safe open in a jiffy, while the doors was slammin' an' voices was hollerin' " Fire!" The pearls was there, an' I grabbed 'em.

Then I remembered Casey.

Half a hundred people were shoutin' " Fire!" in the street. The house was in a hubbub.

I ran out in the hall an' whistled again. But just as I did so somebody somewhere switched on the electric lights, an' there I stood in the hall with the pearls in my hand, bright as day, an' at the far end of the hall was a girl in a vi'let kimono, with her eyes wild, wavin' her arms an' comin' toward me shriekin' " Help!"

I dodged back into the room an' made for the winder. But the smoke was gettin' thick an' I couldn't see my way clear. I stumbled over a chair.

" Fire!" I yelled.

" Fire!" shouted somebody in the hall.

I scrambled up an' stuck the pearls in my pocket, an' made for the winder again. But as I got there I seen the street full of people, an' a tongue of flame leaped up from under the carpet, an' I turned back in a hurry. As I turned back I seen the figger of the butler in the doorway, wavin' his arms, an' it seemed to me like the jig was up.

I dashed at him an' hit him hard on the jaw an' yelled " Fire!"

He dropped like a rocket, an' I jumped over him right into the arms of the girl in the vi'let kimono—the woman I stepped on, of course.

I hollered " Fire!" again, an' started past her, but she throwed her arms around my neck an' screamed:

" Save me!"

There wasn't nothin' for it but to do as she asked. I picked her up an' rushed for the head of the stairs, hopin' the butler would come to before it got too hot. But the smoke was comin' up in clouds from down below, an' I couldn't risk goin' down that way. An' I couldn't very well take her down the veranda post the way I'd come up.

I halted at the head of the stairs in a horrible state of mind, an' her screamin'. I heard the engines puffin' in the street an' the firemen shoutin'. I suddenly felt strange an' heroic.

I forgot the awkerd predicament I was in with the pearls in my pocket an' the young lady under my arm.

" Which is the way to the roof, madam?" I demanded.

She gesticklated with her finger an' hugged up against me like a frightened bird. I dashed up the third flight of stairs to the attic, draggin' her along. I got the trapdoor open an' out we went on the roof.

The smoke out there was horrible, an' the girl—God bless her—was coughin' an' sobbin' an' carryin' on like mad. I almost choked with the flames, an' I tried to think while I was chokin' what was the best thing to do.

But I couldn't see any way to get orf the

roof, so I stopped right clost to the trapdoor an' let the girl sink down on the tiles. She sat there with the smoke eddyin' around her, makin' one of the prettiest pictures in the world. I suddenly felt exhilaration an' all that sort of stuff as I looked at her. It was wonderful.

A hundred voices in the street was hollerin' "Fire!" an' the engines was chuggin'.

"You're good!" the girl cried, grabbin' my knees. "You're good to have carried me out. You'll save me, won't you?"

"Madam," I said, "if anybody can save you, it's me, an' I will."

Tongues of blazes begun lappin' up over the edge of the roof at the far end of the house—little purple an' red an' crimson snakelike tongues. My flesh begun to crawl. The idea of bein' burned to death suddenly struck me with all its horror.

"Don't be afraid," I said, largely for my own benefit prob'ly. "They'll save us."

An' just then there was a squirt an' a swish from the street below, an' steam sizzled an' water begun to splatter against the house, an' I knew the firemen was fightin' the flames.

"They're playin' the hose," I said.

"Thank Heavens!" the girl said. "Isn't it wonderful?"

An' just then there was a clatter from the direction of the trapdoor, as if silver was fallin', an' out bobbed a figger in the smoke.

"I dropped the forks," sez Casey, scramblin' over the roof toward me, draggin' two clatterin' sacks, an' then he seen the girl.

"Fire!" yelled Casey, an' orf he went over the roof like a antelope.

"What did he say?" cried the girl.

"Stop, you blasted idiot!" I yelled with my mouth full of smoke, an' I run an' caught poor ol' frightened Casey just before he broke his neck by jumpin' orf onto an engine. I dragged him back.

The smoke was horrible, but the water was playin' on the far end of the roof now, an' even if he was likely to get drenched it was cheerful to realize the firemen was fightin' the flames.

The girl was cryin' when we got back to her.

"Madam," I said, "it's all for the best. The firemen are fightin' the fire, an' it's only a question of time."

"But we'll be burned by then!" she screamed.

"Nonsense!" sez I, chokin' with smoke.

An' then that Casey begun to jump up an' down, shoutin' that the roof was hot.

"Shut up!" I yelled.

