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APRIL 1921

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

"The Cross-Cut," a Novel by Courtney Ryley Cooper; Frank Condon, Maxwell Smith, Clarence Herbert New Robert J. Casey, F. Morton Howard, Culpeper Zandtt, Paul Fitzgerald, Marshall Scull, George Worts and others

THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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A Complete Novelette

Short Stories You Will Remember

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APRIL 1921

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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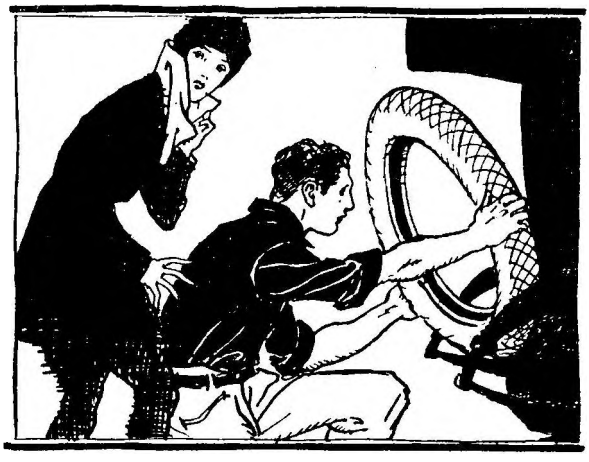

The Crosscut

The Colorado mining country provides the background for this swift-moving novel—a story wherein mystery, adventure and romance keep things interesting indeed.

By COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

CHAPTER I

IT was over. The rambling house, with its rickety old-fashioned furniture—and its memories—was now deserted, except for Robert Fairchild, and he was deserted within it, wandering from room to room, staring at familiar objects with the unfamiliar gaze of one whose vision suddenly has been warped by the visitation of death, and the sense of loneliness that it brings.

Loneliness, rather than grief, for it had been Robert Fairchild's promise that he would not suffer in heart for one who had longed to go into a peace for which he had waited, seemingly, in vain. Year after year Thornton Fairchild had sat in the big armchair by the windows, watching the days grow old and fade into night, studying sunset after sunset, voicing the vain hope that the gloaming might bring the twilight of his own existence—a silent man except for this, rarely speaking of the past, never giving to the son who worked for him, cared for him, worshiped him, the slightest inkling of what might have happened in the dim days of the long ago to transform him into a beaten thing, longing for the final surcease. And when the end came, it found him in readiness, waiting in the big armchair by the windows.

Even now, a book lay on the frayed carpeting of the old room where it had fallen from relaxing fingers. Robert Fairchild picked it up and with a sigh restored it to the grim fumed-oak case. His days of petty sacrifices that his father might while away the weary hours with reading, were over. As he roamed about in his loneli-

ness, he wondered what he would do now, where he could go; to whom he could talk. He had worked since sixteen, and since sixteen there had been few times when he had not come home regularly each night, to wait upon the white-haired man in the big chair, instinctively to discern his wants, and to sit with him, often in silence, until the old onyx clock on the mantel had clanged eleven; it had been the same program, day, week, month and year.

And now Robert Fairchild was as a person lost. The ordinary pleasures of youth had never been his; he could not turn to them with any sort of grace. The years of servitude to a beloved master had inculcated within him the feeling of self-impelled sacrifice—he had forgotten all thought of personal pleasures for their sake alone.

WHAT had been the past? Why the silence? Why the patient, yet impatient, wait for death? The son did not know. In all his memories was only one faint picture, painted years before in young boyhood—almost babyhood: the return of his father from somewhere, a long conference with his mother behind closed doors, while he in childlike curiosity waited without, seeking in vain to catch some explanation. Then a sad-faced woman who cried at night when the house was still, who faded and who died. That was all. The picture carried no explanation.

And now Robert Fairchild stood on the threshold of something he almost feared to learn. Once, on a black, stormy night, they had sat together before the fire, silent for hours. Then the hand of the white-haired man had reached outward and rested for a moment on the son's knee.

"I wrote something to you, boy, a day or so ago," he had said. "That little illness I had prompted me to do it. I—I thought it was only fair to you. After I'm gone, look in the safe. You'll find the combination on a piece of paper hidden in a hole cut in that old European history in the bookcase. I have your promise, I know—that you'll not do it until after I'm gone."

Thornton Fairchild was gone. But a message had remained behind, one which the patient lips had feared to utter during life. The heart of the son began to pound, slow and hard, as with the memory of that conversation, he turned toward the bookcase and unlatched the paneled door. A moment more, and the hollowed history had given up its trust, a bit of paper scratched with numbers. Robert Fairchild turned toward the stairs and the small room on the second floor which had served as his father's bedroom.

The safe had not been opened in years; that was evident from the creaking of the plungers as they fell, the gummy resistance of the knob as Fairchild turned it in accordance with the directions on the paper. Finally a great wrench, and the bolt was drawn grudgingly back; a strong pull, and the safe opened.

A few old books—ledgers in sheepskin binding; Fairchild diregarded these for the more important things that might lie behind the little inner door of the cabinet. The door was unlocked; he drew it open, and crouched a moment staring before he reached for the thinner of two envelopes which lay before him. A moment later he straightened and turned toward the light. A crinkling of paper, a quick-drawn sigh between clenched teeth; it was a letter: his strange, quiet, hunted-appearing father was talking to him through the medium of ink and paper, after death.

"My son:

"Before I begin this letter to you, I must ask that you take no action whatever until you have seen my attorney—he will be yours from now on. I have never mentioned him to you before; it was not necessary, and would only have brought you curiosity which I could not have satisfied. But now, I am afraid, the doors must be unlocked. I am gone. You are young; you have been a faithful son, and you are deserving of every good fortune that may possibly come to you. I am praying that the years have made a difference, and that Fortune may smile upon you as she frowned on me. Certainly she can injure me no longer. My race is run; I am beyond earthly fortunes.

"Therefore, when you have finished with this, take the deeds inclosed in the larger envelope and go to St. Louis. There look up Henry F. Beamish, attorney at law, in the Princess Building. He will explain them to you.

"Beyond this, I fear, there is little that can aid you. I cannot find the strength, now that I face it, to tell you what you may find if you follow the lure that the other envelope holds forth to you. There is always the hope that Fortune may be kind to me at last, and smile upon my

memory by never letting you know why I have been the sort of man you have known, and not the jovial, genial companion a father should be. But there are certain things, my son, which defeat a man. It killed your mother—every day since her death I have been haunted by that fact; my prayer is that it may not kill you, spiritually if not physically. Therefore is it not better that it remain behind a cloud until such time as Fortune may reveal it—and hope that such a time will never come? I think so—not for myself, for when you read this, I shall be gone; but for you, that you may not be handicapped by the knowledge of the thing which whitened my hair and aged me long before my time.

"If he lives, and I am sure he does, there is one who will hurry to your aid as soon as he knows you need him. Accept his counsels, laugh at his little eccentricities if you will, but follow his judgment implicitly. Above all, press no questions that he does not care to answer—there are things that he may not deem wise to tell. It is only fair that he be given the right to choose his disclosures.

"There is little more to say. Beamish will attend to everything for you—if you care to go. Sell everything that is here; the house, the furniture, the belongings. It is my wish, and you will need the capital—if you go. The ledgers in the safe are only old accounts which would be so much Chinese to you now. Burn them. There is nothing else to be afraid of—I hope you will never find anything to fear. And if circumstances should arise to bring before you the story of that which has caused me so much darkness, I have nothing to say in self-extenuation. I made one mistake—that of fear, and in committing one error, I shouldered every blame. It makes little difference now. I am dead—and free.

"My love to you, my son. I hope that wealth and happiness await you. Blood of my blood flows in your veins—and strange though it may sound to you, it is the blood of an adventurer. I can almost see you smile at that! An old man who sat by the window, staring out, afraid of every knock at the door—and yet an adventurer! But they say, once in the blood, it never dies. My wish is that you succeed where I failed—and God be with you!

"YOUR FATHER."

For a long moment Robert Fairchild stood staring at the letter, his heart pounding with excitement. So much had the letter told—and yet so little! Dark had been the hints—of some mysterious, intangible thing great enough in its horror and its far-reaching consequences to cause death for one who had known of it, and a living panic for him who had perpetrated it. As for the man who stood now with the letter clenched before him, there was promise of wealth, and the threat of sorrow, the hope of happiness, yet the foreboding omen of discoveries which might ruin his life. In that super-calmness which accompanies great agitation, Fairchild folded the paper, placed it in its envelope, then slipped it into an inside pocket. A few steps, and he was before the safe once more and reaching for the second envelope.

Heavy and bulky was this, filled with tax-receipts, with plats and blueprints and the reports of surveyors. Here was an assay-slip, bearing figures and notations which Robert Fairchild could not understand. Here a receipt for moneys received, here a varicolored map with lines and figures and conglomerate designs which Fairchild believed must relate in some manner to the location of a mining camp; all were aged and worn at the edges, giving evidence of having been carried, at some far time of the past, in a wallet. More receipts, more blueprints, then a legal document, sealed and stamped and bearing the words:

County of Clear Creek, } ss.
State of Colorado. }

DEED PATENT.

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS: That on this day of our Lord, February 22, 1892, Thornton W. Fairchild, having presented the necessary affidavits and statements of assessments accomplished in accordance with—

On it trailed in endless legal phraseology, stating the fact that the law had been fulfilled in its requirements, and that the claim for which Thornton Fairchild had worked was rightfully his, forever. A longer statement full of figures, of diagrams and surveyor's calculations which Fairchild could neither decipher nor understand, gave the location, the townsite and the property included within the granted rights.

It was something for an attorney, such as Beamish, to interpret, and Fairchild reached for the age-yellowed envelope to return the papers to their resting-place. But he checked his motion involuntarily.

and for a moment held the envelope before him, staring at it with wide eyes. A sentence written in faint, faded ink proclaimed the contents to be "Papers relating to the Blue Poppy Mine," and written across this was a word in the bolder, harsher strokes of a man under stress of emotion, a single word which held the eyes of Robert Fairchild fixed and staring: *"Accursed!"*

CHAPTER II

ONE works quickly when prodded by curiosity. In spite of the dull life which had done its best to fashion a matter-of-fact brain for Robert Fairchild, one sentence in that letter had started a pulsating something within him that he never before had known:

"—it is the blood of an adventurer."

It seemed that Robert Fairchild needed no more than the knowledge to feel the tingle of it—the old house suddenly became stuffy and prison-like as he wandered through it. Only a night of travel intervened between Indianapolis and St. Louis; within twelve hours he could be in the office of Henry Beamish. And then—

A hasty packing of a traveling bag and the cashing of a check at the cigar-store down on the corner. A wakeful night while the train clattered along upon its journey. Then morning, and walking of streets until office hours. At last:

"I'm Robert Fairchild," he said as he faced a white-haired man in the rather dingy offices of the Princess Building. A slow smile spread over the pudgy features of the genial-appearing attorney, and he waved a fat hand toward a chair in a cordial manner.

"Sit down, son," he said casually. "Needn't have announced yourself. I'd have known you—just like your father, boy. How is he?" Then his face suddenly sobered. "I'm afraid your presence is the answer. Am I right?"

Fairchild nodded gravely. The old attorney slowly placed his fat hands together, peaking the fingers, and stared out the window.

"Perhaps it's better so," he observed at last. "We hadn't seen each other in ten years—not since I went up to Indianapolis to have my last talk with him. Did he get any cheerier before—he went?"

"No."

"Just the same, huh? Always waiting?"

"Afraid of every step on the veranda, of every knock at the door."

"And you?"

"I?" Fairchild leaned forward in his chair. "I don't understand."

"Are you afraid?"

"Of what?"

The lawyer smiled. "I don't know. Only"—and he leaned forward—"it's just as though I were living my younger days over, this morning. It doesn't seem any time at all since your father was sitting just about where you are now; and boy, how much you look as he looked that morning! The same gray-blue, earnest eyes, the same dark hair, the same strong shoulders and manly chin, the same build—and look of determination about him. The call of adventure was in his blood, and he sat there all enthusiastic, telling me what he intended doing and asking my advice—although he wouldn't have followed it if I had given it. Back home was a baby, and the woman he loved, and out West was sudden wealth, waiting for the right man to come along and find it." White-haired old Beamish chuckled with the memory of it. "He almost made me throw over the law-business that morning and go out adventuring with him! Then four years later,"—the tone changed suddenly—"he came back."

"What then?" Fairchild was on the edge of his chair.

BUT Beamish only spread his hands. "Truthfully, boy, I don't know. I have guessed—but I wont tell you what. All I know is that your father found what he was looking for, and was on the point of achieving his every dream, when something happened. Then three men simply disappeared from the mining-camp, announcing that they had failed and were going to hunt new diggings. That was all. One of them was your father."

"But you said that he'd found—"

"Silver, running twenty ounces to the ton on an eight-inch vein which gave evidences of being only the beginning of a bonanza! I know, because he had written me that, a month before."

"And he abandoned it?"

"He'd forgotten what he had written, when I saw him again. I didn't question him. I didn't want to—his face told me enough to guess that I wouldn't learn. He went home then, after giving me enough money to pay the taxes on the mine for

the next ten years, simply as his attorney, and without divulging his whereabouts. I did it. Eight years or so later I saw him in Indianapolis. He gave me more money—enough for eleven or twelve years."

"And that was ten years ago?" Robert Fairchild's eyes were reminiscent. "I remember—I was only a kid. He sold off everything he had, except the house."

HENRY BEAMISH walked to his safe, fumbled there a moment, and returned with a few slips of paper.

"Here's the answer," he said quietly. "The taxes are paid until 1922."

Robert Fairchild studied the receipts carefully—futilely, for they told him nothing. The lawyer stood looking down upon him.

"Boy," he said quietly, "I know just about what you're thinking. I've spent a few hours at the same kind of a job myself, and I've called old Henry Beamish more kinds of a fool than you can think of for not coming right out flat-footed and making Thornton tell me the whole story. But some way, when I'd look into those eyes with the fire all dead and ashen within them, and see the lines of an old man in his young face, I—well, I guess I'm too soft-hearted to make folks suffer. I just couldn't do it!"

"So you can tell me nothing?"

"I'm afraid that's true—in one way. In another, I'm a fund of information. Tonight you and I will go to Indianapolis and probate the will—it's simple enough; I've had it in my safe for ten years. After that, you become the owner of the Blue Poppy Mine, to do with as you choose."

"But—"

The old lawyer chuckled.

"Don't ask my advice. I haven't any. Your father told me what to do if you decided to try your luck—and silver's at one dollar and twenty-nine cents. It means a lot of money for anybody who can produce pay ore—unless what he said about the mine pinching out was true."

Again the thrill of a new thing went through Robert Fairchild's veins, something he never had felt until twelve hours before, again the urge for strange places, new scenes, the fire of the hunt after the hidden wealth of silver-seamed hills. Old Beamish caught the light in the eyes, the quick contraction of the hands, and smiled.

"You don't need to tell me, son," he said slowly. "I can see the symptoms. You've got the fever; you're going to work that mine. Perhaps it's just as well. But there are certain things you ought to know and remember."

"Name them," Robert Fairchild put in eagerly.

"Ohadi is thirty-eight miles from Denver. That's your goal. Out there they'll tell you how the mine caved in, and how Thornton Fairchild, who had worked it, together with his two men, Harry Harkins, a Cornishman, and Sissie Larsen, a Swede, left town late one night for Cripple Creek—and never came back. That's the story they'll tell you. Agree with it. Tell them that Harkins, as far as you know, went back to Cornwall, and that you have heard vaguely that Larsen later followed the mining game farther west. Don't let them discourage you."

"Are you certain that this is the truth?"

"How do I know? It's good enough—people shouldn't ask questions. Tell nothing more than that—and be careful of your friends. There is one man to watch—if he is still alive. They call him Squint Rodaine, and he may or may not still be there. I don't know—I'm only sure of the fact that your father hated him, fought him and feared him. The mine tunnel is two miles up Kentucky Gulch, and one hundred yards to the right. A surveyor can lead you to the very spot. It's been abandoned now for nearly twenty years. What you'll find there is more than I can guess. But boy,"—and his hand clenched tight on Robert Fairchild's shoulder—"whatever you do, whatever you run into, whatever friends or enemies you find awaiting you, don't let that light die out of your eyes and don't pull in that chin! If you find a fight on your hands, whether it's man, beast or nature, sail into it! If you run into things that cut your very heart out to learn—beat 'em down and keep going! And win! There—that's all the advice I know. Meet me at the eleven-ten train for Indianapolis. Good-by."

"Good-by,—I'll be there." Fairchild grasped the pudgy hand and left the office. For a moment afterward old Henry Beamish stood thinking—and looking out over the dingy roof adjacent. Then somewhat absently he pressed the ancient electric button for his exceedingly ancient stenographer.

"Call a messenger, please," he ordered when she entered. "I want to send a cablegram."

CHAPTER III

TWO weeks later Robert Fairchild stood at the ticket-window of the Union Station in Denver. In his pocket were a few hundred dollars; in the bank in Indianapolis a few thousands, representing the final proceeds of the sale of everything that had connected him with his past.

"When can I get a train for Ohadi?" he asked impatiently.

The ticket-seller smiled.

"You can't get one."

"But the map shows that a railroad runs there—"

"Ran there, you mean," chaffed the clerk. "The best you can do is get to Forks Creek and walk the rest of the way. That's a narrow-gauge line and Clear Creek's been on a rampage. It took out about two hundred feet of trestle, and there wont be a train into Ohadi for a week."

The disappointment on Fairchild's face was more than apparent—almost boyish in its depression. The ticket-seller leaned closer to the wicket.

"Stranger out here?"

"Very much of one."

"In a hurry to get to Ohadi?"

"Yes."

"Then you can go uptown and hire a taxi—they've got big cars for mountain work, and there are good roads all the way. It'll cost thirty-five or forty dollars. Or—" Fairchild smiled.

"Give me the other system if you've got one. I'm not terribly long on cash—for taxis."

"Certainly not. I was just going to tell you about it. No use spending that money if you've got a little pep and it isn't a matter of life or death. Go up to the Central Loop—anybody can direct you—and catch a street-car for Golden. That eats up fifteen miles and leaves just twenty-two miles more. Then ask somebody to point out the road over Mount Lookout. Machines go along there every few minutes—no trouble at all to catch a ride. You'll be in Ohadi in no time."

Fairchild obeyed the instructions, and in the baggage-room rechecked his trunk to follow him, lightening his traveling-bag at the same time until it carried only necessities. A luncheon, then the street-car. Three quarters of an hour later he began the five-mile trudge up the broad, smooth, carefully groomed automobile highway which masters Mount Lookout. A rumbling sound behind him; then as he stepped to one side, a grimy truck-driver leaned out to shout to him as he passed:

"Want a lift? Hop on! Can't stop—too much grade."

A running leap, and Fairchild seated himself on the tailboard of the truck, swinging his legs, and looking out over the fading plains as the truck roared and clattered upward along the twisting mountain road.

Higher, higher, while the truck labored along the grade, and while the buildings below in Golden shrank smaller and smaller. The reservoir lake in the center of town, a broad expanse of water only a short time before, began to take on the appearance of some great, blue-white diamond, glistening in the sun. Gradually a stream outlined itself, in living topography upon a map which seemed as large as the world itself. Denver, fifteen miles away, came into view, its streets showing like seams in a garment. Higher—the chortling truck gasped at the curves and tugged on the straightaway, but Robert Fairchild had ceased to hear. His every attention was centered on the tremendous stage unfolded before him, the vast stretches of the plains rolling away beneath, even into Kansas and Wyoming and New Mexico, hundreds of miles away.

Upward, still upward. The town below became merely a checkerboard thing, the lake a dot of gleaming silver, the stream a scintillating ribbon stretching off into the foothills. A turn, and they skirted a tremendous valley, its slopes falling away in sheer descents from the roadway. A darkened, moist stretch of road fringed by pines, then a jogging journey over rolling tableland. At last a voice from the driver's seat, and Fairchild turned like a man suddenly awakened:

"Turn off up here at Genessee Mountain. Which way do you go?"

"Trying to get to Ohadi," Fairchild shouted it above the roar of the engine. The driver waved a hand straight forward.

"Keep to the main road. Drop off when I make the turn. You'll pick up another ride soon. Plenty of chances."

"Thanks for the lift."

"Aw, forget it."

THE truck wheeled from the main road and chugged away, leaving Fairchild afoot, making as much progress as possible

toward his goal until good fortune should bring a swifter means of locomotion. A half-mile he walked, studying the constant changes of the scenery before him; behind him sounded the swift droning of a motor, cutout open, as it rushed forward along the road—and the noise told a story of speed.

Far at the brow of a steep hill it appeared, seeming to hang in space for an instant before leaping downward. Rushing, plunging, once skidding dangerously at a small curve, it made the descent, bumped over a bridge, was lost for a second in the pines, then sped toward him—a big touring-car with a small, resolute figure clinging to the wheel. The quarter of a mile changed to a furlong, the furlong to a hundred yards—then, with a report like a revolver-shot, the machine suddenly slewed in drunken fashion far to one side of the road, hung dangerously over the steep declivity an instant, righted itself, swayed forward and stopped barely twenty-five yards away. Staring, Robert Fairchild saw that a small, trim figure had leaped forth and was waving excitedly to him—and he ran forward.

His first glance had proclaimed it a boy; the second told a different story. A girl, dressed in garb strange to Robert Fairchild, she caused him to gasp in surprise, then to stop and stare. Again she waved a hand, and stamped a foot excitedly—a vehement little thing in a snug whipcord riding-habit and a checkered cap pulled tight over closely braided hair.

"For goodness' sake, come here!" she called as he still stood gaping. "I'll give you five dollars. Hurry!"

As Fairchild hurried forward, still staring at her, he managed to voice the fact that he would be willing to help without remuneration She hesitated, then dived for the tonneau, jerking with all her strength at the heavy seat-cushion as he stepped to the running-board beside her.

"Can't get this dinged thing up!" she panted. "Always sticks when you're in a hurry. That's it! Jerk it. Thanks! Here!" She reached forward, and a small, sun-tanned hand grasped a greasy jack. "Slide under the back axle and put this jack in place, will you? And rush it! I've got to change a tire in nothing flat! Hurry!"

Fairchild, almost before he knew it, found himself under the rear of the car, fussing with a refractory lifting jack. Little feet pattered about at the side of the car, hurried to the running-board, then stopped as wrenches and a hammer clattered to the ground. Then one shoe was raised, to press tight against a wheel; metal touched metal; a feminine gasp sounded as strength was exerted in vain—then flying dust as the foot stamped, accompanied by an exasperated ejaculation.

"Ding these old lugs! They're rusted! Got that jack in place yet?"

"Yes! I'm raising the car now."

"Oh, please hurry." There was pleading in the tone now. "Please!"

The car creaked upward. Out came Fairchild, brushing the dust from his clothes.

"Don't mind that dirt, I'll—I'll give you some extra money to get your clothes cleaned. Loosen those lugs, while I get the spare tire off the back. And for goodness' sake, please hurry!"

ASTONISHMENT had taken away speech for Fairchild. He could only wonder—and obey. Swiftly he twirled the wrench while lug after lug fell to the ground, and while the girl, struggling with a tire seemingly almost as big as herself, trundled the spare into position, to await the transfer. As for Fairchild, he was in the midst of a task which he had seen performed far more times than he had done it himself. He strove to remove the blown-out shoe with the cap still screwed on the valve stem; he fussed and swore under his breath, and panted, while behind him a girl in whipcord riding-habit and close-pulled cap fidgeted first on one tan-clad foot and then the other, watching anxiously the road behind her and calling constantly for speed.

At last the job was finished, and the girl fastened the useless shoe behind the machine while Fairchild tightened the last of the lugs. Then as he straightened, a small figure shot to his side, took the wrench from his hand and sent it, with the other tools, clattering into the tonneau. A tiny hand went into a pocket; something that crinkled was shoved into the man's grasp, and while he stood there gasping, she leaped to the driver's seat, slammed the door, spun the starter until it whined, and with open cut-out roaring again, was off and away, rocking down the mountain-side, around a curve and out of sight—while Fairchild merely stood there, staring wonderingly at a ten-dollar bill!

A noise from the rear, growing louder, and the amazed man turned to see a second machine, filled with men, careening toward him. Fifty feet away, the brakes creaked, and the big automobile came to a skidding, dust-throwing stop. A sun-browned man in a Stetson hat, metal badge gleaming from beneath his coat, leaned forth.

"Which way did he go?"

"He?" Robert Fairchild stared.

"Yes. Didn't a man just pass here in an automobile? Where'd he go—straight on the main road or off on the circuit trail?"

"It—it wasn't a man."

"Not a man?" The four occupants of the machine started at him. "Don't try to bull us that it was a woman."

"Oh, no—no—of course not." Fairchild had found his senses. "But it wasn't a man. It—it was a boy, just fifteen years old."

"Sure?"

"Oh, yes." Fairchild was swimming in deep water now. "I got a good look at him. He—he took that road off to the left."

IT was the opposite one to which the hurrying fugitive in whipcord had taken. There was doubt in the interrogator's eyes.

"Sure of that?" he queried. "I'm the sheriff of Arapahoe County. That's an auto bandit ahead of us. We—"

"Well, I wouldn't swear to it. There was another machine ahead, and I lost 'em both for a second down there by the turn. I didn't see the other again, but I did get a glimpse of one off on that side road. It looked like the car that passed me. That's all I know."

"Probably him, all right." The voice came from the tonneau. "Maybe he figured to give us the slip and get back to Denver. You didn't notice the license-number?" This to Fairchild. That bewildered person shook his head.

"No. Didn't you?"

"Couldn't—covered with dust when we first took the trail and never got close enough afterward. But it was the same car—that's almost a cinch."

"Let's go!" The sheriff was pressing a foot on the accelerator. Down the hill went the car, to skid, then to make a short turn onto the road which led away from the scent, leaving behind a man standing in the middle of the road, staring at a ten-dollar bill—and wondering why he had lied!

CHAPTER IV

THE sheriff's car returned before Fairchild reached the bottom of the grade, and again stopped to survey the scene of defeat, while Fairchild once more told his story, deleting items which to him appeared unnecessary for consumption by officers of the law. Carefully the sheriff surveyed the winding road before him and scratched his head.

"Don't guess it would have made much difference which way he went," he admitted ruefully a last, "I never saw a fellow turn loose with so much speed on a mountain road. We never could have caught him!"

"Dangerous character?" Fairchild hardly knew why he asked the question. The sheriff smiled grimly.

"If it was the fellow we were after, he was plenty dangerous. We were trailing him on word from Denver—described the car and said he'd pulled a daylight hold-up on a pay-wagon for the Tramway Company—so when the car went through Golden, we took up the trail a couple of blocks behind. He kept the same speed for a little while until one of my deputies got a little anxious and took a shot at a tire. Man, how he turned on the juice! I thought that thing was a jack-rabbit the way it went up the hill! We never had a chance after that!"

"And you're sure it was the same person?"

The sheriff slipped his car into gear.

"You never can be sure about anything in this business," he answered, "but there's this to think about: if that fellow wasn't guilty of something, why did he run?"

"It might have been a kid in a stolen machine," came from the back seat.

"If it was, we've got to wait until we get a report on it. I guess it's us back to the office."

The automobile went its way then, and Fairchild his—still wondering, the sheriff's question, with a different gender, recurring again and again:

"If she wasn't guilty of something, why did she run?"