He run to the edge of the house an' looked down, a wavin' of his arms. Somebody must of seen him, because the hose was turned square at him almost at once, an' he galloped back through the smoke.

"They'll get the ladders up in a jiffy, madam," I said.

"But we'll be dead; we'll be dead by then," the girl moaned.

"Don't be ridic'lous, madam," I told her. "There ain't any danger to speak of—"

Just then Casey yelled again that the roof was hot an' he'd lorst his sacks.

"Will you 'ush?" I roared.

"No, I won't, an' be damned to ye!" sez Casey. "I've lorst them sacks."

The girl was all tears an' distress, pretty as a dream in her vi'let kimono, an' all of a sudden the flames burst up through the roof at the other side of the house. They leaped up yellow an' red, high in the air, an' the smoke clouds eddied around golden an' red above 'em, drenchin' us in crimson light. An' if she wasn't the picture of an angel in that settin', I'll surrender. An' when she jumped up an' threw her arms around my neck an' shrieked "Save me!" I traveled right off into delirium.

"Madam," I said, "I will save you. Have no fear. Me or Casey, one will save you. The firemen are fightin' the flames an' the ladders will soon be up. The firemen are—"

"How 're we gona git out o' this? That's wot I want to know?" yelled Casey.

"Will you 'ush?" I roared at him.

The water was sprayin' over the roof. There was a scrapin' against the walls.

"It's no larfin' matter," Casey yelled.

"I'm not larfin'," I said. "Madam, the ladders are scrapin' the walls—"

"Save me," she moaned again. "I'm—"

As a matter of fact, she was faintin'.

"Wot will I say about these here sacks?"

Casey demanded, an' he seemed to have found 'em again.

" For the love o' Mike," I said, " can't you think o' nothin' but them sacks?"

" The roof is hot!" yelled Casey.

" The girl's fainted away," I told him. " Git your wits together an' help me git this woman down orf of this house."

" Help yer git orf? Flap your wings an' fly, little penguin. We're gona be broiled right here, I tell ye," said Casey.

A stream of water came splashin' right over our heads. The ladders begun scrapin' against the edge of the roof. The firemen was fightin' the flames, all right, an' rescue was clost at hand.

" Did you git anything?" asked Casey, spittin' out the smoke.

" I got the pearls," I told him.

" Wot are we gona do about it?" sez Casey. " Wot can we say?"

" Keep your hair on," I said, as I heard voices near the edge of the roof. " I c'n save my face if you c'n save yours. Here they come."

Casey groaned an' begun to mop his brow. I leaned down over the girl to see if she was really faintin', an' she was. She couldn't of heard a word we said. An' she was pretty as loveliness itself, she was.

" I'm goin' crazy," Casey announced in a wild voice.

He was a clutchin' of the two sacks an' coughin' with haggard eyes.

Suddenly two ladder-tips stuck up over the edge of the roof, one clost an' the other forty paces away. Up come the helmets!

Casey dashed toward the clostest one with the sacks, and yelled, "Here is the silverware!"

An' he poked it into the hands of a astonished firefighter an' bolted orf to the other ladder an' went down it like a monkey as two firemen stepped orf of it onto the roof.

The firefighter started back down the ladder with the sacks as his comrade climbed orf an' come sputterin' toward me and the girl. I handed her to him.

" She's fainted," I said, " an' you're better at climbin' down ladders than I am, gov'nor. You take her down an' I'll foller."

He picked her up an' went for the ladder, me behind him. An' down we started, with a sea o' faces starin' up at us, crimson in the light of the flames. It was wonderful an' exhilaratin' as we went slowly, rung by rung, toward the ground, with a thousand people cheerin' an' jumpin' up an' down with delight.

It nearly turned into a tragedy when the girl come to in mid-air an' begun to kick, but the fireman kept her under control all right. An' down we went, while the engine chugged, an' the crowd shouted an' the blazes an' burnin' smoke mounted skyward an' the water sizzled an' swished an' the firemen was fightin' the flames.

We stepped orf the foot of the ladder into a stampedin' mob, an' the girl's mother rushed up an' hugged her, an' people throwed their hats in the air.

An' then I heard somebody yell:

" The pearls an' the silver is gorn!"

I could of swallowed myself in my fright.

" Thieves! Vandals! Ghouls!" shouted somebody in the crowd.

" Catch 'em!" yelled somebody else.

It was horrible. An' there I stood.

" Watch for strange faces—" shouted a policeman.

" The pearls an' the silver!" screamed the girl's mother. " Oh, dear!"

" Here's the silverware!" suddenly shouted the fireman that had brought down Casey's sacks. " Here's the silverware."