And why had she? More, why had she been willing to give ten dollars in payment for the mere changing of a tire? And why had she not offered some explanation of it all? It was a problem which almost wiped out for Robert Fairchild the zest of the new life into which he was going. And so

thoroughly did it engross him that it was not until a truck had come to a full stop behind him, and a driver mingled a shout with the tooting of his horn, that he turned to allow its passage.

"Didn't hear you, old man," he apologized. "Could you give a fellow a lift?"

"Guess so." It was friendly, even though a bit disgruntled. "Hop on."

FAIRCHILD hopped, once more to sit on the tailboard, swinging his legs—but this time his eyes saw the ever-changing scenery without noticing it, for in spite of himself, Fairchild found himself constantly staring at a vision of a pretty girl in a riding-habit, with dark brown hair straying about equally dark brown eyes, almost frenzied in her efforts to change a tire in time to elude a pursuing sheriff.

"If she wasn't guilty of something, why did she run?"

It was too much for anyone, and Fairchild knew it. Yet he clung grimly to the mystery while the truck clattered on, mile after mile, while the broad road led along the sides of the hills, finally to dip downward and run beside the bubbling Clear Creek—clear no longer in the memory of the oldest inhabitants, soiled by the silica from ore-deposits that churned and re-churned, giving to the stream a whitish, almost milk-like character as it twisted in and out of the tortuous cañon on its turbulent journey to the sea. But Fairchild failed to notice either that or the fact that ancient, age-whitened water-wheels had begun to appear here and there, where gulch miners, seekers after gold in the silt of the creek's bed, had abandoned them years before or that now and then upon the hills showed the gaunt scars of mine-openings. A small town gradually was coming into view. A mile more; then the truck stopped with a jerk.

"Where you bound for, pardner?"

Fairchild turned absently, then grinned in embarrassment. "Ohadi."

"That's it, straight ahead. I turn off here. Stranger?"

"Yep."

"Miner?"

Fairchild shrugged his shoulders and nodded noncommittally. The truck driver toyed with his wheel.

"Just thought I'd ask. Plenty of work around here for single-jackers and double-jackers. Things are beginning to look up a bit—at least in silver. Gold mines aint doing much yet—but there's a good deal happening with the white stuff."

"Thanks. Do you know a good place to stop?"

"Yeh. Mother Howard's boarding-house. Everybody goes there, sooner or later. You'll see it on the left-hand side of the street before you get to the main block. Good old girl—knows how to treat anybody in the mining game, from operators on down. She was here when mining was mining!"

Fairchild lifted his bags from the rear of the vehicle, waved a farewell to the driver and started into the village. And then—for once—the vision of the girl departed, momentarily, to give place to other thoughts, other pictures, of a day long gone.

THE sun was slanting low, throwing deep shadows from the hills, into the little valley with its chattering, milk-white stream, softening the scars of the mountains with their great refuse dumps, reminders of hopes of twenty years before, and as bare of vegetation as in the days when the pick and gad and drill of the prospector tore the rock loose from its hiding-place under the surface of the ground.

But now it was all softened and aglow with sunset. The deep red buildings of the Argonaut Tunnel—a great, criss-crossing hole through the hills that once connected with more than thirty mines and their feverish activities—were denuded of their rust and lack of repair. The steam from the air-compressing engine, furnishing the necessary motive power for the drills that still worked in the hills, curled upward in billowy, rainbow-like coloring. The scrub pines of the almost barren mountains took on a fluffier, softer tone; the jutting rocks melted away into their own shadows—it was a picture of peace and of memories.

And it had been here that Thornton Fairchild, back in the nineties, had dreamed his dreams and fought his fight. Robert Fairchild realized that he was in the country of the invisible enemy, there to struggle against it without the slightest knowledge of what it was or how it could be combatted. His forehead felt suddenly damp and cold. He brushed away the beady perspiration, with a gesture almost of anger, then with a look of relief, turned in a small white gate toward a big rambling building which proclaimed itself, by

the sign on the door, to be Mother Howard's Boarding-house.

A moment of waiting, then he faced a gray-haired, kindly woman who stared at him with wide-open eyes as she stood, hands on hips, before him.

"Don't tell me I don't know you!" she burst forth.

"I'm afraid you don't."

"Don't I?" Mother Howard cocked her head. "If you aint a Fairchild, I'll never feed another miner corned beef and cabbage as long as I live. Aint you, now?" she persisted. "Aint you a Fairchild?"

The man laughed in spite of himself. "You guessed it."

"You're Thornton Fairchild's boy!" She had reached out for his handbag, and then bustling about him, drew him into the big parlor with its old-fashioned plush-covered chairs, its picture album, its glass-covered statuary on the old onyx mantel. "Didn't I know you the minute I saw you? Land, you're the picture of your dad! Sakes alive, how is he?"

Fairchild found himself suddenly halting and boyish as he stood before her.

"He's—he's gone, Mrs. Howard."

"Dead?" She put up both hands. "It don't seem possible. And me remembering him looking just like you, full of life and strong and—"

"Our pictures of him are a good deal different. I—I guess you knew him when everything was all right for him. Things were different after he got home again."

MOTHER HOWARD looked quickly about her, then with a swift motion closed the door.

"Son," she asked in a low voice, "didn't he ever get over it?"

"It?" Fairchild felt that he stood on the threshold of discoveries. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't he ever tell you anything, son?"

"No. I—"

"Well, there wasn't any need to." But Mother Howard's sudden embarrassment, her change of color, told Fairchild it wasn't the truth. "He just had a little bad luck out here; that was all. His—his mine pinched out just when he thought he'd struck it rich—or something like that."

"Are you sure that is the truth?"

For a second they faced each other, Robert Fairchild serious and intent, Mother Howard looking at him with eyes defiant yet compassionate. Suddenly they twinkled, the lips broke from their straight line into a smile, and a kindly old hand reached out to take him by the arm.

"Don't you stand there and try to tell Mother Howard she don't know what she's talking about!" came in tones of mock severity. "Hear me? Now, you get up them steps and wash up for dinner. Take the first room on the right. It's a nice one. And get that dust off of you. The dinner-bell will ring in about fifteen minutes, and they's always a rush. So hurry!"

Fairchild hastily made his toilet, then answered the ringing of the dinner-bell, to be introduced to strong-shouldered men who gathered about the long tables—Cornishmen, ruddy faced Americans and a sprinkling of English, all of whom conversed about things which were to Fairchild as so much Greek, of "levels" and "stopes" and "winzes," of "skips" and "manways" and "raises," which meant nothing to the man who yet must master them all, if he were to follow his ambition. Mother Howard moved among them, getting the latest gossip from each, giving her views on every problem, and incidentally seeing that the plates were filled to the satisfaction of even the hungriest.

FAIRCHILD spoke seldom, except to acknowledge the introductions as Mother Howard made him known to each of his table-mates. This was not from aloofness, but because of the fact that these men were talking of things which Fairchild longed to know, but failed for the moment to master. From the first, the newcomer had liked the men about him, liked the ruggedness, the mingling of culture with the lack of it, liked the enthusiasm, the muscle and brawn, liked them all—all but two.

Instinctively, from the first mention of his name, he felt they were watching him, two men who sat far in the rear of the big dining-room, older than most of the others, far less inviting in appearance. One was small, though chunky in build, with sandy hair and eyebrows, and weak, filmy blue eyes over which the lids blinked constantly. The other was black-haired, with streaks of gray, powerful in build, and with a walrus-like mustache drooping over hard lips. Who they were, what they were, Fairchild did not know, except from the general attributes which told that they too followed the great gamble of mining. But

one thing was certain; they watched him throughout the meal, talked about him in low tones, and ceased when Mother Howard came near; they seemed to recognize in him some one who brought both curiosity and innate enmity to the surface. And more; long before the rest had finished their meal, they rose and left the room, intent, apparently, upon some important mission.

After that, Fairchild ate with less relish. In his mind was the certainty that these two men knew him or at least knew about him—and that they did not relish his presence. Nor were his suspicions long in being fulfilled. Hardly had he reached the hall, when the beckoning eyes of Mother Howard signaled to him. Instinctively he waited for the other diners to pass him, then looked eagerly toward Mother Howard as she once more approached.

"I don't know what you're doing here," came shortly, "but I want to."

Fairchild straightened.

"There isn't much to tell you," he said quietly. "My father left me the Blue Poppy Mine in his will. I'm here to work it."

"Know anything about mining?"

"Not a thing."

"Or the people you're liable to buck up against?"

"Very little."

"Then, son,"—and Mother Howard laid a kindly hand on his arm—"whatever you do, keep your plans to yourself and don't talk too much. And what's more, if you happen to get into communication with Blind-eye Bozeman and Taylor Bill, lie your head off. Maybe you saw 'em—a sandy-haired fellow and a big man with a black mustache, sitting at the back of the room?" Fairchild nodded. "Well, stay away from them. They belong to Squint Rodaine. Know him?"

She shot the question sharply. Again Fairchild nodded.

"I've heard the name. Who is he?"

A voice called to Mother Howard from the dining-room. She turned away, then leaned close to Robert Fairchild. "He's a miner, and he's always been a miner. Right now, he's mixed up with some of the biggest people in town. He's always been a man to be afraid of—and he was your father's worst enemy!"

Then, leaving Fairchild staring after her, she moved on, to her duties in the kitchen.

CHAPTER V

IMPATIENTLY, Fairchild awaited Mother Howard's return, and when at last she came forth from the kitchen, he drew her into the old parlor.

"Mrs. Howard," he began, "I—"

"Mother Howard," she corrected. "I aint used to being called much else."

"Mother, then—although I'm not very accustomed to using the title. My own mother died shortly after my father came back from out here."

She walked to his side then and put a hand on his shoulders. For a moment it seemed that her lips were struggling to repress something which strove to pass them, something locked behind them for years. Then the old face, dim in the half-light, calmed.

"What do you want to know, son?"

"Everything!"

"But there isn't much I can tell."

He caught her hand.

"There is! I know there is. I—"

"Son—all I can do is to make matters worse. If I knew anything that would help you, if I could give you any light on anything, old Mother Howard would do it! Lord, didn't I help out your father when he needed it the worst way? Didn't I—"

"But tell me what you know!" There was pleading in Fairchild's voice now. "Can't you understand what it all means to me? Anything—I'm at sea, Mother Howard! You've hinted to me about enemies; my father hinted to me about them—but that's all. Isn't it fair that I should know as much as possible if they still exist, and I'm to make any kind of a fight against them?"

"You're right, son. But I'm as much in the dark as you. In those days, if you were a friend to a person, you didn't ask questions. All that I ever knew was that your father came to this boarding-house when he was a young man, the very first day he ever struck Ohadi. He didn't have much money, but he was enthusiastic—and it wasn't long before he'd told me about his wife and baby back in Indianapolis and how he'd like to win out for their sake. As for me—well, they always called me Mother Howard, even when I was a young thing, sort of setting my cap for every good-looking young man that came along. I guess that's why I never caught one of 'em—I always insisted on darning their socks and looking after all their troubles

for 'em instead of going out buggy-riding with some other fellow and making 'em jealous." She sighed ever so slightly, then chuckled. "But that aint getting to the point, is it?"

"If you could tell me about my father—!"

"I'm going to—all I know. Things were a lot different out here then from what they were later. Silver was wealth to anybody that could find it—every month the Secretary of the Treasury was required by law to buy three or four million ounces for coining purposes, and it meant a lot of money for us all. Everywhere around the hills and gulches, you could see prospectors with their little picks, fooling around like life didn't mean anything in the world to 'em, except to grub around in those rocks. That was the idea, you see, to fool around until they'd found a bit of ore or float, as they called it, and then follow it up the gorge until they came to rock or indications that'd give 'em reason to think the vein was around there somewhere. Then they'd start to make their tunnel—to drift in on the vein. I'm telling you all this, so you'll understand."

A MOMENT'S pause and the old lodging-house keeper went on.

"Your father was one of these men. Squint Rodaine was another—they called him that because at sometime in his life he'd tried to shoot faster than the other fellow—and didn't do it. The bullet hit right between his eyes, but it must have had poor powder behind it—all it did was to cut through the skin and go straight up his forehead. When the wound healed, the scar drew his eyes close together like a Chinaman's. You never see Squint's eyes more than half open.

"And he's crooked, just like his eyes." Mother Howard's voice bore a touch of resentment. "I never liked him from the minute I first saw him, and I liked him less afterward. Then I got next to his game.

"Your father had been prospecting just like everybody else. He'd come on float up Kentucky Gulch and trying to follow it to the vein. Squint saw him—and what's more, he saw that float. It looked good to Squint; and late that night I heard him and his two drinking-partners, Blind-eye Bozeman and Taylor Bill—they just reverse his name for the sound of it—talking in Blind-eye's room. I just leaned my head against the door and listened. Then I flew downstairs to wait for your father when he came in from sitting up half the night to get an assay on that float. And you bet I told him—and it wasn't more'n five minutes after he'd got home that your father knew what was going on—how Squint and them two others was figuring on jumping his claim before he could file on it, and all that.

"Well, there was a big Cornishman here that I was kind of sweet on—and I guess I always will be. He's been gone now, though, ever since your father left. I got him, and asked him to help. And 'Arry was just the kind of fellow that would do it. Out in the dead of night they went and staked out your father's claim—'Arry was to get twenty-five per cent; and early the next morning your dad was waiting to file on it, while 'Arry was waiting for them three. And what a fight it must have been—that 'Arry was a wildcat in those younger days." She laughed; then her voice grew serious. "Rodaine didn't jump that claim, and a few of us around here filed dummy claims enough in the vicinity to keep him from getting too close."

"But there was one way we couldn't stop him," pursued Mother Howard. "He had power, and he's always had it—and he's got it now. A lot of awful strange things happened to your father after that: charges were filed against him for things he never did; men jumped on him in the dark, then went to the district attorney's office and accused him of making the attack. And the funny part was that the district attorney's office always believed them—and not him. Once they had him just at the edge of the penitentiary, but I—I happened to know a few things that—well, he didn't go."

AGAIN Mother Howard chuckled, only to grow serious once more. "Those days were a bit wild in Ohadi—everybody was crazy with the gold- or silver-fever; out of their heads most of the time. Men who went to work for your father and 'Arry disappeared, or got hurt accidentally in the mine or just quit through the bad name it was getting. Once 'Arry, coming down from the tunnel at night, stepped on a little bridge that always before had been as safe as the hills themselves. It fell with him—they went down together thirty feet, and there was nothing but Nature to blame for it, in spite of what we three thought. Then

at last they got a fellow who was willing to work for them—in spite of what Rodaine's crowd hinted about your father's bad reputation back East, and—"

"My father never harmed a soul in his life!" Fairchild's voice was hot, resentful. Mother Howard went on:

"I know he didn't, son. I'm only telling the story. Miners are superstitious, and they're childish at believing things. It all worked in your father's case—with the exception of 'Arry, and Sissie Larsen, a Swede with a high voice, just about like mine. That's why they gave him the name. Your father offered him wages, and a ten per-cent bonus. He went to work. A few months later they got into good ore that paid fairly well, even if it was irregular. It looked like the bad luck was over at last. Then—"

THERE was a long pause. Mother Howard had hesitated at the brink of the very nubbin of it all. A long moment, in which he repressed a desire to seize her and wrest it from her. At last:

"It was about dusk one night. 'Arry came in and took me with him into this very room. He kissed me and told me that he must go away. He asked me if I would go with him—without knowing why. And son, I trusted him; I would have done anything for him—but I wasn't as old then as I am now. I refused—and to this day, I don't know why. It—it was just woman, I guess. Then he asked me if I would help him. I said I would.

"He didn't tell me much, except that he had been uptown spreading the word that the ore had pinched out and that the hanging rock had caved in and that he and Sissie and your father were through, that they were beaten and were going away that night. But Sissie was not going with them.

"'I'm putting a lot in your hands,' he told me, 'but you've got to help us. Sissie wont be there—and I can't tell you why. The town must think he is. Your voice is just like Sissie's. You've got to help us out of town.'"

"I promised. Late that night the three of us drove up the main street, your father on one side of the seat, 'Arry on the other, and me, dressed in some of Sissie's clothes, half hidden between them. I was singing,—that was Sissie's habit, to get roaring drunk, and blow off steam by yodeling song after song as he rolled along. Our voices were about the same; nobody dreamed that I was anyone else but the Swede—my head was tipped forward, so they couldn't see my features. And we went our way with the miners standing on the curb waving to us, and not one of them knowing that the person who sat between your father and 'Arry was anyone except Larsen. We drove outside town and stopped. Then we said good-by, and I put on an old dress that I had brought with me, and sneaked back home. Nobody knew the difference."

"But Larsen—"

"You know as much as I do, son."

"But didn't they tell you?"

"They told me nothing, and I asked 'em nothing. They were my friends, and they needed help. I gave it to them—that's all I know, and that's all I've wanted to know."

"You never saw Larsen again?"

"I never saw any of them. That was the end."

"But Rodaine—"

"He's still here. You'll hear from him—plenty soon. I could see that, the minute Blind-eye Bozeman and Taylor Bill began taking your measure. You noticed they left the table before the meal was over. It was to tell Rodaine."

"Then he'll fight me too?"

Mother Howard laughed—and her voice was harsh.

"Rodaine's a rattlesnake; his son's a rattlesnake; his wife's crazy—old Crazy Laura. He drove her that way. She lives by herself in an old house on the Georgeville road. And she'd kill for him—even if he does beat her when she goes to his house and begs him to take her back. That's the kind of crowd it is. You can figure it out for yourself. She goes around at night gathering herbs in graveyards; she thinks she's a witch. The old man mutters to himself and hates anyone who doesn't do everything he asks—and just about everybody does it, simply through fear. And just to put a good finish on it all, the young un moves in the best society in town and spends most of his time trying to argue the former district judge's daughter into marrying him. So there you are. That's all Mother Howard knows."

She reached for the door, and then, turning, patted Fairchild on the shoulder.

"Boy," she said quietly, "you've got a broad back and a good head. Rodaine

beat your father—don't let him beat you. And always remember one thing: old Mother Howard's played the game before, and she'll play it with you—against anybody. Good night. Go to bed—dark streets aren't exactly the place for you."

ROBERT FAIRCHILD obeyed the instructions, a victim of many a conjecture, many an attempt at reasoning as he sought the sleep that was hours in coming to him; and even then it was a thing of troubled visions.

Streaming sun awakened him, and he hurried to the dining-room, to find himself the last lodger at the tables. A rather hasty meal; then with the necessary papers in his pocket, Fairchild started toward the courthouse and the legal procedure which must be undergone before he made his first trip to the mine.

A block or two—then Fairchild suddenly halted. Crossing the street at an angle just before him was a young woman whose features and mannerisms he recognized. The whipcord riding-suit had given place now to a tailored suit which deprived her of the boyishness that had been so apparent on their first meeting. The cap had disappeared before a close-fitting, vari-colored turban; but the straying brown hair still was there, the brown eyes, the piquant little nose and the prettily formed lips. Fairchild's heart thumped—nor did he stop to consider why. A quickening of his pace, and he met her just as she stepped to the curbing.

"I'm so glad of this opportunity!" he exclaimed happily. "I want to return that money to you. I—I was so fussed yesterday I didn't realize—"

"Aren't you mistaken?" She had looked at him with a slight smile. Fairchild did not catch the inflection.

"Oh, no. I'm the man, you know, who helped you change that tire on the Denver road yesterday—"

"Pardon me," this time one brown eye winked ever so slightly, indicating some one behind Fairchild, "But I wasn't on the Denver road yesterday, and if you'll excuse me for saying it, I don't remember ever having seen you before."

There was a little light in her eyes which took away the sting of the denial, a light which seemed to urge caution, and at the same time to tell Fairchild that she trusted him to do his part as a gentleman in a thing she wished forgotten. More fussed than ever, he drew back and bent in apology, while she passed on. A half-block away a young man rounded a corner, and seeing her, hastened to join her. She extended her hand; they chatted a moment, then strolled up the street together. Fairchild watched blankly, then turned at a chuckle just behind him, emanating from the bearded lips of an old miner loafing on the stone coping in front of a small store.

"Pick the wrong filly, pardner?" came the query. Fairchild managed to smile.

"Guess so." Then he lied quickly. "I thought she was a girl from Denver."

"Her?" The old miner stretched. "Nope. That's Anita Richmond, old Judge Richmond's daughter. Guess she must have been expecting that young fellow—or she wouldn't have cut you off so short. She aint usually that way."

"Her fiancé?" Fairchild asked the question with misgiving. The miner finished his stretch and added a yawn to it. Then he looked appraisingly up the street toward the retreating figures. "Well, some say he is and some say he aint. Guess it mostly depends on the girl, and she aint telling yet."

"And the man—who is he?"

"Him? Oh, he's Maurice Rodaine. Son of a pretty famous character around here, old Squint Rodaine. Owns the Silver Queen property up the hill. Ever hear of him?"

The eyes of Robert Fairchild narrowed. But his voice, when he spoke, was slow and suppressed.

"Squint Rodaine? Yes, I think I have. The name sounds rather familiar."

Then, deliberately, he started up the street, following at a distance the man and girl who walked before him.

CHAPTER VI

THERE was no specific reason why Robert Fairchild should follow Maurice Rodaine and the young woman who had been described to him as the daughter of Judge Richmond, whoever he might be. But a certain curiosity impelled him, and when the pair stopped just in front of him on the corner, he turned into a nearby drugstore and ordered a soda. She was the same girl; there could be no doubt of that, and he raged inwardly as she chatted and chaffed with

the man who looked down upon her with a smiling air of proprietorship which instilled instant rebellion in Fairchild's heart.

After a moment they parted, and Fairchild gulped at his drink. She had turned straight into the drugstore.

"Buy a ticket, Mr. McCauley?" she asked of the man behind the counter. "I've sold twenty already, this morning. Only five more, and my work's over."

"Going to be pretty much of a crowd, isn't there?" The druggist was fishing in his pocket for money. Fairchild, dallying with his drink now, glanced sharply toward the door, and went back to his refreshment. She was standing directly in the entrance, fingering the five remaining tickets.

"Oh, everybody in town. Please take the five, wont you? Then I'll be through."

"I'll be darned if I will, 'Nita!" McCauley backed against a shelf in mock self-defense. "Every time you've got anything you want to get rid of, you come in here and shove it off on me. I'll be gosh gimswiggled if I will! There's only four in my family, and four's all I'm going to take. Fork 'em over—I've got a prescription to fill." He tossed four silver dollars on the showcase and took the tickets. The girl demurred.

"But how about the fifth one? I've got to sell that too!"

"Well, sell it to him!" And Fairchild, looking into the soda-fountain mirror, saw himself indicated as the druggist started toward the prescription-case. "I aint going to let myself get stuck for another solitary, single one!"

THERE was a moment of awkward silence as Fairchild gazed intently into his soda glass, then with a feeling of queer excitement, he set it on the marble counter and turned. Anita Richmond had accepted the druggist's challenge. She was approaching—in a stranger-like manner, a ticket of some sort held before her.

"Pardon me," she began, "but would you care to buy a ticket?"

"To—to what?" It was all Fairchild could think of to say.

"To the Old-timers' Dance. It's a sort of municipal thing, gotten up by the bureau of mines—to celebrate the return of silver-mining."

"But—but I'm afraid I'm not much on dancing."

"You don't have to be. Nobody'll dance much—except the old-fashioned affairs. You see, everybody's supposed to represent people of the days when things were booming around here. There'll be a fiddle orchestra, and a dance-caller and everything like that, and a bar—but of course there'll only be imitation liquor. But," she added with quick emphasis, "there'll be a lot of things really real—real keno and roulette and everything like that, and everybody in the costume of twenty or thirty years ago. Don't you want to buy a ticket? It's the last one I've got!" she added prettily. But Robert Fairchild had been listening with his eyes rather than his ears. Jerkily he came to the realization that the girl had ceased speaking.

"When's it to be?"

"A week from tomorrow night. Are you going to be here that long?"

She realized the slip of her tongue and colored slightly. Fairchild, recovered now, reached into a pocket and carefully figured the bills there. Then with a quick motion, as he drew them forth, he covered a ten-dollar bill with a one dollar note and thrust them forward.

"Yes, I'll take the ticket," he answered her.

She handed it to him, thanked him, and reached for the money. As it passed into her hand, a corner of the ten-dollar bill revealed itself, and she hastily thrust it toward him, as though to return money paid by mistake. Just as quickly she realized his purpose and withdrew her hand.

"Oh!" she exclaimed almost in a whisper, "I understand." She flushed, and stood a second, hesitant, flustered, her big eyes almost childish as they looked up into his. Then she whirled and left the store—and a slight smile came to the lips of Robert Fairchild as he watched her hurrying across the street. He had won a tiny victory, at least.

Not until she had rounded a corner and disappeared did Fairchild leave his point of vantage. Then, with a new enthusiasm, a greater desire than ever to win out in the fight which had brought him to Ohadi, he hurried for the courthouse and the various technicalities which must be coped with before he could really call the Blue Poppy mine his own.

It was easier than he had expected. A few signatures, and he was free, to wander through town, to where idlers had pointed out Kentucky Gulch and to begin

the steep ascent up the narrow road on a tour of prospecting that would precede the more legal and more safe system of a surveyor.

The ascent was almost sheer in places. Along the gullies were the scars of prospect holes, staring like dark, blind eyes out upon the gorge, reminders of the lost hopes of a day gone by. It was a cañon of decay, yet of life, for as he trudged along, the roar of great motors came to Fairchild's ears; and a moment later he stepped aside to allow the passage of ore-laden automobile trucks loaded until the springs had flattened. And it was as he stood there, watching the big vehicles travel down the mountain-side, that Fairchild caught a glimpse of a human figure which suddenly darted behind a clump of scrub pine and skirted far to one side.

A new beat came into Fairchild's heart. He took to the road again, plodding upward apparently without a thought of the shadowing figure behind him, stopping to stare at the bleak prospect-holes, or to admire the pink-white beauties of the snowy range beyond, seemingly a man entirely bereft of suspicion. A quarter of a mile he went—a half. Once, as the road turned beside a great rock, he sought its shelter and looked back. The figure still was following, running carefully now along the bank of the stream in an effort to gain as much ground as possible before the return of the road to open territory should bring the necessity of caution again. Fairchild went on.

A MILE more; then, again in the shelter of rocks, he swerved and sought a hiding-place, watching anxiously from his concealment for evidences of discovery. There were none. The shadower came on, displaying more and more caution as he approached the rocks, glancing hurriedly about him as he moved swiftly from cover to cover. Closer, closer—then Fairchild repressed a gasp. The man was old, almost white-haired, with hard, knotted hands which seemed to stand out from his wrists, and with a face that held Fairchild almost hypnotized. It was like a hawk's—hook-beaked, colorless, toneless in all expressions save that of a malicious tenacity; the eyes were slanted until they resembled those of some fantastic Chinese image, and just above the curving nose a blue-white scar ran straight up the forehead—Squint Rodaine!

So he was on the trail already! Fairchild watched him pass, sneak around the corner of the rocks and stand a moment in apparent bewilderment as he surveyed the ground before him. A mumbling curse, and he went on, his cautious gait discarded, walking briskly along the rutty, boulder-strewn road toward a gaping hole in the hill hardly a furlong away. There he surveyed the ground carefully, bent and stared hard at the earth, apparently for a trace of footprints, and finding none, turned slowly and looked intently all about him. Carefully he approached the mouth of the tunnel and stared within. Then he straightened, and with another glance about him, hurried off up a gulch leading away from the road into the hills. Fairchild lay and watched him until he was out of sight, and he knew instinctively that a surveyor would only cover beaten territory now. Squint Rodaine, he felt sure, had pointed out to him the Blue Poppy Mine.