" All but the forks!" yelled Casey's voice somewhere in the crowd, an' I heard him boltin' for safety.

" Thank God!" said the girl's mother. " But the pearls! The necklace!"

" Are the pearls gone? Are the pearls gone?" the girl cried.

" Yes, Miss Alice," said the butler, pokin' his face out from the crowd—an' a horrible swollen jaw he had where I'd hit him —" the pearls are gone. Stolen. The safe was robbed."

" Oh,—oh—" the girl cried again.

" Madam," I said—" sir," I added, as the policeman stepped over toward us; " madam, you must be carried away by excitement. Them pearls is around your neck."

And so they was.

I put 'em there while the firemen was fightin' the flames.

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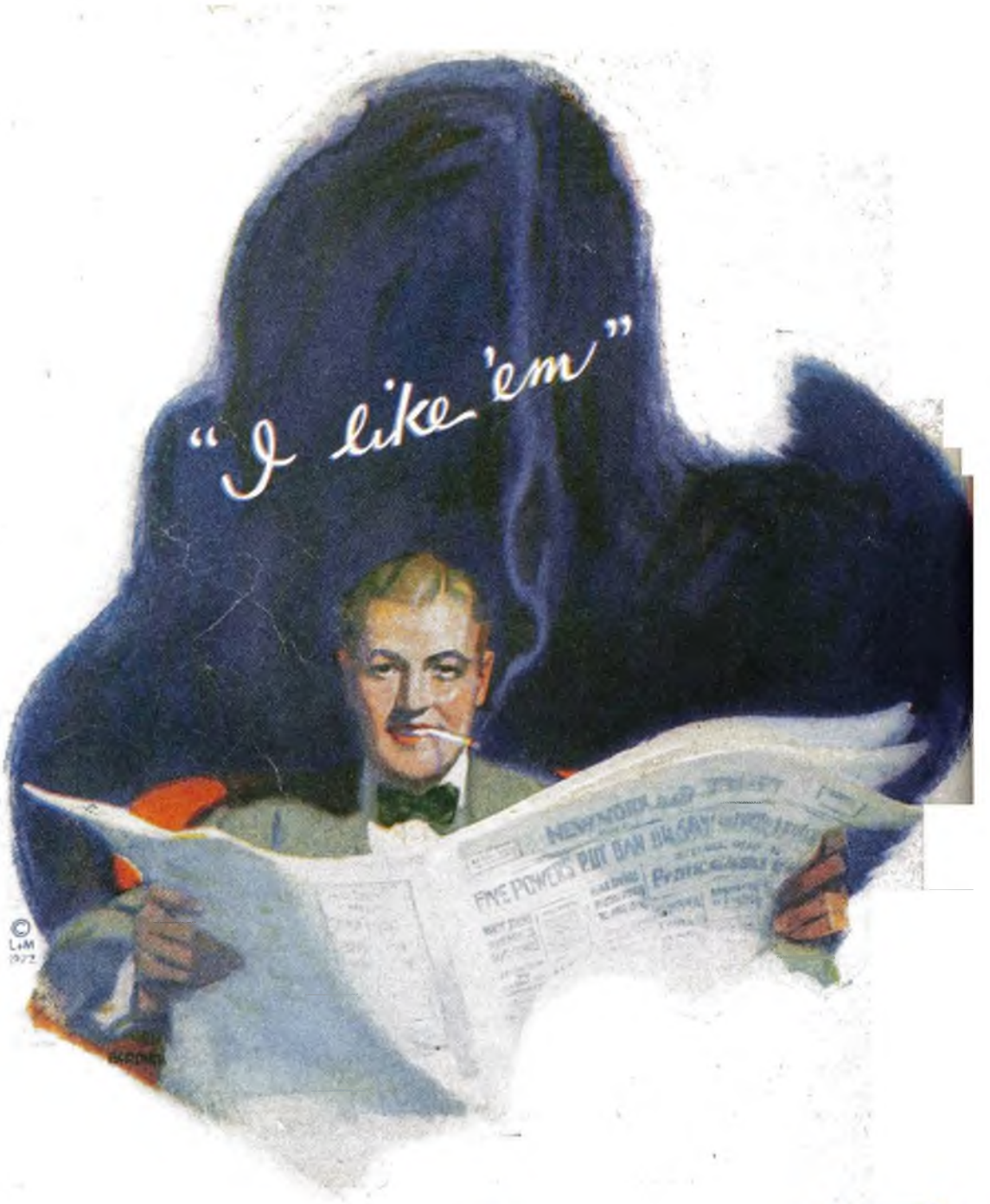

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