But he did not follow the direction given by his pursuer. Squint Rodaine was in the hills. Squint Rodaine might return, and the consciousness of caution bade Fairchild not be there when he came back. Hurriedly he descended the rocks once more to turn toward town and toward Mother Howard's boarding-house. He wanted to tell her what he had seen, and to obtain her counsel.

Quickly he made the return-trip, crossing the little bridge over the turbulent Clear Creek and heading toward the boarding-house. A half-block away he halted, as a woman on the veranda of the big square-built "hotel" pointed him out, and the great figure of a man shot through the gate, shouting, and hurried toward him.

A tremendous thing he was, with red face, and black hair which seemed to scramble in all directions at once, and with a mustache which appeared to scamper even in more directions than his hair. Fairchild was a large man; suddenly he felt himself puny and inconsequential as the mastodonic thing before him swooped forward, spread wide the big arms and then caught him tight in them, causing the breath to puff over his lips like the exhaust of a bellows.

Fairchild felt himself lifted and set down again. He pulled hard at his breath.

"What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed testily. "You've made a mistake!"

"H'im blimed hif Hi 'ave!" bellowed a tornado-like voice. "Blime! You look just like 'im!"

"But you're mistaken, old man!"

Fairchild was vaguely aware that the spray-like mustache was working like a dust-broom, that snappy blue eyes were beaming upon him, that the big red nose was growing redder, while a tremendous paw had seized his own hand and was doing its best to crush it.

"Blimed if Hi 'ave!" came again. "You're your dad's hown boy! You look just like 'im! Don't you know me?"

He stepped back then, and stood grinning, his long, heavily muscled arms hanging low at his side, his mustache trying vainly to stick out in more directions than ever. Fairchild rubbed a hand across his eyes.

"You've got me!" he said. "I—"

"You don't know me? 'Onest now, don't you? H'im 'Arry! Don't you know now? 'Arry from Cornwall!"

CHAPTER VII

IT came to Fairchild then—the sentence in his father's letter regarding some one who would hurry to his aid when he needed him, the references of Beamish, and the allusion of Mother Howard to a faithful friend. He forgot the pain as the tremendous Cornishman banged him on the back; he forgot the surprise of it all; he only knew that he was laughing and welcoming a big man old enough in age to be his father, yet young enough in spirit to want to come back and finish a fight he had seen begun, and strong enough in physique to stand it. Again the heavy voice boomed:

"You know me now, eh?"

"You bet! You're Harry Harkins!"

"'Arkins it is. Hi came just has soon has Hi got the cablegram!"

"The cablegram?"

"Yeh." 'Arry pawed at his wonderful mustache. "From Mr. Beamish, you know. 'E sent hit. Said you'd started hout 'ere hall halone. Hand Hi couldn't stand by and let you do that. So 'ere Hi ham!"

"But the expense, the long trip across the ocean, the—"

"'Ere Hi ham!" said 'Arry again, "Haint that henough?"

They had reached the veranda now, to stand talking for a moment, then to go within, where Mother Howard awaited, eyes glowing, in the parlor. 'Arry flung out both arms.

"Hand Hi still love you!" he boomed as he caught the gray-haired, laughing woman in his arms. "Heven if you did run me hoff and wouldn't go back to Cornwall!"

Red-faced, she pushed him away, and slapped his cheek playfully—it was like the tap of a light breeze against granite. Then 'Arry turned.

"'Ave you looked hat the mine?"

It brought back to Fairchild the happenings of the morning and the memory of the man who had trailed him. He told his story, while Mother Howard listened, her arms crossed, her head bobbing, and while 'Arry, his big grin still on his lips, took in the details with avidity. When Fairchild had finished, 'Arry's grin faded. "Let's go hup there," he said quietly.

THIS time the trip to Kentucky gulch was made by skirting town; soon they were on the rough, narrow roadway, leading into the mountains. Both were silent for the most part, and the expression on 'Arry's face told that he was living again the days of the past. A long time they walked, at last to stop in the shelter of the rocks where Fairchild had shadowed his pursuer, and to glance carefully ahead. No one was in sight. 'Arry jabbed out a big finger.

"That's hit," he announced, "—straight a'ead!"

They went on, Fairchild with a gripping at his throat that would not down. This had been the hope of his father—and here his father had met—what? He swerved quickly and stopped, facing the bigger man.

"'Arry," he said sharply, "I know that I may be violating an unspoken promise to my father. But I simply can't stand it any longer. What happened here?"

"We were mining—for silver."

"I don't mean that—there was some sort of tragedy."

'Arry chuckled—in concealment, Fairchild thought, of something he did not want to say.

"Hi should think so! The timbers gave way, hand the mine caved hin!"

"Not that! My father ran away from this town. You and Mother Howard helped him. You didn't come back. Neither did my father. Eventually it killed him."

"So?" 'Arry looked seriously and stu-

diously at the young man. "'E didn't write me hoften."

"He didn't need to write you. You were here with him—when it happened."

"No—" 'Arry shook his head. "Hi was in town."

"But you knew—"

"What's Mother Howard told you?"

"A lot—and nothing."

"Hi don't know hany more than she does."

"But—"

"Friends didn't hask questions in those days," said 'Arry quietly. "Hi might 'ave guessed if Hi'd wanted to—but Hi didn't want to."

"But if you had?"

'Arry looked at him with quiet blue eyes.

"What would you guess?"

Slowly, Robert Fairchild's gaze went to the ground. There was only one possible conjecture: Sissie Larsen had been impersonated by a woman. Sissie Larsen had never been seen again.

"I—I would hate to put it into words," he said. 'Arry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Then don't. Hit was twenty years ago. Let sleeping dogs lie. Take a look haround before we go hinto the tunnel."

They reconnoitered, first on one side, then the other. No one was in sight. 'Arry bent to the ground, and finding a pitchy pine-knot, lighted it. They started cautiously within, blinking against the darkness.

A detour, and they avoided an ore-car, rusty and half-filled, standing on the little track, now sagging on moldy ties. A moment more of walking, and 'Arry took the lead.

"Hit's honly a step to the shaft now," he cautioned. "Heasy—heasy—look out for that 'anging wall—" He held the torch against the roof of the tunnel and displayed a loose, jagged section of rock dripping with seepage. "Just a step now—'ere it is."

The outlines of a rusty hoist with its cable leading down into a slanting hole in the rock showed dimly before them—a massive, chunky, deserted thing in the shadows. About it were clustered drills that were eaten by age and the dampness of the seepage; farther on a "skip" or shaft-car lay on its side, half buried in mud and muck from the walls of the tunnel. Here too the timbers were rotting; one after another they had cracked and caved beneath the weight of the earth above, giving the further appearance of the tunnel one of an eerie aspect, uninviting, dangerous. 'Arry peered ahead.

"Hit haint has bad has it looks," he announced after a moment's survey. "Hit's honly right 'ere at the beginning that hit's caved. But that doesn't do us much good."

"Why not?" Fairchild was staring with him, on toward the darkness of the farther recesses. "If it isn't caved in farther back, we ought to be able to repair this spot."

But 'Arry shook his head.

"We didn't go hinto the vein 'ere," he explained. "We figured we 'ad to 'ave a shaft hanyway, sooner or later—you can't do under'and stoping in a mine—go down on a vein, you know. You've halways got to go hup—you can't get the metal hout hif you don't. That's why we dug this shaft—and now look at hit!"

HE drew the flickering torch to the edge of the shaft and held it there, staring downward, Fairchild beside him. Twenty feet below, there came the reflection of the flame. Water! Fairchild glanced toward his partner.

"I don't know anything about it," he said at last. "But I should think that would mean trouble."

"Plenty!" agreed 'Arry lugubriously. "That shaft's two 'unnerd feet deep, and there's a drift running hoff it for a couple o'unnerd feet more before hit 'its the vein. Four 'unnerd feet hof water! 'Ow much money 'ave you got?"

"About twenty-five hundred dollars."

'Arry reached for his waving mustache. Thoughtfully he pulled at it, staring meanwhile downward. Then he grunted.

"Hand Hi haint got more'n five 'unnerd. Hit haint enough. We'll need to repair this 'oist, put the skip in horder. We'll need to build new track—do a lot of things. Three thousand dollars haint henough."

"But we'll have to get that water out of there before we can do anything," Fairchild interposed. "If we can't get at the vein up here, we'll have to get at it from below. And how're we going to do that without unwatering that shaft?"

"That's just what 'Arry's thinking about," came his answer finally. "Le's go back to town. Hi don't like to stand lookin' at a lot hof water in a 'ole."

They turned for the mouth of the tunnel, sliding along in the greasy muck, the torch extinguished now. A moment of watchfulness from the cover of the darkness; then 'Arry pointed. On the opposite hill the figure of a man had been outlined for just a second. Then he had vanished. And with the disappearance of the watcher, 'Arry nudged his partner in the ribs and went forth into the brighter light. An hour more, and they were back in town. 'Arry reached for his mustache again.

"Go down to Mother 'Oward's," he commanded. "Hi've got to wander haround hand say 'owdy to what's left of the fellows that was 'ere when I was. Hit's been twenty years since Hi've been haway, you know," he added. "The shaft can wait."

FAIRCHILD obeyed the instructions, looking back over his shoulder as he walked along toward the boarding-house, to see the big figure of his companion loitering up the street, on the beginning of his home-coming tour. It was evident that 'Arry was popular. Forms rose from the loitering places on the curbings in front of the stores; voices called to him—even as the distance grew greater, Fairchild could hear the shouts of greeting which were sounding to 'Arry as he announced his return.

The blocks passed. Fairchild turned through the gate of Mother Howard's Boarding-house and went to his room, to await the call for dinner, and to think over his difficult situation. Presently the insistent clanging of the dinner-bell roused him. Slowly he opened the door of his room, trudged down the staircase—then stopped in bewilderment. 'Arry was before him, in all the splendor that a miner can know.

He had bought a new suit, brilliant blue—almost electric in its flashiness. The cut of the trousers was somewhat along the lines of ten years ago, with their peg tops and heavy cuffs. Beneath the vest, a glowing watermelon-pink shirt glared forth from the protection of a purple tie. A wonderful creation was on his head, dented in four places with almost mathematical precision. Below the cuffs of the trousers were bright, tan, bump-toed shoes; 'Arry was a complete picture of sartorial elegance—according to his own dreams. What was more, to complete it all, upon the third finger of his right hand was a diamond, bulbous and yellow and throwing off a dull radiance like the glow of a burnt-out arc-light—full of flaws, it is true, off color to a great degree, but a diamond nevertheless. And 'Arry evidently realized it.

"Haint Hi the cuckoo?" he boomed as Fairchild stared at him. "Haint Hi? Hi 'ad to 'ave a houtfit, and—

"Hit might as well be now!" he paraphrased, to the tune of the age-whitened sextet from Floradora. "Hand look hat the sparkler!"

Fairchild could do very little else but look. He knew the value, even in spite of flaws and bad coloring. And he knew something else—that 'Arry had confessed to having little more than five hundred dollars.

"But—but how did you do it?" came gaspingly. "I thought—"

"Hinstallments!" the Cornishman burst out. "Ten per cent down—the rest when they catch me." He jabbed forth a heavy finger and punched Fairchild in the ribs. "Where's Mother 'Oward? Wont I knock 'er heyes hout?"

HE boomed forward toward the dining-room, to find there men he had known in other days, to shake hands with them and to bang them on the back, to sight Blind-eye Bozeman and Taylor Bill sitting hunched over their meal in the corner and to go effusively toward them. 'Arry was playing no favorites in his homecoming.

Jovially he leaned over the table of Bozeman and Bill—after he had displayed himself before Mother Howard and received her sanction of his selections in dress. Happily he boomed forth the information that Fairchild and he were back to work the Blue Poppy mine and that they already had made a trip of inspection.

"Hi'm going back this hafternoon," he told them. "There's water hin the shaft. Hi've got to figure a wye to get hit hout."

Then he returned to his table, and Fairchild leaned close to him.

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"What?" 'Arry allowed his eyes to become bulbous as he whispered the question. "Telling them two habout what we're going to do? Wont they find hit hout hanyway?"

"I guess that's true. What time are you going to the mine?"

"Hi don't know that Hi'm going—hand then Hi may. Hi've got to kind hof say 'ello around town first."

"Then I'm not to go with you?"

'Arry beamed at him.

"Hit's your day off, Robert," he announced, and they went on with their meal.

That is Fairchild proceeded. 'Arry did little eating. 'Arry was too busy. There were a thousand questions to be answered by 'Arry's old friends. There was gossip to relate, and the lives of various men who had come and gone to be dilated upon. Fairchild finished his meal and waited. But 'Arry talked on, then went out to renew his rounds of hand-shaking. And there was nothing for Fairchild to do, but to wait as patiently as possible his return.

The afternoon grew old. 'Arry did not come back. The sun set and dinner was served. But 'Arry was not there to eat it. Dusk came, and then, nervous over the continued absence of his eccentric partner, Fairchild started uptown.

The usual groups were in front of the stores, and before the largest of them, Fairchild stopped.

"Do any of you happen to know a fellow named Harry Harkins?" he asked somewhat anxiously. The answer was in the affirmative. A miner stretched out a foot and surveyed it studiously.

"Aint seen him since about five o'clock," he said at last. "He was just starting up to the mine then."

"To the mine? That late? Are you sure?"

"Well—I dunno. May have been going to Center City. Can't say. All I know is he said somethin' about goin' to the mine earlier in the afternoon, an' long about five I seen him starting up Kentucky Gulch."

"Who's that?" The interruption had come in a sharp yet gruff voice. Fairchild turned, to see before him a man he recognized, a tall, thin, wiry figure, with narrowed, slanting eyes, and a scar that went straight up his forehead. He evidently had just rounded the corner in time to hear the conversation. Fairchild straightened, and in spite of himself, his voice was strained and hard.

"I was merely asking about my partner in the Blue Poppy mine."

"The Blue Poppy?" the squint eyes narrowed more than ever. "You're Fairchild, aint you? Well, I guess you're going to have to get along without a partner, from now on."

"Get along without—"

A crooked smile came to the other man's lips.

"That is, unless you want to work with a dead man. Harry Harkins got drowned about an hour ago, in the Blue Poppy shaft!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE news caused Fairchild to recoil and stand gasping. And before he could speak, a new voice had cut in, one full of excitement, tremulous, anxious.

"Drowned? Where's his body?"

"How do I know?" Squint Rodaine turned upon his questioner. "Guess it's at the foot of the shaft. All I saw was his hat. What're you so interested for?"

The questioner, small, goggle-eyed and given to rubbing his hands, stared a moment speechlessly. Then he reached forward and grasped at the lapels of Rodaine's coat.

"He—he bought a diamond from me this morning—on the installment plan!"

Rodaine smiled again in his crooked fashion. Then he pushed the claw-like hands of the excited jeweler away from his lapels.

"That's your own fault, Sam," he announced curtly. "If he's at the bottom of the shaft, your diamond's there too. All I know about it is that I was coming down from the Silver Queen when I saw this fellow go into the tunnel of the Blue Poppy. He was all dressed up, else I don't guess I would have paid much attention to him. But as it was, I kind of stopped to look and seen it was Harry Harkins, who used to work the mine with this"—he pointed to Fairchild—"fellow's father. About a minute later I heard a yell, like somebody was in trouble, then a big splash. Naturally, I ran into the tunnel and struck a match. About twenty feet down, I could see the water was all riled up, and a new hat was floating around on top of it. I yelled a couple of times and struck a lot of matches—but he didn't come to the surface. That's all I know. You can do as you please about your diamond. I'm just giving you the information."

He turned sharply and went on. Sam the jeweler, with the rest of the loiterers clustered around him.

"What'll we do?" he wailed.

"I don't know about you—but I'm going to the mine," said Fairchild.

"It wont do any good—bodies don't float. It may never float—if it gets caught down in the timbers somewheres."

"Have to organize a bucket brigade." It was a suggestion from one of the crowd.

"Why not borry the Argonaut pump? They aint using it."

"Go get it! Go get it!" This time it was the wail of the little jeweler. "Tell 'em Sam Herbenfelder sent you. They'll let you have it."

"Can't carry the thing on my shoulder."

"I'll get the Sampler's truck." A new volunteer had spoken. "There wont be any kick about it."

ANOTHER suggestion—still another. Soon men began to radiate, each on a mission. The word passed down the street. More loiterers—a silver miner spends a great part of his leisure time in simply watching the crowd go by—hurried to join the excited throng. Groups, en route to the picture show, decided otherwise and stopped to learn of the excitement. The crowd thickened. Suddenly Fairchild looked up sharply at the sound of a feminine voice.

"What is the matter?"

"Harry Harkins got drowned." All too willingly the news was dispersed. Fairchild's eyes were searching now in the half light from the faint street lamp. Then they centered. It was Anita Richmond, standing at the edge of the crowd, questioning a miner, while beside her was a thin, youthful counterpart of a hard-faced father, Maurice Rodaine. Just a moment of queries; then the miner's hand pointed to Fairchild as he turned toward her.

"It's his partner."

She moved forward then and Fairchild went to meet her.

"I'm sorry," she said, and extended her hand. Fairchild gripped it eagerly.

"Thank you. But it may not be as bad as the rumors."

"I hope not." Then quickly she withdrew her hand, and somewhat flustered, turned as her companion edged closer. "Maurice, this is Mr. Fairchild," she announced. She knew his name! A second more, and it was explained: "My father knew his father very well."

"I think my own father was acquainted too," was the rejoinder, and the eyes of the two men met for an instant in conflict. The girl did not seem to notice.

"I sold him a ticket this morning to the dance, not knowing who he was. Then Father happened to see him pass the house and pointed him out to me as the son of a former friend of his. Funny how those things happen, isn't it?"

"Decidedly funny!" was the caustic rejoinder of the younger Rodaine.

But Fairchild was too much concerned about 'Arry to notice it. "I'm not going to believe this story until it's proven to me," he said. "Rumors can be started too easily. I don't see how it was possible for a man to fall into a mine shaft and not struggle there long enough for a man who had heard his shout to see him."

"Who brought the news?" Rodaine asked the question.

"A tall, thin, ugly old man, with mean squint eyes and a scar straight up his forehead."

A FLUSH appeared on the other man's face. Fairchild saw his hands contract, then loosen.

"You're trying to insult my father!"

"Your father?" Fairchild looked at him blankly. "Wouldn't that be a rather difficult job—especially when I don't know him?"

"You described him."

"And you recognized the description."

"Maurice! Stop it!" The girl was tugging at Rodaine's sleeve. "Don't say anything more. I'm sorry"—and she looked at Fairchild with a glance he could not interpret—"that anything like this could have come up."

"I am too—if it has caused you embarrassment."

"You'll get a little embarrassment out of it yourself—before you get through!" Rodaine was scowling at him. Again Anita Richmond caught his arm.

"Maurice! Stop it! How could he have intended it when he didn't even know your father. Come—let's go on. The crowd's getting thicker."

The narrow-faced man obeyed her command, and together they turned out into the street to avoid the constantly growing throng, and to veer toward the picture-show.

Carbide lights had begun to appear along the street, as miners, summoned by hurrying gossip-mongers, came forward to assist in the search for the missing man. High above the general conglomeration of voices, could be heard the cries of the instigator of activities, Sam Herbenfelder, bemoaning the loss of his diamond. Fairchild went forward and grasped him by the collar.

"Why don't you wait until we've found out something before you get the whole town excited?" he asked. "All we've got is one man's word for this."

"Yes," Sam spread his hands. "But look who it was! Squint Rodaine! Ach—will I ever get back that diamond?"

"I'm starting to the mine." Fairchild released him. "If you want to go along and look for yourself, all right. But wait until you're sure about the thing before you go crazy over it."

Sam, however, had other thoughts. Hastily he shot through the crowd, organizing the bucket brigade and searching for news of the Argonaut pump, which had not yet arrived. Fairchild turned and started up the hill, a few miners, their carbide lamps swinging beside them, following him. Far in the rear sounded the wails of Sam Herbenfelder, organizing his units of search.

ARRIVED at the mine, Fairchild turned and waited for the first of the miners and the accompanying gleam of his carbide. Presently they had the lights shining downward upon the oily, black water below. Two objects floated there, a broken piece of timber torn from the side of the shaft where someone evidently had grasped hastily at it in an effort to stop a fall, and a new four-dented hat, slowly becoming watersoaked and sinking beneath the surface. And then, for the first time, fear clutched at Fairchild's heart—fear which hope could not put aside.

"There's his hat." It was a miner staring downward.

Fairchild had seen it, but he strove to put aside the thought.

"Yes," he answered, "—but anyone could lose a hat, simply by looking over the edge of the shaft." Then, as if in proof of the forlorn hope which he himself did not believe: "'Arry's a strong man. Certainly he would know how to swim. And in any event he should have been able to have kept afloat for at least a few minutes. Rodaine says that he heard a shout and ran right in here—but all that he could see was ruffled water and a floating hat. I—" Then he paused suddenly. It had come to him that Rodaine might have helped in the demise of 'Arry!

Shouts sounded from outside, and the roaring of a motor-truck as it made its slow, tortuous way up the boulder-strewn road with its gullies and innumerable ruts. Gaining the mouth of the tunnel, Fairchild could see a mass of shadows outlined by the carbides, all following the leadership of a small, excited man, Sam Herbenfelder, still seeking his diamond.

The big pump from the Argonaut Tunnel was aboard the truck, followed by two other auto vehicles, each loaded with gasoline engines and smaller pumps. A hundred men were in the crowd, all with ropes and buckets. Sam Herbenfelder's pleas had been heard. The search was about to begin for the body of 'Arry and the diamond that rested on one finger. Fairchild hastened to do his part.

UNTIL far into the night they worked and strained, to put the big pump into position, while crews of men, four and five in a group, bailed water as fast as possible, that the aggregate might be lessened to the greatest possible extent before the hose and pumps were in position. Then the gasoline engines began to snort, great lengths of tubing were let down into the shaft, and spurting water started down the mountain-side as the task of unwatering the shaft began.

But it was a slow job. Morning found the distance to the water lengthened by twenty or thirty feet, and the bucket brigades nearly at the end of their ropes. Men trudged down the hills to breakfast, sending others in their places. Fairchild stayed on to meet Mother Howard, assuage her nervousness as best he could, dividing his time between her and the task before him. Noon found more water than ever tumbling down the hills—the smaller pumps were working now in unison with the larger one. Sam Herbenfelder had not missed a single possible outlet of aid in his campaign; every man in Ohadi with an obligation to pay, with back interest due, or with a bill yet unaccounted for, was on his staff, to say nothing of those who had volunteered simply to still the tearful remonstrances of the hand-wringing, diamondless, little jeweler. Afternoon—and most of Ohadi was there. Fairchild could distinguish the form of Anita Richmond in the hundreds of women and men clustered about the opening of the tunnel—and for once she was not in the company of Maurice Rodaine. He hurried to her—and she smiled at his approach.

"Have they found anything yet?"

"Nothing—so far. Except that there is plenty of water in the shaft. I'm trying not to believe it."

"I hope it isn't true." Her voice was low and serious. "Father was talking to me—about you. And we hoped you two would succeed—this time."

EVIDENTLY her father had told her more than she cared to relate. Fairchild caught the inflection in her voice—but disregarded it.

"I owe you an apology," he said bluntly.

"For what?"

"Last night. I couldn't resist it—I forgot for a moment that you were there. I—I hope that you'll believe me to be a gentleman, in spite of it."

She smiled up at him quickly. "I have already had proof of that."

"You're not going to be offended if I tell you something?" said Fairchild suddenly after a moment's silence.

"Certainly not."

"The sheriff came along just after you had made the turn. He was looking for an auto-bandit."

"A what?" She stared at him with wide-open, almost laughing eyes. "But you don't believe—"

"He was looking for a man," said Fairchild quietly. "I—I told him that I hadn't seen anything but—a boy. I was willing to do that then—because I couldn't believe that a girl like you would—" Then he stumbled and halted.

Again she laughed, softly, in a way tantalizing to Robert Fairchild, as though she were making game of him.

"What do you know about women?" she asked finally, and Fairchild hesitatingly told the truth:

"Nothing."

"Then—" the laugh grew heartier, finally however, to die away. The girl put forth her hand. "But I wont say what I was going to. It wouldn't sound right. I hope that I—I live up to your estimation of me. At least—I'm thankful to you for being the man you are. And I wont forget!"

Once more her hand rested in his, a small, warm, caressing thing in spite of the purely casual grasp of an impersonal action. He stood watching her until she had reached the motorcar which had brought her to the big curve, and faded down the hill. Then he went back to assist the sweating workmen and the anxious-faced Sam Herbenfelder. The water was down seventy feet.

TWO days later the town divided its attention between preparations for the Old Times Dance and the progress in the dewatering of the Blue Poppy shaft. Now and then the long hose was withdrawn, and dynamite lowered on floats to the surface of the water, far below, a copper wire trailing it. A push of the plunger, a detonation, and a wait of long moments. It accomplished nothing, and the pumping went on. If the earthly remains of 'Arry 'Arkins were below, they steadfastly refused to come to the surface.

The volunteers had thinned now, to only a few men at the pumps and the gasoline engine—and Sam Herbenfelder taking turns with Fairchild in overseeing the job. Spectators were not as frequent either; they came and went—all except Mother Howard, who was silently constant. The water had fallen to the level of the drift two hundred feet below; the pumps now were working on the main flood which still lay below, while outside the townspeople came and went, and twice daily, the owner and proprietor and general assignment reporter of the *Daily Bugle* called at the mouth of the tunnel for news of progress. But there was no news, save that the water was lower. The excitement of it began to dim. But Sam stayed on—and Fairchild with him, and the loiterers who would refuse to work at anything else for less than six dollars a day, freely gave their services at the pumps and the engines in return for a share of Sam's good will and their names in the papers.

Two days more. Through town a new interest spread. The water was now only a few feet high in the shaft—it meant that the whole great opening, together with the drift tunnel, soon would be dewatered to an extent sufficient to permit of exploration. Again the motorcars ground up the narrow roadway. Outside the tunnel the crowds gathered—Fairchild saw Anita Richmond and gritted his teeth at the fact that young Rodaine accompanied her. Farther in the background, narrow eyes watching him closely, was Squint Rodaine. And still farther—

Fairchild gasped as he noticed the figure plodding down the mountainside. He put out a hand, then seizing the nervous Herbenfelder by the shoulder, whirled him around.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Look there! Didn't I tell you! Didn't I have a hunch?"

For, coming toward them, jauntily,

slowly, was a figure in beaming blue, a Fedora on his head now, but with the rest of his wardrobe intact, yellow bump-toed shoes and all. Some one shouted. Everybody turned. And as they did so, the figure hastened its pace. A moment later a booming voice sounded, the voice of 'Arry 'Arkins:

"Hi sye! What's the matter over there? Did somebody fall in?"

THE puffing of gasoline engines ceased. A moment more, and the gurgling cough of the pumps was stilled, while the shouting and laughter of a great crowd took its place. A leaping form went forward, Sam Herbenfelder, to seize 'Arry, to pat him and paw him, as though in assurance that he really was alive, then to grasp wildly at the ring on his finger. But 'Arry waved him aside.

"Haint Hi paid the hinstallment hon hit?" he remonstrated. "What's the rumpus?"

Fairchild, with Mother Howard, both laughing happily, was just behind Herbenfelder. And behind them was thronging half of Ohadi.

"We thought you were drowned!"

"Me?" 'Arry's laughter boomed again in a way that was infectious. "Me drowned, just because I let hout a 'oller, hand dropped my 'at?"

"Then you did it on purpose?" Sam Herbenfelder shook a scrawny fist under 'Arry's nose. The big Cornishman waved it aside, as one would brush away an obnoxious fly. Then he grinned at the townspeople about him.

"Well," he confessed, "there was an un-'oly lot hof water hin there, hand Hi didn't 'ave hany money. What helse was Hi to do?"

"You!" A pumpman had picked up a piece of heavy timbering and thrown it at him in mock ferocity. "Work us to death and then come back and give us the laugh? Where you been at?"

"Center City," confessed 'Arry cheerily.

"And you knew all the time?" Mother Howard wagged a finger under his nose.

"Well," and the Cornishman chuckled, "Hi didn't 'ave hany money. Hi 'ad to get that shaft hunwatered, didn't Hi?"

"Get a rail!" Another irate—but laughing—pumpman had come forward. "Think you can pull that on us? Get a rail!"

Some one seized a small dead pine which lay on the ground near by. Others helped to strip it of the scraggly limbs which still clung to it. 'Arry watched them and chuckled—for 'Arry knew that in none was there malice. 'Arry had played his joke and won. It was their turn now. Shouting in mock anger, calling for all dire things from lynchings on down to burnings at the stake, they dragged 'Arry to the pine tree, threw him astraddle of it, then, with wilfing hands volunteering on every side, hoisted the tree high above them, and started down the mountain-side, Sam Herbenfelder trotting in the rear, and forgetting his anger in the joyful knowledge that his ring at last was safe.

Behind the throng of men with their mock threats, trailed the women and children, some throwing pine cones at the booming 'Arry, juggling himself on the narrow pole, and in the crowd, Fairchild found some one he could watch with more than ordinary interest—Anita Richmond, trudging along with the rest, apparently remonstrating with the sullen, mean-visaged young man at her side.

FAIRCHILD whirled at a voice by his side, and looked into the crooked eyes of Thornton Fairchild's enemy. The blue-white scar had turned almost black now; the eyes were red from swollen, blood-stained veins; the evil, thin, crooked lips were working in a sullen fury. They were practically alone at the mouth of the mine, Fairchild with a laugh dying on his lips, Rodaine with all the hate and anger and futile malice that human being can know typified in his scarred, hawklike features.

"Funny, weren't you? Played your cheap jokes and got away with 'em. But everybody aint like them fools!" He pointed to the crowd just rounding the rocks. 'Arry bobbing in the foreground. "There's some that remember—and I'm one of 'em. You've put over your fake; you've had your laugh—you've framed it so I'll be the butt of every numbskull in Ohadi. But just listen to this—just listen to this!" he repeated, the harsh voice taking on a tone that was almost a screech. "There's another time coming—an' that time's going to be mine!"

And before Fairchild could retort, he had turned, and was scrambling down the mountain-side.

Even more interesting episodes are to come in this engrossing story. Don't miss the next installment in our forthcoming May issue.

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Frozen Dope

This strange and vivid drama in a snow-bound mountain wilderness is one of the most deeply interesting stories we have ever printed.

By MAXWELL SMITH

STURGISS grunted and let drop the dead-weight burden of Trant from his shoulders. He pushed the stocking-cap back on his head, made a motion to unbutton his mackinaw but halted in the act. It was too cold to do that, sweating as he was.

Looking backward, he could see, even in the gathering dusk, the disturbed snow at the last place he had rested. He was not making much progress now. It had been a heart-breaking effort to return Trant to his shoulders after that last stop. He would not attempt that again. He could not afford to overexert himself, to pay out all his strength. Henceforward he would drag Trant—drag him until it became impossible, almost impossible, to do even that.

Though he was about spent, Sturgiss smiled the slow smile which in a shadowy way lighted his toneless-complexioned face. Mopping his dripping forehead, he breathed deeply and slowly to recover his wind. His exhaustion would prove that he had done his best. When he staggered in, they would see by his condition that he had given all that was in him to succor Trant. They could not doubt that.

Sturgiss didn't bother to make Trant comfortable. He let his burden lie as it had fallen, face downward, arms bent beneath, one leg drawn up, the other sprawling. Trant was beyond knowing what posture he was in.

Lying on his back, Sturgiss stretched his aching arms and limbered his cramped biceps. Straightening his legs, he found some relief for them by digging the tails of his *montagnais* into the snow. The broad, nearly round snowshoes weighed like lead, it seemed, and with every step were becoming more unwieldy. His ankles were sore from the many cracks he had given himself latterly on his staggering march. Squinting down at the mountain shoes, he swore at them; but he swore softly, emotionlessly, as was his manner.

FOR four hours Sturgiss had been carrying Trant. He had made close to three miles—which was good, everything considered. It was a husky task, this, toting a man who was not only helpless but unconscious—or dead!

When Sturgiss was rested, he would see whether Trant was dead. At the moment that didn't matter. Trant would be dead later on, anyhow. He surely would be dead before he could be got into Trudeau Landing, the nearest place at which he could receive proper aid. None could hold Sturgiss responsible for that. They must admit that he had done his utmost.

Staring at the drab sky, Sturgiss smiled again. He caught his heavy eyes closing under the soporific influence of the intense quiet there among the Laurentians up back of Montreal—in the silence of these mountains that were abandoned again to the wilderness until the second growth of timber should attain commercial size. He musn't sleep. He was too warm to remain long at a standstill in the zero temperature. He had nothing with which to protect himself from the cold had he desired to slumber. Blankets and sleeping-bags, the entire packs, had been cast away when it became necessary to lug Trant through the snow. If Sturgiss slept, he knew, there probably would be two dead men instead of one—two skeletons to bleach perhaps for years unfound.

They had been abroad two days, Sturgiss and Trant, amid the trackless snows in the mountains. Prior to that they had been tramping three days, but then they had followed the railroad up from St. Jerome, forty miles northwest of Montreal. At Belisle Mill they had branched off to cut through the solitude for twenty miles to Trudeau Landing, whence a dinky railroad was to take them back to the Canadian Pacific line and the end of their outing.

Now the end would come only a little nearer Trudeau—that is, their journeying together would finish there. Trant would not be worth the expenditure of further energy. In all likelihood he was not worth it now. But aye or nay, whether Trant was at this instant alive or dead, Sturgiss intended to take him farther on. Sturgiss was bound that there should not be the slightest excuse for hinting that he had quit.

Sturgiss knew with fair accuracy where he was. He was no stranger in the mountains. Many seasons he had hunted deer and fished in them; and for the sport of tramping, he had crossed them before in winter as he and Trant had started to do. Trudeau Landing was not much more than two miles distant. He would arrive there two hours after dark.

The trip had been undertaken at the suggestion of Sturgiss. And it was he who had set the pace and so maneuvered to be five or six miles from Trudeau at midday. That was the point at which he had predetermined Trant should collapse!

STURGISS kicked his feet up to release the tails of his shoes from the snow. Raising himself, he squatted on his heels. He hauled Trant over with a casual, indifferent motion. Trant's head lolled and came to rest with the empurpled face half-upturned.

Pulling off a mitten, Sturgiss felt at Trant's wrist for a pulse, and at his neck. He could find none. Into Trant's breast he thrust a hand, seeking to discern some fluttering of the heart. He could not.

The body, he noted, was clammy. Though icy, it was damp as with a cold sweat. He shuddered a little and wiped his hand on his clothes.

From Trant's middle he took a woolen sash, mate to one he himself wore. Knotting them together, he slipped a loop under Trant's arms.

The improvised rope and the load it hauled made him go forward with a lurching sidewise movement. His neck, set forward on rounded shoulders, was more than usually craned. His long arms seemed longer, dangling almost to his knees, which were bent constantly to the strain as he tugged. His colorless features had that same rather stony lack of expression, except that now and then the ghost of a smile crossed his lips. He smiled at the grandstand play he was making. Of course, he was sorry for Trant. Trant had been a good fellow, a good partner, but—

Often as he trudged through the young timber in the falling darkness, the snowshoes rapped Sturgiss' ankles and he swore again. But always his tone was quiet, dispassionate, as he was wont to speak and act. There was no occasion for getting mad. He had to go on a while longer with this gruesome tow. Everything had to be made to look right.

Sturgiss was engaged in keeping himself out of prison.

STURGISS finally propped Trant in a sitting position against a tree. His face puckered as he lifted the recumbent man's lids and peered into the glazed eyes. It was a nasty job; but he could take no chance of medical attention reaching Trant too soon. His hands trembled as he explored again in search of a pulse, while he felt beneath his friend's clothing for a flickering of the heart.

He shuddered and started away, withdrawing his hand quickly. He had not imagined that a corpse would be like that. Just cold—cold was all he had expected. And Trant was so—so infernally clammy. The unhealthy feel of the skin, the sticky clinginess to the touch, caused Sturgiss' gorge to rise.

Through taut lips Sturgiss swore gently. A pace off he stood, his head hinging sharply forward, his long arms loose-hanging to his bent and unsteady knees. He swore because his nerve was shaken. He had to hold his nerve.

Five minutes, perhaps ten, he stood. Despite the cold, the sweat poured down his cheeks, over his high-bridged nose. He felt himself grow damp all over. Damp—like Trant!

His broad lips writhing back, he shook himself. He had a task to complete, ghoulish though it was. To turn back was not possible. Perforce he went on.

Again he felt for a beating of Trant's heart. There must be no mistake; he must be certain that Trant was dead.

He was convinced. He could find no slightest sign of life.

Then all Sturgiss desired was to get away from the Thing that sat against the tree with sagging head. No; it didn't sit. It slopped there like a stuffed sack. Ugh! And he had carried it on his back for hours!

Breathing even harder than when he had toiled through the snow with Trant on his shoulders, than when he had dragged Trant with the knotted sashes, he sat about completing the picture for those he would send to bring Trant in. For their benefit it had to be made conclusive that he had done everything possible to save Trant. While they lamented the tragedy, they should applaud Sturgiss—applaud him for the devotion that had sustained him in his abortive but apparently none the less heroic endeavor.

About Trant's body he rebuttoned the clothing snugly. Over that he wrapped both sashes, folding the arms inside them, ostensibly for the added warmth they would have imparted. It must appear also that he had striven to keep Trant warm.

But there was once more a touch of panic in him as he pulled the stocking cap down on Trant's head. His jerky movement caused him to cover the face entirely. The blueness of the stark features made him do that involuntarily. They were so rigid, so masklike, so—were they? —accusing!

He braced himself to undo that slip, to uncover Trant's nose and mouth. As he did so, his thoughts gave him heart to smile again with grisly humor: Were the face wholly muffled, they might say that he had contributed to Trant's death by smothering him!

Still, there was a warning in that bizarre suggestion that he might become strangled. The idea stayed him to a calm execution of his program. He reminded himself—better, he emphasized something that he could not forget—that he would escape prison through the death of Trant. There was his only salvation—in Trant's death and his own poise throughout the ordeal of inquiry.

Sturgiss had no fear that they could fix the killing of Trant upon him. Hadn't he and Trant been both partners and friends. There never had been trouble between them. In a killing, a motive must be made plain to the jury—in a killing that would class as murder, anyway, unless the act was committed during the commission of a felony. They would be unable to ascribe a motive—not definitely. As a lawyer, Sturgiss knew that. Some might suspect him. But there would be no evidence to back suspicion. They could produce none. On the other hand there would appear to be a powerful motive for Trant's having committed suicide. Sturgiss would say that he had. He could not successfully be disputed. He had been alone with Trant. Besides inability to establish a motive why he should have taken Trant's life, they were without a single witness to contradict his story.

STURGISS turned away and went on through the young timber. He did not look back; nor did he hasten. He went instead with laboring, drunken steps, resting frequently as would a man near the limit of his endurance.

Leaving the timber, he struck across a lake. He was grateful for the easier going on the level ice; yet he continued to go along with an exaggerated stumbling. He had to enact his part to the end.

At the far side of the lake, a mile away, he saw the lights of Trudeau Landing. Here and there on the slopes about the village were other glimmers that marked the few clustered farms that had come with the passing onward of the lumbermen.

Halfway over, there came to him the sound of music. He grinned frankly. That took his mind off the huddle in which he had left Trant. He visioned the scene into which he was about to obtrude the note of tragedy. He saw old Jules, corncob in his mouth reeking the acrid tobacco grown on his own patch, sawing away at his fiddle. Watching Jules with contemptuous eye would be young Delormier, playing not a fiddle but a violin; for young Delormier had been taught to play at school in Montreal, while Jules had learned by everlastingly scraping at the strings. Also Sturgiss saw little Dorothy Cook at the piano, shutting her ears to the discord of the fiddle—and of the piano, too, though that was not her fault. As he plodded on his rambling course, he could see the prancing of the farmers and lumbermen, some booted, some moccasined, in the hall over the general store.

This, he recollected, was Saturday, the night of the big hop, the main event of the week all through the long dreary winter. It would be a climactic moment when he should bring the two- or three-score couples tumbling from their pleasure to send them into the night to fetch back a dead man! Already he could hear the buzz and the awe-stricken mutterings, the expressions of real sorrow—for many of them knew Trant—and the generous plaudits for Sturgiss himself which he did not deserve. His humor was tickled again, and he laughed audibly ere he sent over the ice a long-drawn but feeble cry which he was aware would not carry the distance.

Toward the last of his journey Sturgiss let himself fall every rod or so. Now and then he crawled on hands and knees, an insane effort with the snowshoes flapping awkwardly on his feet and hindering him. That was to demonstrate the extent of his travail, his desperation to get in so that help would be hurried to Trant. These folk could read the tracks in the snow. He wished to maintain realism.

THE dancers were swinging breathlessly through a quickstep, imported the previous winter by the visitors whose seeking of the crowded trout-streams and lakes contributed considerable to the existence of the hamlet, when Sturgiss' shouting penetrated the music. The suddenness of it threw them out of step. While they floundered uncertainly, colliding and looking the question one at another, the shout was repeated:

"Help!"—long-drawn and pitiful and startling.

Old man Cook—who was not so old, and at any rate was just as young in spryness as his grown children—called to the fiddlers and his daughter at the piano. The music stopped.

The old-timer, who had come into these mountains with the first lumber outfits ahead of the railroad and had settled after a while to marry and win a living from the soil, had the door open. The dancers were moving after him or standing listening expectantly when Sturgiss cried again. Men left their partners to run for the stairway. The womenfolk, more excited and eager to learn what was toward, followed. It was a diversion to have a man come into the village in the night clamoring for help.

Down by the blacksmith shop, fifty feet away, Sturgiss was struggling to his feet in the middle of the roadway. A woman was on a porch nearby, a lantern held high in her hand as she stared dumbly at him. Other doors were opening along the string of dwellings that made up the village. The whole place was arousing.

When he observed that he had audience enough, that the crowd was streaming from the dance-hall, Sturgiss teetered as he gained his feet, then fell once more.

Old man Cook was first to reach him. His amazed exclamation apprised the others of the identity of the prostrate newcomer:

"My God! It's Sturgiss!" Sturgiss lived at the Cook house when he vacationed at Trudeau Landing. So did—so had—Trant.

Sturgiss' face was drawn and agonized as he looked up. Cook was stooping, lifting him by the shoulders.

"Don't bother about me—" Sturgiss gestured weakly. "Trant—Trant is—out there!"

"Trant!" The chattering group hushed and echoed the name. They crowded closer. Sturgiss had won the desired effect. They already were looking upon him as a man who had given much to obtain assistance for his friend.

"Let's get him inside," said Cook. "Take his feet, somebody."

"Wait!" Sturgiss protested, his hands reaching up to Cook's shoulder restrainingly. His teeth grated as though he were holding himself together by sheer power of will. His face reflected some fateful recollection. In appropriate histrionics, Sturgiss was good!

"Wait! Get Trant," he commanded. "He's—out there."

With the words, Sturgiss' eyes drooped and his head fell forward and his hands slid from old man Cook's shoulders.

Cook shook him.

"What's happened to Trant? Sturgiss—what's happened to him? Where is he?"

Sturgiss opened his eyes heavily. He babbled something—nothing. Then as Cook continued to shake him and repeat the questions, he answered:

"Back—across the lake. I—brought him—as far's I could. He—took poison—this noon."

"O—Oh!" The girl's sharp cry rose above the babel of French and English that came as Sturgiss ceased speaking. Her hands at her throat, her breath drawing in short gasps through her chattering teeth, Dorothy Cook pressed forward.

"He—took poison!" she whispered incredulously. "He—"

Her father waved her back.

"Let's get him inside, girl," he said gently. "He's all played out. Take his feet, Fred." Fred was his son.

As they gathered up Sturgiss, who again was nodding sleepily, Cook called for further action.

"Get your shoes, some of you men, and go after Trant. Sturgiss' trail will take you to him. And somebody call Doc Mackay to go along. There may be a chance—"

The men scattered to get snowshoes and do his bidding. The women, chattering in repressed tones, followed him and his son as they carried Sturgiss to their home on the fringe of the village. In their lead, hovering anxiously by Sturgiss in the hope that he would say more, went Dorothy.

Sturgiss, however, had resumed shamming the drowsiness of exhaustion. Actually he was anticipating the reaction of Dorothy Cook to the story he would tell in explaining Trant's purported suicide. The girl's horrified ejaculation had not escaped him, nor the deep concern she had shown. Mentally he smiled. She must be more horrified when his lying record was completed.

Dorothy Cook, it was true, was but an incidental spoke in the wheel, but she was a real one. In engineering the elimination of Trant, the primary object of Sturgiss was to avoid being sent to prison Trant's "suicide" would be construed as a confession of guilt. Sturgiss considered that he would be looked upon with more favor by the girl if Trant were out of the way, especially if her memory of Trant, already blackened by his alleged self-destruction, was further besmirched by the belief that he was a thief! But he intended to be canny in making this revelation. It was an item to be handled delicately. Had he not been Trant's partner and friend?

LAYING Sturgiss on a couch in the parlor, Cook got a bottle of brandy and administered a liberal dose. Mrs. Cook bustled away to warm a kettle of soup.

The strong spirits made Sturgiss blink.

"You'll be all right," said Cook with forced cheerfulness; his thoughts were on Trant. Somehow he had liked Trant better than he did Sturgiss. And—glancing at his daughter, who stood by pallid and tense, with tight-shut hands stiffly at her sides—he had figured that Dorothy liked Trant pretty well too.

Sturgiss seemed afraid of the answer as he queried: "Have they found Trant? Is he—all right?"

Cook shook his head. "They're after him now. I'm going. We're taking Doc Mackay. I'll send the Doc in to see you—"

"No, no!" From the corner of his eye Sturgiss glimpsed Dorothy. He attempted to bolster the impression of self-sacrifice on his own part. "There's nothing the matter with me. Take the Doctor to Trant. Hurry!"

Cook hauled off his second boot and replaced it with a moccasin. He looked up at Sturgiss.

"What'd he poison himself for?"

Sturgiss shifted his gaze to the girl. There was pain in his face, sympathy, regret, reluctance. With parted lips, her

bosom heaving, her eyes pleading, she leaned to him.

Still looking at her, Sturgiss replied to the father:

"I—don't know." But he said it evasively, uneasily, in a manner implying that he did know. "We were eating when—" Sturgiss took a small vial from his pocket, —"when he poured the tablets from this and swallowed them—a dozen or more. He didn't say anything—just smiled." Sturgiss' voice became jerky. He appeared to be selecting his words, guarding against saying too much. "Then I saw the red label—the poison label. I asked what he had done. 'Good-by, old man,' he said; 'I'm through!'"

Dorothy Cook's stifled sob interrupted him. Sturgiss stopped and pressed his hands over his eyes.

"Give me another drink," he asked huskily. He gulped it.

"Morphine." Old man Cook read the label on the vial. "And then?" he prompted, taking the snowshoes his son held out to him—narrow shoes which would permit him to make speed.

"Then"—Sturgiss was abashed, apologetic—"then I tried to prevent his swallowing the tablets—to make him spit them out—but Trant was bigger, stronger—" His hands moved despairingly. "He laughed and shoved me away."

Cook nodded understandingly. It should not have been difficult for Trant to handle Sturgiss, though the latter was in good condition.

"And when he went out, you carried him—how far?"

"I pestered him, I harried him, to keep him awake—tried to persuade him to head for here. He wouldn't move," explained Sturgiss somberly. "When he lost consciousness about an hour later, I carried him—carried him and hauled him until an hour or so ago, when I was all in myself."

"We-ell, you did your best," granted Cook. It struck him that Sturgiss might have got help to Trant earlier had he come on alone in the beginning, but he did not mention that. Doubtless Sturgiss had been too overwrought to leave his friend.

"When you left him," interjected Dorothy tremulously but bravely, "was he—alive?"

"Yes," said Sturgiss gravely. "Yes, Dorothy, he seemed to be—alive!"

"Father—" She contained herself by an effort. He understood her plea.

"I'm going right away." He laid a caressing hand on her shoulder. "Remember, girl," he comforted her, "Ned's still alive. When Doc Mackay gets hold of him—" Cook turned to Sturgiss. It hurt him when his girl was hurt. "Fred'll look after you, Sturgiss," he said with unintentional gruffness. "I'm going to catch up on the boys."

The girl moved abruptly.

"I'll go—"

Her father negatived her. "You stay here with Fred," he said. "We'll be back soon." It would not be wise to have her present when Trant was discovered, should he prove to be dead.

"Dad! I must—"

"No. Wait here, girl. You're only delaying me," he added gently.

She saw the truth in that and let him go.

Several minutes Sturgiss lay staring at her. He fidgeted at last, disconcerted by the fixity of her attention.

On the edge of a chair she sat, inclining toward him but immobile. Only her eyes in their fascinating intensity seemed alive.

Sturgiss grew cold—clammy as Trant had been! He wished to heaven Dorothy would move. She was so rigid, so—so frozen! That was it. She was frozen. He found the simile. Her face looked dead and stark as Trant's had been when last he saw it. Her face was dead and stark—all except the eyes. And these, like Trant's blue cold face, seemed to Sturgiss to accuse him!

Sturgiss feigned sleep. He was foolish. How could she accuse him—or Trant? Trant was dead. She knew nothing. None could know anything. The situation explained itself. Trant had committed suicide because he was a thief.

Sturgiss stole another glance at her from beneath slitted lids. He turned his head away and sourly admitted that he had miscalculated about Dorothy Cook. He doubted whether anything that might be said against Trant could alter her feeling for him. She, therefore, could not be counted among the results to be achieved by the removal of Trant. That was unfortunate, but after all she had been a secondary consideration. The chief end was to keep out of prison by creating at least a circumstantial case against Trant.

WITH a crouching, sweeping stride old man Cook took up the trail across the lake. Before reaching the other side,

he caught up on the Doctor and the man who had summoned him.

Doctor Mackay, a gaunt, whiskered man of Scotch descent who many years ago had gone into the mountains as a lumber-company surgeon and had been captivated by the restfulness, wagged his head seriously when Cook told him that Trant had suffered morphine poisoning.

"Do you be knowing how much he has taken?" The trace of ancestry crept occasionally into the Doctor's speech when he was perturbed.

Cook handed him the vial. "A dozen or more of whatever was in that."

The Doctor stopped to examine it. He struck a match to read the fine type on the label.

"Pffff!" He smiled ruefully, and his remark was dry: "It's an undertaker the poor devil'll be wanting instead of a doctor!"

"You think so?" Cook rattled the query as they got started again. Dorothy—her attitude on the arrival of Sturgiss had revealed to the full how dreadfully this blow would strike her. He caught at the ray of hope, but he felt that it was as futile to do so as for a child to grasp at a ray of sunshine: "But, Doc, Sturgiss says Trant was alive when he left him an hour ago."

"Mebbe so," returned the Doctor frankly but discouragingly, "mebbe so. If he was, man, he's got a remarkable constitution—remarkable. Unless he's been taking it; and as I remember Trant, he wasn't the sort of man to take to drugs. These were quarter-grain tablets. If he took a dozen of them, he'll be having three grains in his system—which is more than too much for any ordinary man. And"—his voice softened as he sensed some significance in Cook's moody silence—"you tell me that 'twas noontime when he took it. He should have been a corpse hours ago."

They went on without speaking. Cook's thoughts strayed from what was ahead of them to his girl, who was waiting so courageously behind. Unconsciously he slowed his pace. He was half afraid to continue, now that the doctor had said that Trant must be dead.

"Yon'll be them."

The doctor's words roused the brooding father. He looked up the mountain slope through the trees. Lanterns were glimmering. He broke into a faster run. They were bringing Trant down. In a few minutes he would learn whether his girl was to sorrow or rejoice. He outdistanced the Doctor and the other man, spurred by a heartrending desire to know which it was to be.

Trant was being carried on a rude stretcher contrived out of a blanket and a couple of saplings. The bearers dashed the final hope before he could catch his breath to put the question.

"He's dead, sure enough," they said. And without irreverence one added: "Dead and frozen nigh like a side of beef!"

COOK fell into step beside them. Because of his girl, he experienced a surge of resentment against Sturgiss. Why hadn't Sturgiss raced in immediately? Had he done so, the Doctor could have been at Trant's side within two hours of the poisoning. Sturgiss' lone effort had cost six hours—six hours lost, when minutes meant life or death.

So was his mind working when they met Doctor Mackay. Cook caught him by the arm.

"Doc, they say he's dead, but—" He pushed the Doctor to the stretcher. "Doc," he whispered, "my girl loves him. You see— There's a chance, isn't there, Doc? If he was alive just a little while ago—it's less'n an hour, Doc. There's a chance, isn't there, that there may be a spark? My girl Dorothy, Doc, is looking for you to—"

The Doctor motioned for them to set the stretcher down. Before he bent over the still form of Trant, he would have staked his reputation on what his verdict must be. And since the heart of little Dorothy Cook, whom he had brought into the world, was involved, he gladly would have yielded his reputation to make the verdict otherwise.

Calling for a lantern to be held close to the blue face, he raised Trant's eyelids. His lips pursed as he marked the pupils contracted to pinpoints. That was an unmistakable symptom of morphine or some other opium derivative, as was the blueness of the face, although that alone might have been due to exposure. Without expecting any result, he touched the eyes with his finger. He was not disappointed. There was no reflex.

Cook hung over him. More to delay the pronouncement than anything else, the Doctor opened Trant's clothing and placed the stethoscope over the heart to listen long and earnestly. It communicated no faintest throb.

The practitioner straightened to meet Cook's anxious gaze. The handclasp he gave supplied the answer as much as did the slow shake of the head.

Cook turned away. The Doctor walked silently by his side. Others took up the stretcher. The procession renewed the journey to the hamlet where the two persons most vitally concerned awaited, where Dorothy Cook awaited with leaden heart, motionless and dulled, still perched on the edge of the chair, staring unseeingly at Sturgiss, where Sturgiss awaited, pretending sleep and smiling to himself as it reechoed through his brain that he was saved. Only one thing disturbed him. Even with his back turned to her, he could feel Dorothy Cook's eyes upon him. He could feel how—how dead she looked, how dead and frozen!

"YOU'D better not take him home," advised the Doctor as they started up the village street. "Dorothy—"

Cook understood the unfinished suggestion. It would be too great a shock to the girl to take Trant directly to the house. She would have to be told first.

Thus the stretcher-bearers turned into the home and workshop of Beaubien, the village barber and undertaker, within the shadow of the hall in which they had been dancing so merrily when Sturgiss came. In the rear room, really an outbuilding, in which Beaubien kept his unvarying supply of one coffin, Trant was laid.

Beaubien—undertaker more by courtesy than by actual fact—phoned to St. Jerome for another coffin. Doctor Mackay phoned the county seat, St. Jovite, for the coroner and the sheriff. Old man Cook went wearily to his home. . . . .

Dorothy Cook stood as her father appeared. Her big dark eyes read his message while yet he remained miserably on the threshold, heedless of the blast of cold that swept into the house. The first tears glistened on her cheeks. She swayed, controlled herself, and gently putting aside her mother's hands, passed out of the room. In these initial moments of her greatest grief she wished to be alone with her memories.

Sturgiss stirred, rolled over and hoisted himself on an elbow. There was a flush of eagerness on his normally colorless face—eagerness to know that he had allowed sufficient time to insure the death of Trant. His head perked farther out from his round shoulders.

"You found him? He is—" Sturgiss paused. It would be too ludicrous to ask if Trant were alive. It would sound indecent to ask if he were dead.

Cook closed the door. He assumed that the word unspoken by Sturgiss was "alive."

"No," he answered, and he wondered at the sudden falling of Sturgiss' jaw.

"Uh?" Sturgiss gagged.

"No," repeated Cook, "he is dead."

"Oh!" Sturgiss could not altogether restrain his relief. He hurried to recover himself. "Oh, I thought—when you said 'No,' I thought—" He settled back on the couch. "My mind isn't quite clear, I guess," he wound up.

Cook looked at him curiously, almost scowling. He did not feel particularly friendly toward Sturgiss. He repeated an inquiry which previously had been dodged.

"Why did he kill himself?"

Sturgiss did not reply at once. He squinted down his high nose, apparently pondering. He was embarking on the stage in which he was to pose as desirous of protecting Trant from further stigma.

"Is it necessary to go into reasons?"

"The coroner'll want to know if there is any, don't you think?"

"Well, yes, perhaps." Sturgiss' brows wrinkled as he conceded that much.

Dorothy reappeared in the doorway. Her eyes, dry but burning, rested on him. Her voice was clear, but it dwindled to a wisp: "Can't I go now—to see—Ned?" Her teeth buried into her lip as she composed herself. "I can go. I—I want to see—him."

Her father looked at the floor. He couldn't tell her why she couldn't go yet to look upon what remained of her sweetheart. Not until Beaubien had finished—Trant would look better then! There was a stubble on his chin. He would look better after Beaubien had shaved and washed him and shrouded him.

"Shortly, girl, shortly; we'll have him brought here." He lied: "The coroner has to see him first. Go rest awhile. Your mother—"

"No," she interrupted tonelessly. "I'll stay here."

To distract his mind from her distress, he reiterated to Sturgiss:

"Why did he do it?"

Sturgiss frowned and motioned for him to be still. Dorothy caught his eye.

"Do you know the reason, Mr. Sturgiss?" she asked quietly.

Sturgiss wriggled uncomfortably. "I don't think it is—"

"Tell me!" she commanded. Her simple dignity masked a ferocity as she advanced a step.

"It isn't necessary that this should become public," insisted Sturgiss. "I have money enough to cover it up—to make good—"

"To make good!" She took up his words dazedly.

"Yes—yes. You shouldn't make me tell this," objected Sturgiss petulantly, "but since you do—well," he rushed on, "Trant sold bonds belonging to some of our clients. He took them from our deposit-box at the bank. I don't know exactly how much—only what he told me after he had taken the poison. He said sixty thousand dollars. He gave me a list. Here—" He produced a notebook and thumbed to a page on which the bonds were enumerated.

A wrinkle of unbelief between her brows, Dorothy took the notebook.

"Ned didn't write that," she challenged.

"No, I did," admitted Sturgiss. "He told me all he could remember and said there may be others."

Her face flushed. She outgazed him, forced him finally to look away, because in her eyes he once more imagined there was a light of accusation. Her words strengthened it.

"I don't believe it," she declared simply.

Sturgiss permitted himself to smile furtively. He realized that there was no use attempting to play into her good graces.

"There's the fact of his suicide," he reminded her bluntly. "That seems to be somewhat of an admission."

She returned the book to him, and her eyes sparked at the cruelty of his remark.

"Yes," her inflection cut at him, "it *seems* to."

Before he could retort, she left the room. A minute later she slipped quietly out the back door. She had to look upon the features of the man she loved—of the man Sturgiss had branded both thief and suicide.

JOSEPH BEAUBIEN, barber and undertaker, muttered to himself as he drew the sheet over Trant. He was puzzled. He stepped back and pulled the sheet down from the face and chest. Drying his hand carefully, he laid it on the body. It came away moist.

"Umph!" He grunted, his dark eyes narrowing thoughtfully. Again drying his hand, he replaced it on Trant's chest. He was not mistaken. There was moisture, as he had noticed while preparing his subject for the embalmer who was coming from St. Jerome.

M. Beaubien spoke his thoughts aloud in English:

"Umph! She is one vair funny corpse —sure!"

Probably it was that decision which caused him to light two more candles beside the pair already at the head of the coffin. M. Beaubien was devout.

In his absorption he failed to observe the arrival of Dorothy Cook. Beaubien lived alone. She had found his front door unlatched.

"M'sieur Beaubien!"

He whirled, startled, as she spoke. When he saw who it was, he bowed, clasped his hands funereally and spoke his sympathy; for it was known throughout the village now that Dorothy Cook had loved Trant.

"Will you go—please, m'sieur?" She wanted to be alone with her dead.

M. Beaubien comprehended that but he demurred. He wondered why her father or brother had not accompanied her. She might break down, faint. One never could tell about a woman, no matter how admirably she seemed to have herself under control.

"Please, m'sieur," she begged. "I want —to pray."

"Ah!" M. Beaubien crossed himself. If mademoiselle desired to pray, he could not intrude. He left her, but he did not quite close the door.

A time she stood, image-like, looking down on the dear face in the wavering light of the candles. Kneeling by the coffin she prayed; and her prayers were interspersed with quiet, dry, racking sobs which caused Beaubien to linger closer to the door.

Half an hour she knelt. When she arose, the suffering in her heart was partly eased. She bent to kiss the still forehead—but stopped with starting, wide-flung eyes.

Her impulse was to scream. But was not this her dead?

Yet she shivered. For there was a difference in the face. The bluish tint had receded. The lips were a fuller red. And—she started back. And—

But no! No! It was a trick—a trick of the shadows created by the shifting candle-flames!

Spellbound, fearful, her heart hammering wildly, she watched. With her hands she sheltered the candles to steady light.

The shadows no longer twisting, Dorothy Cook saw clearly—and she laughed!

Hearing her laugh, Beaubien decided that what he had feared was taking place, that she was becoming hysterical. He intervened.

"Ma'mselle—"

She swung to him, her face bright with excitement.

"M'sieur Beaubien—" Her voice was pitched high but she kept a grip on herself. "Run, m'sieur, run for Doctor Mackay! Run!"

She shoved the astonished man toward the outer door. As he turned to try to soothe her, she cried more vehemently for him to make haste—and fainted. Whereupon Joseph Beaubien, barber and undertaker, lost his head and ran for the Doctor to revive her.

Her father, searching for her, found her there senseless.

STURGISS slept well that night. The coroner and the sheriff had come, heard his story. His narrative had been given with a seeming unwillingness, only out of a sense of duty and necessity. He believed that they had accepted it on its face as a plausible motive for suicide by Trant. Had he known that they had seen Doctor Mackay before calling on him, that they spent the night beside the Doctor as he worked over Trant, Sturgiss would not have slept so evenly.

It was past daylight when old man Cook awakened him.

"They're bringing Trant in," he told Sturgiss. "D'you want to come down and see him?"

Sturgiss yawned and rubbed his eyes. He'd rather have slept, but—

"Yes, of course," he said, and compassionately: "Poor old Trant."

The countless seams about Cook's eyes deepened. The eyes themselves twinkled grimly, and there was an odd smile at the corners of his mouth; but in the poor light Sturgiss did not see that. His own smile came and lingered as Cook withdrew. He could mourn with the rest of them.

The stage was set in the parlor when Sturgiss entered. The ensemble around the coffin in the parlor surprised him, however. He could understand the presence of Beaubien—but why Doctor Mackay, the sheriff and the coroner? He hesitated, looking from one to another.

When his gaze came to Dorothy Cook, he was more perplexed. There was nothing of sorrow in her face. On the contrary, it was alight with happiness. He couldn't make that out—unless the tragedy had made her crazy!

Dorothy broke the spell.

"Come, Mr. Sturgiss," she said, and there was a lilt in her voice, "let us look at Ned—together."

She held out a hand to him. He did not take it. She was mocking him, wasn't she?

"Come!" She advanced and touched his arm. The word was an order.

In the attitude of the others as his glance roved over them, he noted an air of anticipation. Obviously they were waiting for him to make the move.

Expecting something, but without any inkling of what to look for, he proceeded into the room. Dorothy walked at his side. Her elbow touched his, and it was like an electric shock to him, so surcharged was the atmosphere.

As he drew near enough to see Trant's still face over the side of the coffin, Sturgiss felt a creepiness ripple up his spine. His step balked when the sheriff moved a pace to let him approach. There appeared to be something warningly menacing in that motion of the sheriff. And while he reassured himself and took the last stride, Sturgiss suffered another chill. The sheriff had moved up ominously behind him.

Sturgiss managed to look melancholy, compassionate, but to himself he swore. This damned mummery, with all these fools staring at him, was spearing through his accustomed calm. He was mumbling some appropriate remark when—

Dorothy Cook laughed!

Trant opened his eyes!

"Hello, Sturgiss!" he said quietly; and though his eyes were dull, reflecting weakness, they blazed upon the man who bent above him.

The episode which he had stage-managed so excellently up to this point was taken instantly out of the hands of Sturgiss. He could only gape stupidly, refusing to believe his own senses but compelled to believe as Trant lifted his head. Compelled to believe beyond all doubt when the sheriff took him by the arm!

"And now," Doctor Mackay said as

Trant was lifted from the coffin and placed on the couch, Dorothy nestling her cheek against his, "I'll tell you why Trant is not dead, although he was given more than enough morphine to kill him."

The Doctor was enjoying his moment. He opened an old copy of a medical journal.

"You'll laugh, perhaps—all except Mr. Sturgiss!—when I tell you that Mr. Trant, instead of dying, simply went back to the days of primal man—that is, he was hibernating!"

The Doctor smiled as they looked at him blankly. "We don't know for a certainty, naturally, that our very early ancestors did hibernate, but there are scientists who consider it not unlikely—especially our ancestors who lived in the colder regions. They do not maintain that primitive man slept because of the difficulty in obtaining food. The theory is more that, being close to the animals, he followed their example. Lack of food is not positively the reason for hibernation. There are forms of life in the tropics which sleep, or æstivate, during the dry season, although the temperature remains warm.

"In some animals hibernation has been proved to be a complete suspension of animation. A hedgehog, for instance, can be taken from his winter quarters and immersed in water for a long period without ill effects. Normally it will drown in three minutes. Nor is the length of the winter sleep a fixed quantity. Take the same hibernating hedgehog and put it near a fire, and it soon will come to life—to return to sleep again as soon as put back into the cold.

"The bear is another good demonstration. Going to sleep for the winter, the bear rolls its tongue back until it practically closes the throat, making it impossible either to breathe or swallow. And the polar bear, being without a den, simply lies down and gets buried deeper and deeper by the successive falls of snow.

"Aside from the animals, however, and apart from the discussion as to whether primal man did hibernate, Trant assuredly was to all intents dead—which," and the old doctor looked at M. Beaubien quizzically from under his bushy brows—"which makes it fortunate that the coroner had to see him before Joe got an opportunity to try his art as an embalmer!

"Now, how are we to explain the conditions which in Trant we believed to be death? I say frankly that I would have certified him dead. He had no discoverable heart-action, nor respiration. His bodily activity appeared to be totally suspended. Why? By what causes did he during these hours duplicate the feats of the fakirs of India who permit themselves to be buried underground for weeks and then return to life?

"In this"—the Doctor tapped the medical journal—"is a parallel case. I remembered having read it immediately Trant, in the warmth of Beaubien's house, began to show signs of life. It is the case of a woman in Berlin who took morphine with suicidal intent and went outdoors to die. It was very cold. She was found apparently dead and at a hospital was being transferred to the morgue when an attendant discovered that her heart was beating."

M. Beaubien nodded vigorously: "It was the morphine, m'sieur, which make her a vair fine corpse, eh?" He grinned.

"Yes. Morphine frequently is used as a diaphoretic—to produce perspiration," explained the Doctor. "Joe couldn't quite make it out when he found the 'corpse' sweating. And by the way, the washing Joe gave Trant did much to bring back the suspended circulation. One time," he chuckled, "that an undertaker cheated himself."

Sturgiss licked his lips.

"The idea," he sneered, "seems to be that Trant did not poison himself?"

"You said it," agreed Trant. "Nor did he take the bonds you mentioned. In fact, he didn't even know they had been taken."

Sturgiss laughed arrogantly.

"Well—" he began.

"It is well—as things stand," cut in Trant. "You can tell it to the judge, Sturgiss. . . . . Say, Doctor,"—his arm circled Dorothy's shoulders more tightly—"I have one amendment to make. The cold may have done its part, and Joe too. But when you get down to fixing final credit in this life-saving act, you have to give it to this little lady here. If she hadn't noticed my heart fluttering, I'd mighty soon have absorbed that morphine after thawing out. Then what?"

"Oh, nothing," said the Doctor lightly, "except that we'd have found you really dead this morning. Still"—he eyed them judiciously and spoke with a dry humor—"I'll be thinking she wasn't wholly unselfish in discovering you were alive!"

To an American in Siam comes a strange adventure: an unusual and colorful story.

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Lou-How-Chow

EZRA GORDON sat down amid a harsh sibilance of rattan and began mopping his forehead with a limp silk handkerchief. His eyes were phenomenally luminous.

The reptile lurking in the inklike puddle of shadow was the finishing touch to an exceedingly trying afternoon. It looked so venomously real—long jaws ajar, scaled legs spread apart, tails straight arear, eyes glimmering in the liquid dark. The night mist of the jungle, from which such dreadful creatures often came crawling, drifted in a silver and lavender film across the slanting moonbeams.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Gordon," the faintly amused voice of Doctor Dill reassured him. "Well! Doesn't the little rascal look lifelike in this setting!"

The shock, when it had expended itself, left Ezra Gordon in a singular frame of mind—that is, a singular frame of mind for Ezra Gordon. Ordinarily he was a difficult man to arouse to any robust emotion; he prided himself on his poker qualities, his composure, his glacial poise. Now his composure, or his poise, was unseated. He was trembling, limp, cold, irritated.

"I hate lizards, crocodiles," he announced. He spoke with a pronounced vocal defect, a jarring wheeze not unlike that of the asthmatic sufferer, which propelled a wispy tenor voice to unbelievable distances. Its shrillness, produced by so ample a human mass, was startling.

Dr. Dill was in the act of applying an explosively flaring Japanese safety-match to a white Burmese cheroot. He smoked none but the larger ones, some of them over a foot in length, such as the Shan girls of Terrisserim favor. They were made of rough soft wood tubes stuffed full of colorless but pungent and acrid native tobacco.

The greasy white flare left a crisp, photographic impression of his wrinkled, polished, mahogany-like countenance on the other's eyes. He seemed to be smiling as he rolled the end of the cheroot around in his mouth; but Gordon could not be sure.

"That," the Doctor corrected him, "is not a crocodile, Mr. Gordon, although it is related to the lizard family. We seldom see the creatures in this part of the country; they seem to prefer the denser jungle around Chengmei and Chuntaboun. The *lou-how-chow*, or elephant-cobra, it is called."

"'Cobra?'" wheezed Gordon. "A cobra with legs?"

DR. DILL nodded; rather, the smoldering red disk a foot away from his mouth described an elongated oval. His eyes seemed phosphorescent in the bluish darkness.

"Never heard of such a thing! Poisonous?"

"Exceedingly. Deadlier even than the Kreit-adder or the Stanley-viper or the

king-cobra. Strikes sidewise—like this—a slash. Quicker than greased lightning! This fellow got one of my coolies near Chuntaboun-Town, the sapphire workings, you know. Poor devil! Walked seven steps—just! I counted 'em—seven. Well, that was two more than customary."

Gordon in silence revolved the silk handkerchief into a damp wad. The suspicion prevailed that Dr. Dill had deliberately placed the stuffed reptile in the open doorway to frighten him when he stepped out onto the veranda. Such a preposterous stage-setting would not have been out of character with some of the preposterous things he had been hearing of the Doctor.

"I nailed him with a revolver—one shot," the old gentleman chirped; then he sighed. "My eyes must have been good in those days."

He paused and became absent-mindedly silent, as if marveling at the boldness of his earlier days. Presently he waved one hand; the other he extended so that the moonlight fell upon the object it contained —a lump of gilded metal irregularly formed, giving off dull gleams, reflections.

As he did so, Gordon leaned forward with a start of eagerness, and the action brought him also, from rounded forehead to undershot jaw, into the cool light. His jaw was set with fine, sharp little teeth.

The lump of gilded metal exchanged hands; and Gordon turned it over critically with little grunts. It was the image of a monkey or a man, with hollow ribs, sunken cheeks, socket-like eyes, deep depressions at the temples, legs and arms like splinters. It was heavy enough to be iron or bronze, and was coated with stained gold-foil. The depressions between ribs and in the cheeks were black, giving it an air suggestive of death—mummification. In the hollowed pedestal the clinging sand of the casting sparkled like diamond-dust.

"You were saying a Lama found it in one of the Ayuthian *wats*—" he began.

Dr. Dill took up the threads. "Yes. It is supposed to represent an unpleasant experience in the life of Buddha when he was a young man seeking truth along strictly material planes. His philosophy was then crude, realistic, I imagine. The legend is that he came one day during his wanderings upon a colony of living skeletons who were also seeking the truth.

"Their belief was that by starving the flesh, the soul grew plump. Buddha tried the experiment. He reduced his rice allowance until he was subsisting finally upon five grains a day.

"He became very thin and weak—like a leper. One day he fell into a river and was too weak to save himself. A woman fished him out, took him home, and fed him until he became strong. He returned to the fasters and denounced them. Told 'em they were fools, that they had discovered falsehood, not truth. Man, he said, was not meant to starve the flesh; for to starve the flesh left the soul without physical support. I think he was developing the theory then of the 'middle way'—to sidestep all extremes."

"I have heard the story," Gordon remarked in his thin, jarring voice, as he fondled the gilded iron image, "but I have never seen a genuine Starvation Buddha before. They are very rare. You are fortunate, Dr. Dill."

Dr. Dill sniffed contemptuously.

"You don't seem to realize what a prize this is," the fat man persisted.

The Doctor sprang up. "Would you like to keep it?"

"Good heavens! I don't want you to think—" Gordon began apologetically.

"Keep it," he was told curtly. "I've got dozens of Buddhas."

"It's very kind—"

"I'm glad you called, Mr. Gordon."

Gordon accepted the dismissal in a generous mood. He left the house immediately with the Starvation Buddha in his hands and in his mind the belief that Dr. Dill had, with the stuffed *lou-how-chow* as a symbol, intended to convey to him a sense of warning. Evidently, according to the Doctor's mental processes, the shortest distance between two points was a circle.

THE extremely low visibility of Dr. Dill's methods was a most natural outcome of his intimate contact with native life. All nationalities have distinguishing characteristics which irritate, offend, charm or move to laughter the rest of the world. Witness the steel-clad conceit of the German, the cold-blooded opportunism of the Chinese, the passionate intensity of the Italian, the shameless imitativeness of the Jap. In the Siamese this peculiarity takes the form outwardly of a dreamy, lotus-like indolence; mentally, it is illusive subtlety —a love of achieving results in an indirect, mysterious manner. Dr. Dill's roundaboutness was simply a reflection of

the national manner, a product of forty years maturity.

When Dr. Dill came out to Bangkok, he was of the age when young men either bravely stifle or courageously gratify the nomadic impulse. Bangkok was not a rational decision; the name simply had always had an irresistible lure.

His appetite for the bizarre and exotic was agreeably satisfied by a confusion of rich impressions. All things were charmingly topsy-turvy to his American eyes and inveigled him to linger—the soft wiles of ravishing slave-girls from Moulmein, the painlessness of birth, the shocking ease of death and the cheapness of life, the laughter and joyous music at the funerals, the sullen influence of heathen idols on dreamy-minded people, the listlessness, the brutal white heat, the sweet breath of the jungle before the mangoes were ripe.

The young physician gave himself ardently for ten years, until the middle period of his thirties, to his ideals, to fighting cholera, dengue and yellow jack, beriberi and leprosy, elephantiasis and the black plague, diseases which were then more of a scourge throughout Asia than they are today. All in all, it was a thankless and unprofitable undertaking. The subsequent period, until he was well along in his forties, Dr. Dill devoted to throwing his ideals overboard and enhancing a wealth of information pertaining to the fascinating customs, habits, religions and mentality of the people with whom he had decided to spend the remainder of his days.

Dr. Dill gave up his practice and his hospital entirely. Opportunities for gilt-edged investments came during this period; he grew rich, with his fingers in many pies.

Then a species of resuscitated youth overtook him. He was over fifty and instinct with a novel adventurous zeal, when a profitable opportunity was offered him to aid a warring Lao chieftain by supplying him secretly with firearms. For this successful and highly illegal enterprise he was begrudgingly forgiven by the Siamese king; but he was forgiven, for Dr. Dill already was recognized as an institution of vast influence and uncanny power.

It was the first of many similar ventures in most of which the hand of the foxy old gentleman was seen by no one. He became addicted, as the novelty of money-making wore off, to an irrational favoritism. Men whom he admired prospered astonishingly; men whom he disliked left the country because of unexplainable runs of disastrous luck. It took him four years to drive a German trader out of Bangkok, and he accomplished the unfortunate man's downfall by methods of which a Siamese cat would have been envious.

That quality of invisibility, of secretly accomplishing good and evil, became as time went on Dr. Dill's outstanding characteristic. He realized in his veiled power an instrument with which he could extract an immense amount of enjoyment from the humdrum of life. His power for administering justice according to his unique and often illogical standards, for obtaining occult information in ways that were dark, delighted him.

THIS power enabled Dr. Dill to exercise his patriotism in unusual ways. Bangkok is not now and never has been a stronghold of American commerce. Americans came to Bangkok, were generally enabled by the Doctor to succeed and when their fortunes were made, they went home, after the habit of American colonizers. Nevertheless Dr. Dill continued to encourage every American who arrived and opened up in business or looked for employment.

There was, for example, Michael Tennerton, who hailed from Oregon, the Doctor's native State. Mike Tennerton fought in the Spanish-American War, and after Aguinaldo was subdued and pensioned off, Tennerton, instead of returning to Oregon, gave in to an acquired taste.

He drifted from Manila to Saigon, stowed away on a French coasting schooner and was put ashore in Bangkok, where his status was that of a beachcomber. He was pleading for a lift as far as Singapore at the American Embassy when Dr. Dill found him and took him under his wing. He gave Tennerton employment in one of his teakwood developments on the upper reaches of the Menam Chow Pya, near the Chinese border.

Disregarding his patron's advice on the subject of native women, the ardent Irish-Oregonian wooed and won a fifteen-year-old Morn girl in Paknam, member of a dying hybrid race which had immigrated a half-century before from one of the Burmese provinces.

The Morn girl died of grass fever soon after the birth of a daughter. Cholera dealt similarly with the father during an up-country epidemic; and Dr. Dill, who

was a bachelor, placed the child in a protestant mission school at Wan Lang, with the intention of legally adopting her when she was twelve.

Mythui Tennerton was seventeen, with the golden skin and passionate, demanding mouth of her mother and the Celtic blue eyes and devil-may-care spirit of her father, when Ezra Gordon, the antiquary, came to Siam, seeking, so to speak, what Buddhas he might devour.

The advent of Ezra Gordon was somewhat of a problem. The American consul, who had been officially appraised of his coming, was under the impression that the man was a well-to-do American with unlimited New York capital behind him for the development of commercial relations on a large scale between New York, on one side of the world, and Bangkok, on the other.

Dr. Dill, with his scores of little eyes and ears, knew in addition that Ezra Gordon was known in another part of Asia as Y. K. Nambog, who, and no other, spirited the Laughing Golden Angel, a merit-making offering of a dying Burmese prince, from the Schwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon in 1912. Gordon, in a word, was an antiquary with grasping habits, a man not with a police-blotter record, by any means, his past unwritten except in the memories of certain silent and bitter men—a past that was a fiery and romantic trail of pillaged tombs, temples and pagodas, ranging geographically from the sarcophagus of Omar at Bussra to the private collections of declining royalty in Peking and Kyoto.

WITHIN two hours after Gordon debarked from the little China Navigation Line steamer that had brought him down from Hongkong, Dr. Dill knew, among other things, that the fat man was called by his two Chinese boys "Big Fat Grease," after the custom of Chinese servants in labeling their masters and mistresses with pictorial accuracy.

Gordon established himself in offices on Sempeng Road and flamboyantly advertised his intentions with full pages in the Bangkok *Times*. He was willing, he announced, to buy and sell anything, from tilseed oil to hippopotamus hides, from bead bags to steam dredges. His banking connections and his letter of credit were formidable.

Dr. Dill was relieved by the newcomer's display of earnestness; he was pleased at the renewed talk he heard on all sides of American products. But he did not discard his private belief that the antiquary's thoughts, while engaged upon bead bags and hippopotamus hides, were distracted by the presence so near him of the famous Emerald Buddha in the Wat Pra Keo.

This marvelous specimen had indeed tempted Dr. Dill many a time; in comparison, his own collection of Buddhas, which was famous from Tien-tsin' to Darjeeling, was so much rubbish. The Emerald Buddha was (and is) a beautifully carved and polished figure greenly opaque surmounting a glittering pyramid of gold and precious stones in the most gorgeous Buddhistic shrine on earth. So highly is it honored by the devout, that specially appointed priests have charge of its garments —a wrap of gold filigree for the dry season, and one of silver for the wet. It has tempted many adventurers; and in light of Gordon's past performances it was inconceivable to the Doctor that Gordon would concern himself with the lesser Siamese antiquities.

Gordon attended strictly to his export and import business—for a time. His success was astonishing even to himself. He secured with ease a profitable contract for steel rails from the government, which was then rapidly extending its southern line to the border of the Federated Malay States, preparatory to inaugurating a tri-weekly train service from Bangkok Noi to Penang and Singapore. Other choice business was handed him on silver platters.

At the end of three months of irreproachable behavior the fat man ran amuck. His spree began in the bar at the Oriental and ended in the bar at the Sports Club, where he made many remarks which he had hitherto generously repressed. He said tactless things about the railroad administration, the king, the white residents, the climate, many of which no doubt were true.

In a place with such limited horizons a mole-hill of rumor will be transformed into a mountain of scandalous gossip before the sun has time to rise and sink again. Gordon's foolish remarks echoed about in the confined space like words set free in a sharp-walled cañon. The white residents talked; the Siamese whispered. Gordon became in a twinkling a doubtful quantity.

Dr. Dill was bitterly disappointed. But it was not in his nature to send for the offender and criticise him. Knowing his man, he sent Gordon a *chit* informing him

that he had recently added to his collection a somewhat remarkable miniature of Buddha exhumed from the ruins of a *wat* in Ayuthia, the ancient capital of Siam. The antiquary vindicated the old gentleman's judgment by coming immediately—that very evening.

He carried away with him not only the Buddha but a growing irritation.

THERE are many people to whom discipline even in homeopathic doses is intolerable. Such men make poor soldiers, disappointing husbands and unsuccessful colonizers. Gordon had detected the invisible hand of Dr. Dill in the steel-rail contract and the Chengmei sawmill deal, when a man unversed in the ways of the East would have thanked his lucky stars or congratulated himself upon his business adroitness.

Gordon was nobody's fool. He realized, or believed, that the gift of the Starvation Buddha was designed to remove the sting from the subtle warning implied by the stuffed lizard, the *lou-how-chow*. He reasoned that the doctor would be nice to him, would permit him to build up a flourishing export and import business as long as he behaved.

If he chose not to behave—then what?

The curb upon his actions, his conduct, the very course of his luck, was extremely offensive to Gordon. Returning to his house in his private rickshaw, he permitted his slight gratitude to cool and his resentment to kindle. The old man had no authority to pass judgment on his behavior. He resented his indebtedness to Dr. Dill, and he told himself, in substance, that the meddling old schemer would soon learn just how much respect he had for his catlike methods.

A few evenings after the *lou-how-chow* episode, the Doctor was informed that Ezra Gordon had exceeded his previous brilliant exhibition at the Sports Club. In the presence of British, American and Siamese witnesses he had hotly denounced Dr. Dill and all his rascally enterprises, had noisily dared Dr. Dill to do his damdest, and had wound up his oration by announcing that Dr. Dill was a slinky-eyed cat and that every Siamese, regardless of caste or rank, was a monkey.

The morning following this demonstration a shipment of tin-mining machinery which Gordon had bought on receipt of authoritative information that big mining developments were under way in the Chumphon district, was discharged from the hold of a tramp steamer onto the Borneo Company's wharf.

The machinery was moved to Gordon's *godown*, where an inventory disclosed the absence of vital working parts. The bill of lading established beyond doubt that the machinery had been unloaded intact.

Somewhere between wharf and *godown* the vital parts had been lost or stolen. It was impossible to trace them. The Chinese coolies who had carried the parts shifted the responsibility from one pair of shoulders to another until responsibility went a-glimmering.

That afternoon four prominent Siamese government officials who had ordered American automobiles from him canceled their orders by telephone one after another—not fifteen minutes apart.

Later in the day a telegraphic cancelation from Chengmei for sawmill equipment corrected Gordon's half-hearted belief that he was the victim of accidental misfortune. A broken contract for a shipload of polished rice substantiated his new theory.

It was evident to him that the powers disapproved of him. At dinner that evening Gordon discovered in his curry a repulsive dead worm. He discharged his cook for the oversight. The cook who followed proved to have cultivated habits even more shiftless. The food he prepared was tasteless, often unpalatable. Spoiled fruit, doubtful meat and lukewarm wine came to the table.

His room boy neglected to repair a rip in the mosquito-bar shrouding the master's bed; the result was a night of torture at the hands of a swarm of tiny merciless Siamese mosquitoes. His bath-boy became negligent in the matter of changing the water in the bathing urn. It became rancid, a breeding hole for larvæ by the billions. His rickshaw boy fell into the practice of misunderstanding appointments. His laundryman returned his next batch of shirts, underwear, pajamas and white suits with scores of buttons missing.

A more alarming thing occurred. The house suddenly was peopled with a colony of black giant spiders. Simultaneously the lizards—*tokays* and *chinchooks*—deserted the premises; and when the lizards leave a house as if by premonition, that house is doomed, as a ship or a mine is doomed when the rats make their departure.

Gordon had played games in the dark

himself, however. Some of the Doctor's moves did mystify him,—he would have liked to learn the vanishing lizard trick,—but the countless petty irritations, the swift decline of his business, did not puzzle him at all. He awaited the outcome with a kind of grim curiosity, as a dying man might regard the premature arrangements for his funeral; and he expected at any time to be made the victim of some crushing stroke of misfortune. The irritations continued; yet nothing of major importance befell him.

Gordon was aware that the author of his misfortune, little and large, desired only to drive him out of the country—as he drove out that unpopular German trader. And it was with a species of malicious delight that he announced to those who would still listen to him that he intended to make Bangkok his home as long as he lived. True, his intentions at heart were to escape from the torment as early as he could do so gracefully. His pride would not permit him to give Dr. Dill the satisfaction of driving him away; he intended, as he secretly expressed it, to give the fiendish old hypocrite a run for his money.

And before he left of his own free will, he intended to repay the Doctor in his own coin.

His plan for avenging these piling up annoyances was fully matured long before he saw fit to employ it. He had discovered long ago that the weak spot in the old man's armor was the half-caste daughter of Michael Tennerton and the woman from Paknam. Dill had frequently announced his intention of educating the girl, of establishing her in his household as if she were his own daughter. That he loved her as a daughter, was, in Gordon's mind, a foregone conclusion.

The antiquary's own knowledge of occult Oriental methods, a knowledge developed by countless midnight experiences, was the instrument with which he planned to deal the blow.

ONE evening, following the receipt of a puzzling note, Mythui embarked alone in a canoe on the river from the little wharf at the Wan Lang school. Her reputation was that of an entertaining mischief-maker; and her absence from the school and the simultaneous disappearence of Ezra Gordon from his house and office sent tongues to wagging in the inevitable I-told-you-so's.

Dr. Dill maintained the silence of a sphynx during the entire course of the affair.

Nearly two weeks went by before an English rice-dealer reported having seen the white man and the half-caste in a rattan house on one of the *klongs* running through Bangrap, a suburb of the capital. It was later reported that the beautiful Eurasian had sickened of Gordon, had run away from him, was in a locked room at Dr. Dill's, weeping out her remorse, and that Gordon had ostentatiously reopened his office on Seneng Road. Such temporary alliances between white men and native or half-caste girls were not uncommon; the incident attracted unusual attention only because of the interesting and unknown effect it was having upon Dr. Dill.

What, the question was asked, would the Doctor do about it?

Gordon waited forty-eight hours in an atmosphere of sudden liberation. To be sure, none of his business returned, but the petty annoyances which had rolled up his resentment, as boys roll a huge snowball, abruptly were suspended. His food became palatable again. His house-boy became civil and attentive. The lizards returned to his ceilings. Dr. Dill, it was evident, had surrendered unconditionally.

In a spirit of triumph Gordon decided to pay the vanquished old gentleman a visit. He was mildly surprised when the Doctor greeted him not only without astonishment but with his usual gentle cordiality. He was his old cheerful, wrinkled self; and he led the way up the stairs, through the great living-room—famous for its rare Satsumas and Mings and Han bronzes—and out upon the darkened veranda, where the seasonal monsoon swept across the treetop and through the copper screen.

And on the darkened veranda, with the circular pink spark of the Doctor's cheroot glowing a yard away from him, and at his feet the stuffed elephant-cobra which had once so nearly unnerved him, Gordon in his wheezing tenor voice said what he had come to say.

The Doctor maintained a silence unbroken by so much as an irregular breath while Gordon arrogantly aired his feelings.

"You can make up your mind, Doc, I am not going to tolerate any more of your underhand tricks. You haven't fooled me a minute. I've seen your hand in every-

thing that's taken place, from the lost mining machinery to the missing buttons on my laundry.

"You have been shown that two can play your own game. I simply want to make my stand clear to you—you aren't going to drive me out of Bangkok the way you did that German!"

The bright point of the cheroot darkened to a maroon; and the Doctor's voice detached itself from the darkness in the monotonous cadence peculiar to the speech of those who have lived long in Siam.

"But I do intend to drive you out of Bangkok, Mr. Gordon," he said earnestly.

"You must realize that these simple-minded people draw their inferences, base their generalities, on what they see and hear individuals doing and saying. There are not many Americans in Bangkok. We cannot afford to have the Siamese believe that all of us are as rude and tactless as you have proved yourself to be.

"You are absolutely correct, Mr. Gordon. Since the night when you called me a meddlesome, slinky-eyed cat, and the Siamese, monkeys, I have made it as unpleasant and disagreeable for you as I possibly could. You understand my position perfectly. I want you out of Bangkok as soon as you can close up your business."

Gordon lighted a cigarette before he replied, principally to let the Doctor see that he was grinning.

"You seem to have overlooked one point," he said pleasantly. "And that is my personal feeling toward this town. You know, Doc, it seems to me, now that we're on the subject, that I've been looking for Bangkok all of my life. I've tried most of 'em too—Persia, Africa, Japan, Tahiti, the Markuesas. None of 'em have that peculiar lure, that seductive charm, that ancient loveliness.

"And I'm in love, too. Mustn't forget that, Doc. I am going to have her. And what's more, I am not going to marry her."

"Gordon," the Doctor stopped him in a weary voice, "sometimes I think you're a smart young man, and at other times I'm convinced that you're a plain old-fashioned darn fool. You've apparently deluded yourself into believing that you got under my hide by running off with that girl.

"You probably imagined you were inflicting some dreadful punishment by taking her out to Bangrap. If you still think I'm wasting any regrets over your escapade with an irresponsible half-caste—wake up!"

GORDON was too astonished to reply immediately. He dropped the cigarette on the floor and ground it firmly under his heel.

"Doc," he said finally with a sigh of pitying contempt, "I've played around out here in the East for twenty years. I'm no mind-reader, but I can read you like a book. I know all about the quaint customs of this country.

"At least twenty of your close friends have gone out of their way to tell me the story of the silk-buyer who stole a Siamese princess—and got as far away as Colombo or Bangalore before somebody dropped some *ton-lan* nuts or a pinch of ground-up tiger's hair into his food. Perhaps you ought to be reminded that we are living in an advanced quarter of the twentieth century."

The Doctor's inspiration and sigh were fatigued.

"I'm afraid, Gordon, that your perceptions are beyond my depth. You say you've lived in the East for twenty-odd years. Well, I've lived here forty-odd. I pride myself on my knowledge of the Oriental and Eurasian mind.

"I know what Eurasian moral standards are, particularly in the women. So do you. I believe Confucius was responsible for the statement that rotten wood cannot be carved.

"You are a young man, with a young man's natural passions, aren't you? Mythui is beautiful, young, tempting. You found that she was accessible. That's all. You did a natural thing. Let it go at that, and leave me out of it."

"Does that explain why she is in this house?" Gordon retorted.

"Certainly not. The fact that the Wan Lang authorities wont have her back explains that. She came here because I at one time befriended her father. I'm keeping her here until you take her away, as you say you're going to do. I'm glad to hear you like her. She's as pretty as any half-caste I've ever seen. Will you take her tonight?"

"Not—not tonight," Gordon muttered.

"Why not?" the Doctor burst out irritably. "Dammit, she's yours, isn't she? No other white man will have her now. I don't want her around, getting into more trouble. What shall I do with her?"

"I don't care what you do with her," Gordon said defiantly. "I'm through with her. Sell her."

The Doctor sighed. "You're a hard one to understand, Gordon. One minute you rave about the girl, and the next you say: 'Sell her' What's the matter? Leaving town?"

Gordon's laugh lacked sincerity.

"Guess again!"

"Yes, you are!" the Doctor growled. "We wont tolerate you here any longer! You're insulting our friends, hurting our business, giving the whole colony a black eye! By God, I'll make it so hot for you—"

Dr. Dill choked; his anger would permit him to say no more. He was panting, and his cheroot was out.

Gordon grinned in the darkness; he had been sure a moment ago that the situation was slipping from his control. His confidence had returned when, presently, Dr. Dill rediscovered his voice.

"Mr. Gordon, you didn't come here to discuss half-castes. State your proposition."

"You're ready to consider one, Doc?"

"I am, Gordon!"

"Very well. I want the Emerald Buddha in the Wat Pra Keo."

"That—that is impossible, Mr. Gordon," the Doctor stammered. "It's unfair!"

"Why?"

DR. DILL'S answer was a groan. Gordon chuckled.

"Be honest. Speak up! There's honor among thieves, or ought to be. Come out and admit it like a man! Don't we understand each other perfectly?

"You've been here forty-some years. You've had the Emerald Buddha numbered for at least thirty-nine of 'em. It would break your dear old heart if some one else got away with it.

"You're just waiting until you've finished cleaning up here and get ready to go home. Then the Emerald Buddha is going to disappear some night—very mysteriously."

"I wont deny it," the Doctor replied wearily. "I've wanted that Emerald all my life. I love it as some men love their wives. It is a beautiful, classic carving, an incomparable specimen."

"In other words," Gordon took him up promptly, "you want me to remain here and continue to bring shame to the American residents."

"Wont you consider any other proposition?" the Doctor pleaded. "You know the value of my Satsumas, my Mings, my Han bronzes, my Buddhas, my temple-drums and jades. Take any of them—the entire collection. Isn't that a fair offer? Will you, Gordon?"

The antiquary gave his victim a full minute of suspense before he rendered his decision.

"It seems to me," he said slyly, "that some one told me not long ago of a temple between here and Rangoon—five or six days overland by elephant. The recollection is hazy; but—*isn't* there a Sapphire Buddha in that temple?"

The Doctor's reply was a startling exclamation. "You must not go there, Gordon!"

"Mustn't I? Just as I expected," Gordon returned disgustedly. "You don't happen to have the Sapphire Buddha numbered also?"

"No, Gordon; no, I have not!" Dr. Dill protested. "I wouldn't go near the place! No one dares go near that temple. You can laugh if you want to. But that temple is haunted. The village has been deserted nearly a half-century. I've been within ten miles of the place a dozen times, but you couldn't hire me to go into that temple if it was the doorway to paradise!"

"You admit you're so superstitious you wouldn't go into a temple in broad daylight—for a genuine Sapphire Buddha?" Gordon demanded with incredulity.

"No, Gordon, I would not. I certainly would not," the Doctor stated firmly.

"How big is the thing?"

"Seven or eight inches high—they say."

The fat man sighed. "Well, we don't seem to be getting anywhere, Doc. As near as I can discover, you're the only man in Bangkok who knows the exact location of the ruins.

"You wont give me a crack at the Emerald Buddha in the Wat Pra Keo, because you're saving it for yourself. You wont tell where this Sapphire Buddha is located —why? Not for the same reason? Goodness, no," he added sarcastically.

"I tell you it is *haunted,*" the Doctor reiterated huskily. "Would you dare go there if I did tell you?"

Gordon snorted. "I'm not afraid of haunted temples any more than you are. My price for leaving Bangkok is *reliable* information that will lead me to that Buddha. Tell me how to get there, and

the American colony wont be blighted by my presence any longer. Misdirect me, or if it doesn't exist, or if it is unattainable, I'm coming back here—and haunt you!"

"I'll tell you how to find the temple," the Doctor surrendered; "but I've warned you."

"I'll take the chance," Gordon declared cheerily, rising; "and I'll hit the trail tomorrow."

"Very well. Come into my study, and I'll show you the town on an old map."

IN the opinion of the American residents, Gordon's unannounced departure for Chengmei, where, it was understood, he intended to start across country by elephant for Rangoon or Mandalay, was the closing incident of a distasteful and memorable experience.

The embers of an unforgotten scandal were stirred sometime later when the foster daughter of Dr. Dill married a young man whose standards were generously broad but who was considered to be greatly beneath her. He was a half-caste, son of a Lao woman and an Australian sea-captain. Certainly her affair with Ezra Gordon spoiled her for any white man.

Dr. Dill, who aged shockingly during this period, allowed certain highly edifying facts to leak out. The wreckage of his plans for Mythui Tennerton had embittered him. He had intended garnishing her tropical loveliness by sending her away to the most exclusive of American finishing schools; it had been his intention afterward to buy her such happiness in America or Europe as he would have bestowed upon a blood daughter. There were many who wondered why Dr. Dill permitted Ezra Gordon to escape without punishment.

EZRA GORDON did not, however, reach either Rangoon or Mandalay. The despoiler followed the route by elephant that the Doctor laid out for him and reached the abandoned village one evening at sunset. Fearlessly he hacked his way through the vines and heavy foliage choking the dried-up *klongs*. And as fearlessly he entered the tumbledown temple which Dr. Dill had warned him against.

He picked his way cautiously over fallen timber and rubbish piles. The temple was dark, the air musty with the odors of long inattention. A chink in the rotting roof admitted a shaft of red sunlight which illuminated a half of the stained north wall where the gilded shrine reposed. The little idol surmounting it gave off no reflections —it was shadowy with dust.

He reached the base of the discolored shrine, and as he raised his hands to lift down the blue stone, Gordon screamed. He turned about and took five steps toward the arched doorway before his legs gave way and lowered him to the rubbish.

Dr. Dill, in warning him that the temple to the Sapphire Buddha was haunted, had neglected to tell him that its population was not an army of heathen ghosts, but a colony of elephant-cobras which tolerated no intrusion.

Are Black Cats Unlucky?

Wherein the sad remnant of the Jane Gladys' *sprightly crew collect a basketful of black trouble.*

By F. Morton Howard

IT had been a day thickly veined and marbled with emotions for the little group of men who, aforetime, had in some measure controlled the sea-going vagaries of that decrepit old barque, *Jane Gladys*. For that day the *Jane Gladys* had ceased to be a ship dowered with an imposing collection of virtues perceptible only to the auctioneer, and had become but so much old wood and rusting iron to be exploited by the speculative marine-store dealer who had hazarded the highest price for her unlovely bulk.

This distressful climax was not allowed to go unwitnessed by those who had so long lived and thrived amid the sinister shadows of her ill-repute. The erstwhile crew of the *Jane Gladys,* those established confederates in mercenary plot and counterplot, had rallied to watch the transfer of their stronghold into alien and unsympathetic ownership, and in the untroubled throng about the auctioneer, they stood as figures thrust apart from their fellow-men by the stern arm of Tragedy.

Captain Peter Dutt was there, his countenance a very show-case of mournful reminiscence—although he had retired ashore on a comfortable pension, and had already taken to bragging about his extraordinary prowess as a grower of vegetables. That venerable and corpulent amphibian Mr. Samuel Clark was there too, having contrived to evade for a while his present duties as ferryman across Shorehaven Harbor in order to attend this dismal chapter in the history of the vessel upon which he had served for so many years. And Mr. Horace Dobb, who formerly graced the cook's galley of the doomed ship, was also in attendance in a great glory of garb which was explained and justified by the fact that he had married a widow and a snug secondhand business at one fortunate sweep.

But as may be inferred, the regrets of Captain Dutt, of Mr. Clark and of Mr. Dobb, were almost entirely retrospective, for their daily bread was assured. Far more earnest and practical was the grief at the passing of the *Jane Gladys* of the two remaining members of her old crew, Mr. Peter Lock and Mr. Joseph Tridge.

Despite the assiduity with which these two gentlemen had of late pointed out to the great god Luck ways by which he might help them, that fickle deity had proved himself singularly unresponsive. By personal inquiry they had discovered that no master mariner was prepared to risk the morale of his crew by importing into the fo'c's'le anyone who had been even remotely connected with the *Jane Gladys;* nor was a task ashore attainable when once they had mentioned the only references they could give.

Thus of those who mourned the end of the *Jane Gladys,* none mourned her with

more genuine feeling or with a greater sense of personal bereavement than Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge; for others were only mourning for memories, while they were mourning a lost home. Gradually, however, as the day wore on, they had struggled with and overcome their melancholy.

But this was not till the day was nearing its close. The early afternoon had been a space of sighs and doleful head-shakings, for, at the close of the sale, Captain Dutt had led his old subordinates into the Turk's Head, and here they had all spoken so wistfully and reverently about the *Jane Gladys* that the landlady had wondered how one of them could have come back wearing a green and pink tie from a funeral.

Mr. Horace Dobb, not averse from exhibiting the opulence of his new sphere in life to his former skipper, competed with that worthy for the honor of being prime host to the party. It was a challenge which Captain Dutt's pride forbade him to refuse, and so round after round of refreshment was served, till by degrees a brisker mood descended upon the company.

It was not till past tea-time that the party began to break up. Mr. Clark was the first to leave, having suddenly remembered that he had faithfully promised to return to the ferry at one o'clock sharp. And next Mr. Dobb went, pleading the calls of business, and purchasing a cigar at the bar as he left, with excellent effect. For Captain Dutt, after silently and disapprovingly considering such an action on an ex-cook's part, at last stigmatized it as a kind of socialism, and bought Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge a cigar apiece to reëstablish his prestige.

Soon afterward Captain Dutt reluctantly announced that he too must now depart, and Messrs. Tridge and Lock accompanied him to the nearest draper's shop, where he had sagely selected a bonnet to be presented to Mrs. Dutt the moment he got home. And when the skipper, already holding the hatbox before him in a propitiatory manner, had passed from their sight round a corner, Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock looked hard and remindingly at each other, and then made search in their pockets.

As a result the one party produced a shilling and five pennies, and the other party disclosed a florin and a halfpenny—frank and unabashed confession admitted these coins to be change which the skipper had forgotten to pick up amid the mental distractions of the afternoon.

Whereupon, congratulating themselves and each other on this presence of mind in face of opportunity, Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge retired to the tap-room of the Royal William, and there abundantly developed their policy of drowning dull care.

BY now the night was well advanced, and a fevered, reckless brilliance was illuminating Mr. Lock's personality, lighting up all those manifold polite accomplishments of which he was a master. Thus, he had entertained the company with a series of imitations of bird-calls, and performed clever feats of legerdemain with corks and pennies and hats.

Mr. Tridge was in complete eclipse. He had tried hard to be genial, but his temperament was different to Mr. Lock's, and every minute of revelry only found him more and more subdued and morose.

Mr. Lock, however, shone still more effulgently as the evening progressed.

Knotting his handkerchief into semblance of a doll, he affected that it was a wife and that he was its husband, and built up on these premises a highly diverting ventriloquial monologue. And after that, he successfully introduced some farmyard mimicry, and then got well away with card-tricks.

Appreciative, and even enthusiastic, were Mr. Lock's audience, and none was more enthusiastic or appreciative than the plump, fresh-faced little landlord of the Royal William. Not once nor twice but thrice did he pay tribute to Mr. Lock's powers in the medium most gratifying to that artist, and his flow of hospitality ceased only when a big and stern-visaged lady came presently and stood behind the bar at his side. Thereafter the licensee of the Royal William took, as it were, but a furtive and subsidiary interest in Mr. Lock's entertainment, while the lady eyed the performance with a cold hostility which was inimical to true art.

Whether it was that Mr. Lock grew a little flustered under her malign regard, or whether it was that he sought to sting the landlord into revolt against domestic oppression, the fact remains that he began to intersperse his card-tricks with humorous but inflammatory remarks bearing on the subject of domineering wives and too submissive husbands.

It is possible that the landlord of the Royal William derived amusement from these sallies. Certainly his eyes gleamed at each thrust, and more than once he turned away to conceal a grin, but he was too craven to exhibit open hilarity at Mr. Lock's satires. The landlady, however, did not hesitate to betray her feelings in the matter, and thus it was that, at the tail of an amusing anecdote of domestic tyranny, Mr. Lock found himself confronted with a stern and acidulated request to sit down and keep quiet unless he wished to find himself in trouble.

Mr. Lock, a little nonplused, glanced at the landlord to enlist his support. The landlord's gaze was apologetic but unhelpful. Mr. Lock looked around among his admirers, but their demeanor had become grave and constrained. Mr. Lock turned and regarded Mr. Tridge: Mr. Tridge was wrapped in his own sable meditations. Pettishly, Mr. Lock flung down the pack of cards and sulked in a corner.

THE landlady, having thus suppressed unwelcome propaganda, indulged in a tight-lipped smile of triumph and began a rinsing of glasses. The hush deepened in the room, developing an atmosphere which brought Mr. Lock back to remembrance of his own insecure position in the world, and this was rendered still more discomforting by what followed. For an amiable gentleman in a check coat, after twice clearing his throat, sought to reëstablish light conversation and asked the landlord whether there was yet any news of Ted.

"I had a letter from him," answered the landlord, coming out of a thoughtful trance.

"Thanking you for all the kindnesses you've showed him, I lay," hazarded the checkered gentleman.

"No," returned the landlord slowly. " 'E only asked me to send on after him a pair of boots he'd left behind for mendin'."

"Fancy bothering about boots!" marveled the other. "If *my* uncle died and left *me* a greengrocery shop—"

"And a nice little business, too, by all accounts," struck in an individual in a mackintosh.

"Ay, by *his* accounts," agreed the landlord. "If half he said was true, he wont have to do no more billiard-marking and odd-jobbing."

"Not while the money lasts, at any rate," said the man in the mackintosh. "Have you got anyone to take his place yet?"

The landlord, shaking his head, replied that he had not yet found a successor to Ted. Billiard-markers, he added, were scarce; people who desired employment as such were, as a rule, of one of two unsatisfactory classes, knowing either too little or too much.

MR. LOCK, assimilating this talk, lifted his eyes and peered as it were through the mists of his troubles. Here, obviously, was a vacancy going, and one which he was well qualified to fill, for his knowledge of the billiard-table was neither elementary nor academic. A post as a marker and odd-job man at the Royal William appealed with equal force to his temperament and his talents. He almost groaned with mortification at the thought that he had allowed a *faux pas* to ruin his chances of so delectable a situation.

None the less, he determined to make sure that his opportunity was indeed irrevocably lost, and when the landlady had temporarily quitted the apartment, he sidled up to the host of the Royal William, and put a blunt inquiry to him.

"No chance whatever!" answered that worthy, regretfully shaking his head.

"You'd find me just the sort of chap you want," pleaded Mr. Lock.

"I've no doubt of it," accepted the landlord. "If it was only me what had the say, you could start tomorrow. I don't mind admitting straight to your face that I've took to you. You've got a civil, well-bred, amoosin' way with you. You'd get on like a house afire with the gents in the billiard room. But—"

He shook his head again, sighed, and left the ellipsis to carry its own implication.

"The missis, eh?" said Mr. Lock sadly.

"The missis," agreed the landlord.

"I suppose it'd be no good my trying to—"

"It'd be no good your trying anything!" interrupted the landlord with conviction. "You can bet she's got her knife into you, and you can bet nothing'd please her more than to twist it round like a corkscrew."

"Well, if I had a job here," contended Mr. Lock, "she'd have a lot more chances to twist it."

"Look here, I'd give you the job if I dared, but I daren't, and that's flat and honest," said the landlord earnestly. "I

daren't! See? That's how it is—I daren't! But here she comes; *you* can ask her about it, if you like."

The landlady, returning, bent a gaze of extreme displeasure on both Mr. Lock and her husband at finding them in commune. Mr. Lock, studying her countenance but the briefest while, turned away.

"I don't think it matters," he remarked disconsolately.

TWENTY minutes later the law's exigency emptied the Royal William. The fresh air outside immediately had a restorative effect on Mr. Lock's spirits, giving back to him his normal buoyancy, so that he shed his worries like a mantle and became again his gay and debonair self. Mr. Tridge, however, had come to a slow and obstinate truculency of mood, and avowed an open antagonism to all mankind.

And this divergency of outlook led to an unfortunate sequel, for as they made their way back to the ship which was only to continue as their home until the formalities of her sale had been completed, a black cat shot across their path, and Mr. Lock gleefully hailed its transit as a fortunate omen.

"Black cats are always lucky!" declared Mr. Lock with elation.

"You're a liar!" churlishly declared Mr. Tridge.

"But they are!" insisted Mr. Lock.

"And I'll prove you're a liar!" cried Mr. Tridge irately, and forthwith struck Mr. Lock a grievous blow on the right eye.

"'Ere—steady!" shouted Mr. Lock.

"'Oo are you giving orders to?" bellowed Mr. Tridge in high passion, and straightway smote Mr. Lock's left eye. "*Now*, do you think black cats are always lucky?"

Mr. Lock, sitting down on a convenient doorstep, pressed his palms to his eyes, too engrossed in a species of private astronomy to reply to Mr. Tridge's question. Mr. Tridge, as one who had creditably sustained the truth of his assertions, cocked his head proudly and walked on. Mr. Lock, recovering, followed him with marked caution.

Mr. Tridge, achieving the *Jane Gladys* in grim solitude, made his simple preparations for slumber and lay down in his bunk with a sigh of weary content. He was fast asleep ere Mr. Lock ventured down to the fo'c's'le and wooed repose.

"STREWTH!" cried Mr. Tridge in utter amazement, waking next morning.

Mr. Lock, who had just risen reluctantly to dress, turned an inquiring gaze on his shipmate.

"*Now* what is it?" he asked petulantly.

"'Strewth!" exclaimed Mr. Tridge again, staring incredulously at the polychromatic setting of Mr. Lock's eyes. "Peter, you *must* 'ave been a-going it last night!" he added, with intense conviction. "My word!"

"Me? No worse than you!" denied Mr. Lock.

"You must 'ave got to scrapping," surmised Mr. Tridge. "Did you win or lose?"

"What do you mean?" sourly questioned Mr. Lock. "I never scrapped with no one. I was—I was imitating canaries. Canaries don't scrap."

"'Ow did you get them two awful big black eyes, then?"

"Black eyes?" murmured Mr. Lock, perplexed. "Black eyes?"

"Black and red and green and yaller and blue and purple and horange," supplemented Mr. Tridge.

Mr. Lock crossed to the little mirror which hung on the shelf.

"So I 'ave!" he said in blank surprise. "So I 'ave! I thought it was only the front part of my 'eadache!"

"Two real beauties!" declared Mr. Tridge. "You must 'ave got nasty over something, Peter. Why didn't you leave it to me to do your scrapping for you, like we always does? I shouldn't 'ave got 'it like that, you can bet!"

Mr. Lock, disturbed by the discovery, sat down on the edge of his bunk and shook his head, an action which caused him such discomfort that he lay down again.

"Can't you remember 'ow it 'appened, Peter?" asked Mr. Tridge with genuine sympathy. "If you can remember the chap, *I'll* step along and square up with 'im for you," he promised.

"I've been trying to remember," said Mr. Lock. "I don't think it was a scrap, though. I believe it was a hexplosion somewhere. I seem to remember a lot of sparks."

"Now I come to think of it, I seem to remember a fire or something," murmured Mr. Tridge, after mental gropings. "Or was it something to do with the 'arbormaster?"

The twain lay silent, striving to recol-

lect the cause of the alteration of Mr. Lock's countenance, and they were still silently seeking to establish the origin of the disaster when Mr. Horace Dobb made his appearance in the fo'c's'le.

"Well, did you 'ave a good time last—" he began, and then broke off at sight of Mr. Lock's confused features. "Ah, I see you did!" he ended sapiently.

"*Both* of 'em! That's what I can't understand," mused Mr. Tridge. "*Both* of 'em! 'E must 'ave been carrying something in his arms at the time; that's the only way I can hexplain it."

"'Ow did it 'appen, Peter?" asked Mr. Dobb curiously.

"I can't remember yet whether it was a man or the hact of Providence," confessed Mr. Lock. "I've got a headache and can't think clear."

"Pity," commented Mr. Dobb. "I've come down to see you on a little matter of business, but if you aint equal to—"

"Talking business always clears my 'ead," said Mr. Lock eagerly. "Have you found me a job, then?"

"Found you a road leading to a job," amended Mr. Dobb. "I can put you on it, but you must walk up it yourself. 'Ow do you like the hidea of going around with a milk-cart?"

"Not much," frankly returned Mr. Lock.

"It'll do you all right to go on with," urged Mr. Dobb. "You've got to find something to do, aint you?"

"Peter Lock in a milk-cart!" marveled Mr. Tridge. "A *milk*-cart! Don't that just show you what a rum world this is?"

"I sha'n't half get chaffed!" foretold Mr. Lock.

"You needn't keep it longer than it takes you to find a better job," pointed out Mr. Dobb. "Meanwhile you'll be remaining in Shore'aven 'ere, and we shall all be in touch with each other, like what we've always planned on."

"But a milk-cart!" protested Mr. Lock. "Now, if it 'ad been a wine-and-spirit shop—"

"Think of all the pretty gals you'll be 'anding in cans to!" recommended Mr. Dobb. "Everything's got its bright side."

"Come to think of it, it aint such a bad job," agreed Mr. Lock, brightening. "When do I start?"

"You've got to get the job first," Mr. Dobb reminded him. "You'll 'ave to play up for it very careful and polite and artful, and that's why I thought it was a better chance for you than for Joe, there. There's a old geezer, a Mrs. Golightly, what you'll 'ave to be hextra special hattentive to. 'Er 'usband runs a grocery shop, and she's going to start the dairy-business as a side-line in a week or two. You play your cards right, and the job is yours for the asking. You see, you're going to do the old geezer a favor before she knows what you're after, and that's always a big 'elp."

Mr. Dobb paused and pointed impressively at Mr. Lock.

"You're one of the finest amytoor animal doctors in England," he told him.

"Ho, am I?" said Mr. Lock casually. "First I've heard of it."

"Same 'ere till a hour ago," returned Mr. Dobb. "Only I 'appened to be talking with 'er, and one thing led to another, and then I see you just *'ad* to be good at animal doctoring."

"Why?" asked Mr. Lock.

"Why, because you're going to cure 'er pet cat of fits for 'er."

"Am I?" remarked Mr. Lock. "'Ow do I do that?"

"That's for you to decide," answered Mr. Dobb easily. "It'll be the beginning of your job in the milk line. It's lucky she's got a pet cat with fits, aint it? It's a black cat, too. Black cats," he stated dogmatically, "are always lucky."

AT mention of these words, a swift tremor coursed through Mr. Lock's frame, and he sat up in his bunk, staring hard at Mr. Tridge, and gradually raising a rigid forearm to point accusingly at him. A similar start of surprise pulsed through Mr. Tridge, and after a long, horrified stare at Mr. Lock's damaged optics, he suddenly turned on his mattress and guiltily drew his blankets over his head. Mr. Dobb, viewing this byplay in surprise, offered the theory that his friends were rehearsing for employment as cinema actors.

"I know who done it now!" cried Mr. Lock bitterly. "And so does he! It was you talking about black cats 'Orace, what done it!"

"I done what by talking about black cats?" demanded the mystified Mr. Dobb.

Mr. Lock irately made the situation clear to Mr. Dobb, who, as soon as he had regained composure, assumed the rôle of peacemaker so successfully that ere long Mr. Tridge was encouraged to emerge again from beneath his blankets and promise all

manner of recompense to Mr. Lock at some future date when liberality should be more convenient. This understanding reached, Mr. Dobb returned to the object of his call.

"Soon as ever Mrs. Golightly told me about 'er cat 'aving fits," said Mr. Dobb, "I thought at once of you, Peter. Remember that cat you cured of hiccups.

"I *said* it was cured," shamelessly corrected Mr. Lock. "I neve went back to see, once I'd got the money for it."

"Anyway, you can *start* to cure this old geezer's cat for 'er, can't you? You've got till next Saturday aboard this old boat, 'aven't you? Well, suppose you get the cat and bring it 'ere, and keep it with you till then?"

"I see," said Mr. Lock readily. "Then I can take it back to 'er and say I'm sorry, but I'm leaving the town to find work elsewhere; and what a pity it is, seeing that the cat's so much better already under my treatment."

"That's the hidea, Peter!" concurred Mr. Dobb. "The old gal is regularly wrapped up in that cat. She couldn't make more fuss of it if she tried. And 'er 'usband is very fond of it, too. It's more like a nursery than anything else when that cat comes into the room, and to 'ear 'em both sit round hencouraging it to eat its meals!"

"They'll be very grateful if I can cure it of fits," said Mr. Lock thoughtfully; "and if I 'aven't had time enough to do it—"

"They'll pretty well offer you that job in the milk line without being asked, simply to keep you near your patient," prophesied Mr. Dobb. "You dress yourself now and come along with me, and you'll see what a simple, easy affair it is to a smart chap like you."

"See?" said Mr. Lock severely to Mr. Tridge. "Black cats *are* always lucky, after all!"

HALF an hour later Mr. Lock, furnished with a very circumstantial story about a carriage accident to account for the spectacular state of his features, had the felicity of being introduced to Mrs. Golightly and her husband by Mr. Horace Dobb. Mr. Dobb came straight to the point of the business in hand.

"Peter's going to do you a favor and cure that 'ere cat of yours, aint you, Peter?" he observed.

"All being well, yes," said Mr. Lock modestly.

"If *you* can't cure it, no one can!" gushed Mr. Dobb. "You're a wonder at curing animals, Peter, and you knows that's true. Remember that dog you cured for the dook?"

"Which one?" asked Mr. Lock carelessly.

"The—the blood'ound," answered Mr. Dobb.

"I meant, which dook?" said Mr. Lock.

"The—the one what give you the gold watch and chain," replied Mr. Dobb. "Show 'em to Mrs. Golightly, Peter; she'd like to see 'em."

Mr. Lock's hand made a movement towards his waistcoat, and then checked itself.

"I forgot," he said with a smile. "I left it at the bank in London, along with all them other testimonials and medals I've got for animal doctoring. A chap what lives a traveling, seafaring life," he explained to the lady, "needs to be careful of his property."

"Yes, indeed," she assented. "But I wonder you don't give up the sea and settle down ashore."

"So 'e means to one day," struck in Mr. Dobb. "'E's going to give up seafaring and animal-curing, aint you, Peter, and settle down quiet and peaceful ashore?"

"In a nice, quiet, respectable job, when I find one to suit me," said Mr. Lock.

"I wonder if you'd—" began the lady, and then paused. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind seeing dear Jonathan now?"

Mr. Lock professing readiness to interview his prospective patient, both Mr. and Mrs. Golightly bustled from the room, making loud and endearing appeals to the stricken feline to come and be shown to the kind gentleman. Left alone, Mr. Lock and Mr. Dobb winked very pleasantly at each other.

"It's as good as yours, that job is, Peter," said Mr. Dobb. "She nearly offered it to you just now of 'er own accord. Did you 'ear 'er? You've made a 'it here, Peter, my boy! Keep it up!"

Mrs. Golightly, returning presently with a rather undistinguished-looking black cat in her arms, postponed consideration of its condition while she delivered an affectionate address on the manifold virtues of the animal. Mr. Lock, after gravely listening to the tale of so much excellence,

plainly enhanced his favor with the good dame by remarking that the cat reminded him very much of a similar animal, the property of a countess, which he had cured of sunstroke in two days. He added that the countess' gratitude was most touching and substantial.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Golightly. "I do 'ope you aint going to charge me very, very much for curing Jonathan! I aint a countess, not by no means."

"I shouldn't dream of charging you anything, ma'am," replied Mr. Lock. "I've already took a great fancy to this cat, for one thing; and for another, I believe we all ought to do folks good turns whenever we get the chance."

He now bent professionally over the cat, felt all the joints in its tail in a highly technical manner, and then gravely studied its eyes. Mr. and Mrs. Golightly, watching him, awaited his verdict breathlessly.

"He can and shall be cured," said Mr. Lock. "If," he added, "*I* can do it in the time."

Within the hour, the afflicted animal had taken up temporary residence on board the *Jane Gladys*. Sundry dainties which had, at Mr. Lock's instruction, been secured for the patient's diet, served as an excellent dinner that day for two impecunious mariners. An indignant black cat found that "rest and quiet" were terms interpreted on the *Jane Gladys* by enforced seclusion in a sea-chest while the human occupants of the fo'c's'le enjoyed a protracted siesta after their meal.

INDEED, it was only when a late tea had restored full energy to Mr. Lock that he recollected the needs of his patient. A foray in the galley was rewarded with the discovery of a red herring in a dark corner, and armed with this booty, Mr. Lock prepared to inaugurate an altered course of dietetics for his patient.

Cautiously he raised the lid of the chest, but not cautiously enough; for the black cat, wearied of solitary confinement, slipped through the opening, and easily dodging the convulsive clutch of Mr. Lock and the outstretched hands of the interested Mr. Tridge, it streaked out of the fo'c's'le and up to the deck. Mr. Lock's ill-timed recriminations of Mr. Tridge's clumsiness caused a regrettable delay in pursuit, and when at last the two sailormen had reached the deck, the black cat had completely vanished in the darkness.

Frenzied and exhaustive search was made, only to be abandoned in the end when sundry sportive souls on the wharf took to jocund mimicry of the enticing calls made by Mr. Lock and his companion.

Loudly did Mr. Lock bewail so inauspicious and swift a termination to his high hopes of the conduct of a milk-cart. And moodily did he make his way to Fore Street, there to seek Mr. Dobb in his home and tell him of this underhand trick which the cat had played upon one who had desired to deal benevolently by it.

"Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk-carts," pronounced Mr. Dobb. "You've got to be up and doing—that's all. As long as that cat don't turn up at its old 'ome, you've always got a chance of finding it again somewhere. And after all, one black cat is very like another. And they can't talk and give things away, can they?"

"No," agreed Mr. Lock, immensely relieved. "And besides, a cat that's been taken away to be cured of fits aint hardly likely to look quite the same when it comes back again, is it?"

A nod of perfect understanding passed between these two keen tacticians, and Mr. Dobb promised that he would take care to call frequently at the residence of the Golightlys to ascertain whether Jonathan was controlled by homing instincts sufficiently serviceable to lead him back to his mistress. Meanwhile, Mr. Lock was to secure another black cat.

Thus it was that Mr. Lock, going wistfully about the environs of the harbor at a late hour that night, at last managed to track down and capture an animal of the species and color he desired. He conveyed his protesting prisoner swiftly aboard the *Jane Gladys*, and there he extemporized for it a prison system from which not even a cat provided with a burglar's kit and the ability to use it could have escaped.

FOR three days did Mr. Lock keep close watch and ward over his captive. Mr. Dobb, on reconnoitering duty, was able to tell him that the vanished Jonathan had not yet put in an appearance at his home, and that the Golightlys were looking forward with the liveliest emotions of thankfulness to the moment which should restore to them their pet cured of its ailment by Mr. Lock's veterinary skill.

"But, s'pose," put forward Mr. Tridge one afternoon in a pessimistic mood, "s'pose that that there first cat turns up at 'is old 'ome one day after you've got your other cat settled there? It'll be awkward, wont it?"

"Not a bit of it," vaunted Mr. Lock. "I shall be working at the place by then, so it's a 'undred to one that I shall catch sight of it first, and then there wont be no fatted calf killed for the returned prodigal, you can bet. I shall just collar it and shove it in a sack and come down and have a look to see how the old harbor is getting on."

"Ah, but s'pose you aint on the spot?" persisted Mr. Tridge. "What 'appens then?"

"Why, I shall swear it can't be their beloved Jonathan, because 'e'd never 'ave left my sight while I 'ad 'im 'ere, so the newcomer must be a stray. Oh, I'll manage them all right, don't you fret!"

Next morning Mr. Lock arrayed himself in his best, shaved himself to a miracle of velvet smoothness and brushed his hair with extraordinary interest, for he purposed now to restore the pseudo Jonathan to its expectant master and mistress, and to bring diplomacy to bear upon the securing of the coveted post of conductor to a milk-cart.

"Pity my eyes don't lose a bit of their color," he observed, studying his reflection in the glass. "They look just as black as they did when we first 'ad that little dispute, Joe."

"They look as if you might only 'ave got them last night," agreed Mr. Tridge. " 'Pon my soul, they makes me feel almost like a bad character myself, just to be talking to 'em."

MR. LOCK, recognizing the futility of wishes, dropped the subject and took up the imprisoned cat. Slipping it into a hamper, he set off up town with it, and speedily came to the home of the Golightlys.

" 'Ere's your cat, ma'am," he said to that lady, handing the animal over to her.

"My, that's never our Jonathan!" cried the lady.

"Don't he look well?" asked Mr. Lock with enthusiasm. "I reckon he's more than half cured by now."

"But—but this is ever so much bigger than our dear old Jonathan," objected the lady. "Bigger and—and stouter."

"That's the treatment and diet I give 'em," explained Mr. Lock. "It always 'as that effect on my patients. It puts on weight and improves their coat wonderful. Ah, I never grudged him nothing. The best of everything he's had, even though I've 'ad to go short myself sometimes."

"Well, he certainly is wonderfully improved," said the lady gratefully. "I shouldn't 'ardly have ever known 'im. And in that short time, too! 'Ow ever did you do it, young man?"

"Trade secret," said Mr. Lock promptly.

"He—he don't seem to take much notice of me," said the lady a little disappointedly. "Before he went away, when I used to speak to him, 'e'd look back at me and mew like a Christian; but now 'e don't even seem to like me 'olding 'im."

"You're a bit strange to 'im at present, that's all," Mr. Lock assured her. " 'E'll be loving and affectionate to you again very soon. And, as for 'is fits—well, I can take my solemn gospel oath that he aint even had a attempt at one all the time 'e's been in my charge."

"How splendid!" cried Mrs. Golightly. "I'm sure he looks heaps better. You must 'ave took good care of 'im."

"I did," Mr. Lock asserted. "Never let him out of my sight for a single moment. Brushed and combed him three times a day, fed him on tidbits, give him his physic regular with an oyster after it to take the taste of it out of his mouth, and used to sit by 'is side at night till he fell off to sleep."

"You have been good to him!" cried the lady, moved by such devotion. "I wish I could make it right with you, some'ow!"

"I done it because I took a fancy to the cat," said Mr. Lock, "and I don't want no reward. I shall miss the old chap, though," he went on, lowering his voice. "I'm sorry to part with him, for his sake as well as my own. If he could only have had a bit longer under my care, he'd 'ave been cured for good and all of them fits. As it is, there's always the chance that they may come on after awhile, and I'll be far away by then."

"But—but can't you stop here in Shorehaven?"

"No, mum. I've got my living to earn, and there aint a job going here that would suit me. I want to give up the sea. I used to be a milkman afore I was a sailor, and naturally I'd like to take on the job of milkman again, only there aint no vacancies in this 'ere town."

"That's just where you're wrong!" cried the lady in high good humor. "I'm starting a dairy business here next week, and I'm looking out for a man to take the milk-round!"

"Well, well," breathed Mr. Lock, "if ever there was a coincidence—"

He ceased abruptly, for sometimes coincidence has two long arms and uses both simultaneously. Mr. Lock, gazing spellbound at the doorway, saw Mr. Golightly framed in it, and clasped in Mr. Golightly's embrace was a black cat.

"JONATHAN!" stated Mr. Golightly simply.

"What?" screamed the lady.

"Just found him outside the back door, mewing enough to break his heart," said her husband. "Look at him! Covered in mud, half starved—"

"That aint your cat!" denied Mr. Lock. " 'E's only a mangy old stray you've got 'old of. There's your Jonathan in the fireplace there. Cured and improved out of all recognition."

Mrs. Golightly picked up both cats and set them side by side.

"Jonathan!" she called, and the cat that Mr. Lock had brought foolishly strove to get up the chimney, while the other animal, uttering a half-plaintive, half-delighted mew, tottered forward to lick the lady's hand.

" 'Never let him out of my sight!' " cried Mrs. Golightly. " 'Washed and brushed him every day! Fed him on all the best! Sat by 'im till 'e went off—' 'Ere!" she ended fiercely. "*You* go off—now—this minute! Else—"

Mr. Lock, ever one to recognize defeat, turned to take his departure. Mrs. Golightly, retrieving the alien cat from the chimney, thrust it none too gently into the hamper.

" 'Ere, take your rubbish with you!" she ordered; and thus encumbered, Mr. Lock took his departure.

"Blest if I am so sure that black cats are always lucky!" he murmured dazedly.

At the corner of the road he ran into Mr. Horace Dobb. Mr. Dobb was in a state of considerable excitement.

"You 'aven't left that cat at the Golightlys' yet, then?" he observed, with relief. And, taking Mr. Lock by the arm, he eagerly dragged him forward. "Well, then, the Golightlys 'ave lost their second chance of a cat; that's all! 'Ere, come on in 'ere!" he directed, turning into the Royal William.

THE aggressive landlady and the cheerful little landlord were behind the counter. At Mr. Dobb's entry, they both turned expectantly towards him, and the severity of the landlady perceptibly waned.

" 'Ere's the young fellow I spoke about just now!" cried Mr. Dobb. "Look at the state of 'is eyes, and you can see I was telling the truth!"

"And 'as 'e got it there in the basket?" asked the landlord eagerly.

" 'E 'as!" declared Mr. Dobb, and unfastening the lid of the hamper, he allowed its occupant to escape.

"That's 'im!" cried the landlord raptly.

"That's our dear, dear little lost one!" shrilled the lady in happy agitation.

"Well, you're a trump!" declared the landlord, turning to Mr. Lock. "This gent 'ere 'as been telling us all about it!"

"Oh?" said Mr. Lock lamely.

"Yes, indeed," answered the landlord. "We 'appened to mention to 'im that our cat was missing, and 'e told us 'ow 'e knew of *a* cat what 'ad been saved from torture by a sailorman. There was a great big 'ulking chap and another chap 'ad got 'old of our cat," narrated the landlord, "and you see 'em ill-treating it, and you interfered, and they knocked you about cruel, and give you two terrible black eyes—"

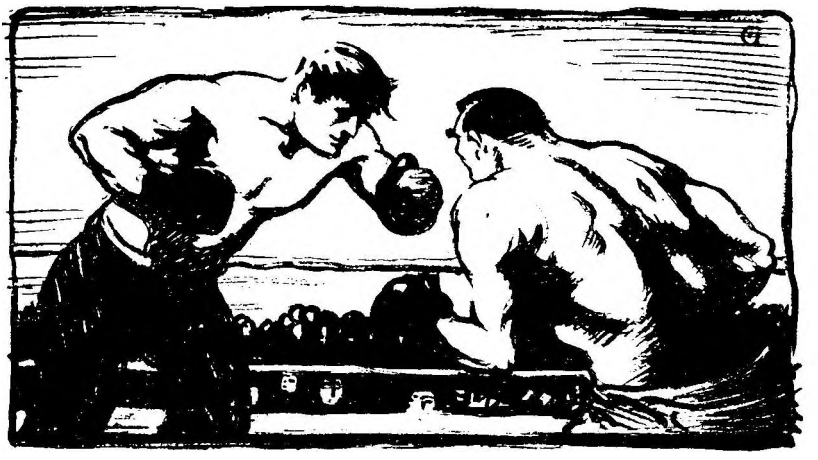
"And they are terrible, too!" said the landlady, with a sympathetic shudder. "You must 'ave suffered, young man."

"I did, ma'am. I did!"

"But you saved our pet!" cried the landlord. "You see, that gent there's been telling us all about it! It comes out quite by accident, too—we was talking about billiard-marking; that was what led up to it, some'ow. Anyway, you saved our cat, and me and my missus are very grateful to you for it. And you've been keeping it till you felt less knocked about, and then you were going to try and find its home. Well, you're saved that trouble, anyway!"

"From what I saw of you the other night," confessed the landlady, "I should never have thought you could have behaved so noble."

Husband and wife now retired apart for a brief, whispered colloquy. Within one minute of its conclusion Mr. Lock had been offered and had accepted the vacant post of billiard-marker and odd-job man to the Royal William.



The Battle Cry

A story of the American Legion

By Frederick Tierney

IN the darkness of the gallery at the Mason Athletic Club stood two men, taking advantage of the shielding bulk of a steel support as they stared downward to the well lighted gymnasium floor and the sleek, panther-like form of a young man as he mauled a sparring partner around the twenty-four-foot ring. About the contestants were clustered the usual number of seconds, trainers and advisers, all shouting, all laughing, all making prophecies regarding the future. Up in the gallery, the younger of the two watchers turned dubiously to his partner.

"Bill," he said quietly, "I can't do it. He's going to put it over me."

"What's that?" The face of Bill James, trainer of Jimmy Adams of Peoria, went red with excitement. "Put it over you? Him? Say, he couldn't hit a flock of barns."

But the voice of the other man was calm with decision.

"There's no use trying to hand me any kidding, Bill. It wont work. I've got eyes. I can see whether he's any good or not. And we might as well be frank about it. He's going to lick me."

"Sure he is—if you want him to." Bill James was cold and caustic. "Sure he'll whip you if you get up in front of him and lay down like a yellow pup!"

"I'm not yellow! But I've got enough sense to know when I'm whipped. I—"

"Let's get out of here—they'll be getting wise to us in a minute. They may hear us talking."

The two men slipped to the rear stairway of the club and to the alley. For a whole block they walked in silence. Then Bill James turned with a sneer on his lips.

"I thought you were a medal-of-honor man."

"I am."

"And the Croix de Guerre and the Medaille militaire and all that bunk."

"I am."

"What you ought to have is the croix de goof! You, with every fellow in all the Legion posts of Peoria ready to lay down his last cent that you can cop off the Legion championship of Illinois—and then you playing the quitter!"

THE fighter's face went white—to slowly resume its coloring. He smiled.

"You know I'm not a quitter, Bill. You know I'm not scared of anything or anybody. I didn't say I was afraid to fight the Spider, did I? I simply remarked that

he was going to whip me, because he was the better man. Is there anything so terrible about that?"

"Yeh—plenty of it," growled Bill James. "You've let him get your goat—and that's just as bad as being scared. You've let a little flash and exhibition speed—"

"But he didn't know we were watching him."

"Don't care whether he did or not. Every fighter in the world looks better in a training-camp where he's got a lot of human pillows to maul around than he does in the ring when he's up against the real thing. You took one look at him mauling them human punching bags around, and you get the yellow up in your neck so thick it looks like a London fog. What's eating on you, anyway? You never acted that way in the old Second."

"Act?" Jimmy Adams still resented the accusation of a yellow streak. "Am I acting out of the ordinary? When I was in the Second Division, I took on all comers and licked them. Well, maybe it was luck. Then too, there was the confidence of knowing that I had a long string of victories behind me and that—"

"You've still got 'em, aint you? You're still champion of the Second Division, doughboys and gyrenes alike."

"I know it. But Bill,"—there was a shade of exasperation in the voice of Jimmy Adams,—"being champion of the Second Division doesn't mean that I'm champion of the world. This Spider's a professional fighter. He was a profesh with a long string of knockouts behind him when he enlisted in the old Sixty-ninth in New York. He was lucky all through the scrap—everybody else rated a casualty but him. Now that he's come out to Chicago and joined the Harrison Mason Post, they've fastened on him to win all their battles for them. And as far as I'm concerned,—I say this coldly and designedly, Bill,—here's one boy he'll knock out. So if you've got any friends, you might just as well tip them off."

"Well, if you aint yellow—"

"Yellow nothing! I'm getting tired of that. I'm going to give Spider Kennedy the fight of my young life. I'm going to put everything I've got into the battle, but I know it isn't going to do much good. I'll do my best to hold out the ten rounds—but even at that, he'll get the decision on points, if he doesn't knock me for goal. I *know*, Bill! In the first place, he's faster with his punch and quicker on his feet. He's got the best of me in weight and reach. Whether he's any gamer or whether he's any better in his head, I don't know. But he certainly works like a whirlwind."

"Aw, you make me sick! Le's change the subject. I don't even want to talk fight to you until I get you back in Peoria. Hear what's happened to ol' Dan Delvy?"

"Fighting Dan? What? He didn't get bumped off?"

"Not so's you could notice it. But he's liable to die of dry rot. He's left the Corps."

"What for?"

"Got some kind of a good job with a brokerage firm, selling bonds or something like that."

"Dan? Good night!" Then Jimmy Adams laughed. "Suppose he'll go into a man's office, scowl at him and then let out a roar: 'Hey, you blankety, blank, blank. Rise and shine there! Hit the deck! Le's see whether you're a human being or a hunk of cheese. Fr-r-r-r-ront! R-i-i-i-ght dress! Le-e-f-t dress! Front! Dress that line, you blank, blank, blankety blank, blank, blank. Aw-right. Be the numbers-s-s-s—produce!"

EVEN Bill James found a chuckle at the memory of old Fighting Dan of the United States Marines, Fighting Dan, who had led the advance across the white ribbon of death known as the Lucy-Bouresches Road at the battle of Belleau Wood, Fighting Dan, to whom an enemy machine-gun was only something to be captured, to whom a battle meant only that much more cussing and perhaps a slight loss of sleep—certainly not anything to fret about or to cause fright. "Top kick" that he was, Fighting Dan had ruled with a rod of iron and a voice of thunder, and Fighting Dan had left behind a record in the Marine Corps that would not be equalled for many a year.

"He sure knew how to put the fighting blood into a man," said Jimmy Adams after a half block of silence. "I'd never have gotten that medal of honor if it hadn't have been for old Fighting Dan. One yell from him, and I was ready to capture the whole German army. As it was, I got a machine gun by myself—"

"And a lot of medals for doing it," agreed Bill James. "But you're right about ol' Dan. I aint ashamed to confess

it; when we came across that wheat-field, with the machine-guns cutting 'em down faster'n we could stand 'em up, the old yellow was right straight up my back, and I'm right here to admit it. Boy, how they was mowing us down!"

"You said something," agreed Adams. "Every once in a while I'd look around for the fellow who'd been at my side a minute before—and he wasn't there. Then some one else would take his place, and —he'd be gone too."

"And remember just when we got to the road?"

"Do I?" Jimmy Adams' face was ablaze with memory. "With all those typewriters up on the hill there giving us hell? I'll tell the world. That was when I got that hole through the muscle in my right arm. But you couldn't stop going then."

"Couldn't?" Bill James turned belligerently. "Well, we did, just the same. And we'd have been there yet—every one of us in a two-by-six, with a G. R. S. cross on top of us, if it hadn't been for ol' Fighting Dan. Remember how he jumped out in front of us, scampered across the road and then turned back and yelled?"

"Do I? Some battle cry!"

"Boy, how that old bird can cuss! And the folks back home dreaming about us waltzing over the top with a brave second louie in front of us with a sword in one hand and a flag in the other, while the cream-puffs busted up above and the brave boys in khaki all sang 'Over There,' or something of the kind! War sure aint what the lithographs paint it—at least, not with ol' Dan Delvy at the head of a platoon!"

IT all served as a break in their earlier disagreement, this reminiscence of old Fighting Dan, and they continued to talk of him as they strolled toward the station to take their train for Peoria. Nor was it until the train was far out of Chicago that they returned to the old subject, and then only for a moment.

"Jimmy," said Bill James suddenly as he shifted in his seat, "Elsie aint got anything to do with this, has she?"

"With what?"

"With you throwing this fight?"

"But I'm not throwing it, I tell you, Bill! I'm going to fight my best—I don't know how I can say anything more than that."

"I've heard that before. What I want to know is this: Elsie aint kicking against your fighting, is she?"

"Not for the Legion. Of course she wouldn't—"

"Oh, I understand about professional stuff. I just wanted to be sure she wasn't crabbing against you doing this for us."

"Not at all."

"All right. Merely asked to be sure."

Then the conversation trailed off again, not to be renewed throughout the journey. Nor was much of anything said in the days that followed, regarding the declaration of Jimmy Adams in the dark gallery of the athletic club in Chicago. The training went on; Bill James still held his place as taskmaster, and Jimmy Adams worked to the limit of his ability —always, however, with a ghost lurking in the background. Even Bill James, without mentioning it, gave the appearance of knowing that the fight was lost, that the championship Legion belt would go to Chicago. The watchers at training quarters seemed to sense it. Jimmy Adams more than once heard it rumored that he had gone stale. Then, there entered a new element.

"JIMMY,"—it was Elsie Madison who spoke as they sat on the veranda of the big house late one evening.—"I know it's none of my business—but were you ever afraid of anything?"

"Sure." Jimmy smiled. "I was scared to death when I captured that machine-gun."

"But you went ahead and did it."

"Of course. Why not?"

There was silence for a moment.

"I—I just can't understand you, Jimmy."

"Understand?"

"No. I can't see how a man who has shown the bravery that you've shown could let anyone scare you out of a determination to—"

"Don't say that, Elsie!" Jimmy Adams had risen. "Don't *you* accuse me of being yellow!"

"Why, I wasn't, Jimmy. But it just seems—"

"Yes, I know. It just seems." There was bitterness in Jimmy's voice. "It just seems! If a man tries to move a mountain and it's a bigger job than he can handle, nobody calls him a coward. If I were only a moderate swimmer and should draw back from trying to cross the Mis-

sissippi River, I wouldn't be yellow, would I? Everybody'd say I had common sense. But simply because I've got the common sense and lack of egotism to say that I believe another man is a better fighter than I am, I'm a coward, and I'm showing the streak of yellow. I didn't think you'd throw that at me, Elsie!"

"Please!" Her hand had snuggled into his. "I didn't mean it that way, Jimmy. Only, I'm so anxious for you to win."

"I'm anxious too."

"It means a lot for the boys here in Peoria. If they could just hang up that championship, it'd—"

"I know all about that. I'm going to do my best. I'm going to give them everything I've got in me. And that's what hurts, Elsie—to go up against a losing fight and feel that you haven't a single person back of you, that unless you're a winner, you're no good. You don't know what it means—but I do."

"That'd make me fight all the harder."

"A man can't fight more than his limit—unless there's a miracle somewhere. Right now, I don't see any of those things floating around."

"Maybe you've overestimated him, Jimmy."

"Yes, and maybe I've underestimated. All I can say is that I'm going to do my best. If I win, I'll be the most surprised person in Illinois. If I lose, I'll know what to expect: the loser's end, without a single person to pat me on the back and tell me that nobody could have done more."

"That's unfair! Of course, I can't be at the fight to tell you just the minute that it's over. But I'll be thinking it, Jimmy, and that's something."

"It's a lot." Jimmy Adams grinned in the darkness.

"What's more," said Elsie Madison determinedly, "I'll be hoping—and hoping—for the miracle."

"That's a long hope." Jimmy said it as he held out his hand for a good night clasp. "It's a good hope—but oh, Lordy, what a long one!"

A WEEK passed. The Spider arrived from Chicago for the last week of training before the fight. Three days more went by, and for the first time since that day in Chicago, Bill James grinned during the work-out of his fighter.

"That's good stuff, Jimmy. Try that again. That's it—work your knees! Work your knees! That's the stuff—you can't get a real punch without putting your whole body behind it!"

Jimmy Adams stopped short in his sparring match. He walked to the ringside and stared at his trainer.

"What's gotten into you?" he demanded shortly. Bill grinned.

"Nothing? Why?"

"You're acting almost human toward me."

Bill James allowed the old growl to come into his voice.

"Just got excited for a minute," he said finally. "Go on back to your rat-killing."

For three days more it was the same old grind, minus the enthusiasm of a fighter who is training to win. Grim, determined, Jimmy Adams was going steadily toward defeat. He knew it, he felt it; he was sure that the maximum of his fighting ability, the every element of his bag of tricks, his footwork, his wicked jabs and long, sweeping thrusts would avail him nothing. He was going to fight his best fight—and lose!

AT last came the night of the battle. The Spider was already in his corner when Jimmy stepped through the ropes, noticing as he did so that there was the failure of the old applause which usually had greeted him back in those days with the Second Division when he had been the pride of the lightweight class. A rippling of handclapping, swelling slightly, then dying away—that was all. Out there were his buddies, out there the men of the Legion for whom he was fighting; yet they weren't standing behind him! And in spite of the chagrin of it all, Jimmy could not find it in his heart to blame them. From here and there had come rumors, bits of this and a little of that, which pieced together told plainly the story that Jimmy Adams, their man, their choice for the lightweight Legion champion of Illinois, had gone yellow. Jimmy allowed his shoulders to slump slightly, and he dropped into his chair, holding up his hands listlessly for Bill James to affix the gloves. But before they could be pulled over his taped knuckles, a hurrying, swift form had intervened—the Spider.

"Just gimme a feel at them tapings," he ordered with a grin. "Never can tell, you know. Want to feel mine? Here!"

He held out his hands, and Jimmy pressed them lackadaisically—it was only

so much formality. Then the Spider reached briskly for the Peoria man's hands, and bent quickly toward him.

"Licked before you start, aint you?" he whispered.

"Oh, I don't know!" Jimmy said it as quickly as possible—but already the Spider had turned, and with a smile was returning to his corner. Bill James came quickly to his fighter's side.

"What'd that guy say to you?"

"Usual stuff," answered Jimmy grimly. "Trying to get my goat."

"Going to let him put it over?"

"Not if I can help it."

Bill James scowled—then suddenly bent over his fighter and put both hands on Jimmy's shoulders.

"Don't let him get you, Jimmy," he begged. "Honest, can you see what it means? Don't let him put it over on you that way! We're all behind you—honest, we are. We're pulling for you. I was hoping—" Then he stopped. Jimmy looked up quickly.

"Hoping for what?"

"Nothing. It—it didn't turn out. Never mind—it wasn't anything. Just a hunch of mine. That's all. Anyway, you're going to lick him." It was a brave attempt to instill confidence into his fighter. "I feel it in my bones that you're going to lick him. He just looked better than he really is; that's all, Jimmy. Come on—the referee's motioning for us."

TO the center of the ring they went, to crowd about the referee and to hear the usual admonitions about breaking pretty, kidney-blows barred and no hitting in the clinches. Then back to their corners again. The gong!

Those who had expected to see Jimmy Adams cower and cringe in front of his adversary suddenly sat up with a jerk. He had leaped from his chair and had passed the center of the ring almost before the Spider had gained his feet. They met in the Spider's corner, a rushing, pantherlike, desperate little lightweight crashing against a man stronger, faster and heavier than he, for the possibility of the first blow. And he got it.

A stinging right to the stomach, a left to the lips; and the Spider, gasping, recoiled slightly, while a red, ugly spot began to show on his torso, and the blood trickled on his chin. A sudden wild yell ran through the crowded, smoky hall. And another yell followed that—suddenly to resolve itself into a straight succession of shouting screams. For Jimmy Adams was carrying the fight to his adversary's camp, slugging and punching with every atom of strength he possessed, seeking to break down the other's defense even before it could be established.

But in vain. For a moment the very momentum of his primary rush seemed to have carried the Spider off his feet, and he gave ground without seeming able to evade the blows which Jimmy Adams showered in his direction. To the ropes he went, there to cover for a second and to gain time in which to formulate his plans for action. Then with a straight rebound he went back at his lighter opponent to the only possible breaking of the attack, a slugging-match.

Toe to toe they stood for a full half-minute, exchanging blow for blow, their blood-smeared gloves slapping and crackling as they found flesh, or struck against each other in the wild, almost aimless struggle. Then, as if by common consent, they broke, each to his position, and to the crafty, creeping circling of each other in an attempt to find a vulnerable point of attack. And this was the Spider's game.

A minute more remained to the round. It found Jimmy Adams rocking under the effect of the straight, quick jabs, the short counters and speedy body-blows of the Chicago fighter, while his own efforts seemed to go to naught. The gong sounded, and he trotted to his corner, waving a hand to the shouting throngs as he went. But his lips were grim pressed and his eyes set. Not once had he been able to penetrate that defense. Not once had he gotten past the guard of the shifty Spider. Instead, once they had really started to box, Spider had seemingly been able to hit him at will! Down he dropped to his chair, and to the lemon and water and towels of his seconds. The hands of Bill James fastened upon his shoulder-muscles, kneading them; the voice of Bill James sounded close to his ear:

"He's got it on you in that far-off stuff!" came hurriedly. "Fight him—don't let him box you. Get in close—get me? Get in close and stay there. And don't let him set!"

Jimmy Adams nodded. With the gong he again leaped from his chair, to rush his opponent, to slug with him, to strive

to keep under his guard and to hold in close to him, taking punishment that he might give it. Blood from the Spider's lips dripped once on his shoulder—it was like an injection of wine into Jimmy's veins. Slugging and rushing until his legs seemed to go numb beneath him, Jimmy carried the fight to the enemy, to slow up only when his strength could push him no farther, to duck and parry and cover when the other man came into his own method of fighting, and to hope for the end of the round.

IT was heart-breaking—a system which would lead only to one end—unless somewhere, sometime, in one of those rushes he could land the lucky punch which would end the fight. It was Jimmy's only chance, his only hope. Out in the ring, boxing against this shifty, swift, phantomlike fighter, it was hopeless. In a rush there was at least the chance of mauling down the defense of the other man and of breaking through to a goal which seemed almost hopeless. The third round, and again the same tactics—and with the same ending. Jimmy Adams, tired, weaving, and against the ropes, cowering, his gloves covering his face, as the trim Spider ripped and slashed at him without a return blow.

"That's all right, boy." It was Bill James talking as he again rubbed those shoulder muscles. A second was looking after the calves and thighs, seeking to restore to them by massage the strength that had been sapped through the terrific rushes. "He's got you on the open stuff. Rush him and stay close in. You can hold out. You've got to! Now, at the gong, get your head down and bore in. Then the old straight one-two stuff, right for his comissary. That's where he's weak! Stay off his face—it's as hard as a rock. All you can do is make him bleed. Cut for that stomach!"

He leaped to one side to let Jimmy flash out at the gong. He yelled and shouted as Jimmy bored in, then silenced as the round went to its inevitable conclusion, the weakening of the smaller fighter, the gradual drawing away, and the crafty, slow, ripping punishment of the Spider. Jimmy Adams was failing. His rushes were shorter now. The slugging did not have the steam behind it that it had possessed in the earlier rounds. And above all else, Jimmy knew it!

Boxing to the best of his ability, covering and countering, he sought to whip the Spider at his own game. It was futile. He rushed again, and breaking past the other's guard, slammed blow after blow against the washboard muscles of the Chicago fighter's torso. Then again he was forced into the open, the breath pulling hard over his gummy, bloody lips, his tongue thick in his mouth, his throat rattling with dryness. His legs were numb—they moved now only by impulse and instinct. If that gong would only ring!

Another round. A second after that, and a third. Jimmy weaved slightly as he left his corner. His eyes were red with the horror of fatigue. His every muscle ached. His hands failed to clench to their maximum as he forced himself forward and slugged with all that remained of his strength. In the haze before him he found his only consolation—the fact that the Spider was weakening too, that the steady pull of a rushing, slugging fight was making its impression upon him, and that his torso was growing redder and angrier from the succession of blows which Jimmy had planted there. But he still was far the fresher, still far the superior. His had been the defense in the rushes, not the offense. The strain had not been so great.

Again they slugged, again the Spider forced him away. Jimmy's head ached with the pound of blood; his sight was becoming dimmer. Once his feet twisted as he sought to duck a blow, and he stumbled half across the ring. He whirled, started back toward his opponent, then crumpled as a light blow struck him on the chin. It was simply the final atom of weight added to that which his protesting body was striving to carry. He stumbled a few steps—then dropped.

Hazily, vaguely, he heard the beginning of the count of the referee, hardly knowing what it meant. Then suddenly he struggled to rise. A new voice had come from somewhere, one that he recognized as in a dream, a commanding Irish voice which seemed to chill his spine with its incisiveness:

"Get up off that flure, ye blankety, blank, blank!"

It was only a dream. Jimmy started to sink again. The referee's toll droned on again:

"And three—and four—and—"

"Hear me, ye blankety, blank, blank! Get up off that flure!"

"And five—and six—"

"Come awn, there! Come awn, ye blankety, blank, blank! Do yez want to live forever?"

The ring suddenly faded for Jimmy Adams! No longer was he lying on the rosined canvas of a fighting inclosure. No longer was he in the trunks and gymnasium shoes of a pugilist. He was lying beside a road, a white road that stretched like a ribbon in the bright sunlight, lying there while out in front, a cursing, tobacco-chewing Irish top sergeant had turned back from his initial leap and was waving his arms with the excitement of his battle cry:

"Come awn, there! Do yez want to live forever?"

"And seven—and eight—"

Jimmy came to his knees, new blood flowing in his veins. Jimmy looked around him, new sight in his eyes. It was true! Over there by the shouting, screaming Bill James was a tall figure, bare-headed, his white-gray hair touseled, his arms tossing—old Fighting Dan, Dan with his two medals of honor in his hip pocket along with his chewing tobaccy and his cuddy pipe, old Dan, again yelling the command of desperation, the battle cry that had once before turned Jimmy Adams from an ordinary man into a hero:

"Come awn there! Do yez want to live forever?"

"And nine," called the referee, then ceased. Jimmy Adams was on his feet, again the tiger of the first round, again the rushing, boring, slugging fighter, carrying the struggle straight to the Spider, breaking through the heavier man's guard, planting blow after blow against that washboard set of muscles—and with strength now that counted!

Frantically the Spider leaped into a clinch as a straight blow with every atom of Jimmy's weight behind it crashed into his ribs. There came a cry from the second's corner, high, strident:

"Throw him off, there, ye blankety, blank fool! Throw him off!"

And Jimmy found the strength to obey, simply because it was old Fighting Dan who had called the order, Fighting Dan whom he had followed up the hill in the Bois de Belleau, straight into the face of a score of machine guns and their clattering hail of death, on up, up to the scattering explosion of hand-grenades, the chattering cries of fear as men surrendered, straight into heroism. He threw Spider off and then leaped to the attack again, head lowered, gloves tight clenched now, boring one after the other, like the motions of some double set of irresistible pistons.

A gasp came from the Spider. Again he sought to clinch—only to be knocked back against the ropes. As the smaller fighter looked up, he saw that the Chicagoan's face was white and drawn with pain, his mouth pulled tight with the pressure of anguish, his eyes vacant and staring. Then hazily he saw him fade, saw him roll against the ropes, weave there a second, then drop.

Shouts, wild yells of victory from his supporters. The smoky dimness of a great crowd on its feet. Jimmy knew that it all was true—knew that he had won. Staggering now with a sudden weakness, he went to his corner, to feel a hand laid on his shoulder and to hear an Irish voice growling:

"What's eatin' on yez? Why didn't ye do that three rounds ago? What's more, ye'd have done it, if that blankety blanked train of mine hadn't been late!"

And Jimmy smiled—smiled because old Dan Delvy, Fighting Dan of the two medals of honor, was giving him the limit of his praise, smiled because he had won, and smiled because in a few minutes he could hurry down the street to the old, rambling Madison home and tell a girl that the miracle she had hoped for—had come to pass!

Mr. Tierney is now writing "Tales of Old Denver," a spirited series of stories laid in the West when it was really wild. The first of these will appear in an early issue.

A young Rhodesian farmer-boy faces a great crisis and—becomes a man.

By MARSHALL SCULL

Five Lions

"I SEE an unusual quantity of lion-tracks around the river yesterday," Maltby said to his wife, poising the blade near his mouth, "and I'm going to the railway with Fred and the wagon." Ducking to take the knife-load, he chewed vigorously and watched her expression across the table.

She looked up quickly, and the fleeting fretwork of alarm patterned her sensitive face; her glance hopped here and there like a little bird which fears to stay on one perch; the corners of her mouth drew down, trying to still a nervous tremor; one blue-veined hand plucked at slack skin of the other.

His hard gray eyes shifted from the woman's thin form and rested on the stolid face of his son at the right. The boy looked somewhat like him, though his wide eyes were blue, and his features had a more finished appearance. Perhaps it was this favoring of his mother that provoked Maltby's mocking pleasantry: "I guess me and you can keep 'em off, eh, Fred?"

Fred mumbled and swayed low on big forearms to the plate from which he forked meat and vegetables. For a strong-looking boy he seemed very meek; the growing light from a window fell directly on him and made no characteristic shadows.

An African dawn illumining the three faces was rapidly turning the flame of their kerosene lamp paltry yellow and revealing details of the room. A square wood-burning range behind Mrs. Maltby defined itself; several doors and a fireplace were distinct; and the broadening diffusion showed an uneven texture of the dung-and-mud plastered walls. But it emphasized particularly the furrows of the woman's face.

"I'm so afraid!" she cried, bringing the palms of her hands together at her flat breast. "You'll be careful of Fred, wont you, Pa?"

"I aint worrying about Fred," the older man laughed; "I got twelve good oxen hitched to that wagon; them's what I'm worrying about."

Fred's bent neck continued to move rhythmically up and down in time with the fork that did not come up high from the plate. His eyes were intent, and his rich brown skin betrayed no offense at the slights.

His mother, however, shrank from the brutality. "Oh," she cried, "I wished you wouldn't talk like that. He aint had the experience you have—him only twenty."

"He'll get it, sooner or later," Maltby declared, and it was difficult to tell from his tone whether it was a threat or a statement. There seemed to be a meaning in the voice, and yet there might not be; he often said things that way: you never knew how to take them. Gray ends of hair, set face-lines, stiffening limbs, double words, marked the passing of middle age.

"That's all right, Ma," Fred glanced furtively at his father's face from under thick blond eyebrows. "Don't get him on his ear." Apparent anxiety to avert a quarrel did not sit suitably on his firm lips and the slightly arched profile of his nose.

"I aint getting him on his ear," she said plaintively, "but I'm tired of these scenes all the time. I'm sick of the loneliness out here; and if anything happens to Fred, I'll just die."

"'Taint very complimentary to me," Maltby retorted, sardonically smiling. He took up his coffee, keeping the spoon out of the way with his thumb, and drank it at one draft.

"Say, Pa, can't you cut it?" the boy put in; he looked up swiftly and dropped his eyes. "You'll have her crying again."

THE cup and spoon clattered down. "You too!" the father shouted in derisive astonishment. Fred shuffled his feet uncomfortably. "Aint he getting to be the big man! Takes after his mother, he does." He pushed his plate, with the knife and fork rattling on it, over the red-and-white cloth to the middle of the table, stood up and gave his wife a contemptuous glance.

She, mistaking the action, or maybe connecting it with some too-well-remembered occurrence of the past, rose quickly and stepped round the table and placed herself between Fred and his father. For only a moment the little woman with a harried face stood protecting him by the instinctive attitude, and then, seeing the man move across the room to find his pipe, she let fall one arm on her son's shoulder. "Take good care of yourself, Fred dear."

He responded in cautious affection, following the father with his eyes. "Take it easy yourself, Ma. He don't mean to be so hard; it's just the bad luck."

"Come on, if you're done breakfast," the gruff voice interrupted. "It's daylight already."

The two men went out together, and Fred, looking later through the door from the compound, saw her sitting still and alone in a rocking-chair before the black hearth, her head bowed.

That glimpse made Fred brood for the first half-hour of the growing day on her situation and his own feelings. It cut him deep daily to sit and shuffle his feet impotently when his rough father said and did things that hurt his mother's thread-bare nerves; and yet if he ventured, as he had this morning, to fend some of the unkindness, the whip of his father's cruel wit flailed him and left them no better off than before. "He's got me where he knows where," he complained to himself, "and I can't do nothing at all."

Worse, he could not see any way out of it; for as he grew older (and he had been doing that for some conscious years), his father grew also in power to slash the quivering souls subject to his mind. Any spontaneous caper of youth, every involuntary leading out of old ruts into new paths, all inarticulate longings to try something different, were relentlessly curbed by that heavy hand on the reins. Sometimes it brought him up standing, shaking all over; and then, just as he felt that his temper had to burst the galling straps of his guidance and pound madly on a race of his own, the fear of what would follow tamed him and kept him from snapping those slender bands of authority. Fred measured himself against the older man by odd recollections and knew that he was stronger in muscle. But minds controlled muscles, and he had to admit by many another memory that the older mind dominated him completely. "'Cut it,' I says to him," he repeated, and shivered at the boldness. "It's a wonder he didn't swipe me." The champing spirit of a boy becoming a man was snaffled with despair.

"Hey!" yelled his father, who had been walking at some distance from the oxen-wain, "if you don't look where you're going, I might as well put one of the yokes on you and give you the lash to show you where." He laughed loudly, and Fred woke up to his business without joining in the jest. He flung back the fifty-foot snaky black whip, and it whistled out ahead and bit the flank of a leading ox. "Red Dirk!" he shouted. "Pieter!" The huge Cape wagon rumbled in fresh efforts of the team, and Fred bounced on his springless seat. The canvas covering of the arched cartel fluttered idly at its corners, and numerous sacks of grain on the bed wabbled like molasses.

"That's the way!" Maltby called. "Make 'em step out; I want to cross the river before night."

Fred did not reply, for he knew that he could crack the ox-whip better than his father. He had grown up with it for five years, but Father had never been able to master the knack. In one or two African

accomplishments he needed no praise from the man who was otherwise his superior. A fair number of times already he had driven the ox-team four days in from the farm to the railway station, and four days out again, over the road which lay marked only by wheel-tracks on the plain. With two or three of the black servants to help, he was easily able to make the journey in the dry season, when water was shallow in the ford of the Waso Dabash River.

Miles of rising and falling tree-dotted prairie and minor dry stream-beds intervened, then a long dip down the escarpment to the valley, two days' trek on its level floor, and a short haul from the warm springs to the station, where he made infrequent contact with humanity. The Uganda line from Victoria Nyanza to the Indian Ocean carried out grain and hides to the places that returned woven stuff, machinery, canned goods and occasional money. Trains ran down five thousand feet from the tableland where white men throve, to the malarial damp coast at Mombasa. Forested mountains puckered these high uplands, hiding their own breeds of large animals: elephant, python, *bongo*. Swampy water attracted buffalo, hippopotamus, crocodile. The vast plains bore an amazing wealth of beasts and carnivorous life to prey on it: you could not look anywhere without seeing herds of game. Within eye-range he noticed zebra, gazelle, gun, eland kongoni, three giraffes and two ostriches. Somewhere, waiting for night to bring them easy food, he knew there were jackals, hyenas, leopards and lions. Humans, however, were sparse; his mother had none of her sex within seven miles.

More than one thought of her now made him look back at the farmstead before they went out of sight. The yet level rays of the rising sun smote the yellow mud walls of the compound and the house which was part of it, and glinted on the thatched roof. Maltby had put up fairly extensive buildings, of the material which settlers considered temporary, and they made a wealthy showing on the skyline of his domain. To the boy they were neither prosperous, as to a stranger, nor a sunken investment as to their owner, nor a boundary of servitude as to the woman in them—just home. Five years seemed half a lifetime to him. In the restricted excitement of this outdoor world he did not especially regret the placid uplands of northern Pennsylvania, of which his father had exchanged one hundred acres for ten thousand of these.

"Kanga!" announced one of the natives who ran at the head of the team, and Fred immediately turned. They were entering a thin grove of acacia thorn-trees. Fred smiled in spite of his usual gravity, to think that these comical birds were the closest connecting link between the farm lives of America and British East Africa.

"Say, Pa," he asked, "will you drive awhile, till I shoot a guinea hen for supper?"

"All right," Maltby answered, boarding the wagon and taking the whip, "but don't waste all your cartridges."

"I got a plenty," came from the canvas cover, and Fred emerged with his rifle.

"You ought to; you spend all your money on 'em. Only I hate to see you waste 'em."

WITHOUT answering, Fred stood high on the rattling seat of the wagon, filling the magazine and chamber of the weapon as he looked ahead for the game. There was a voluble screeching cackle presently, when the oxen disturbed the feeding birds, and he saw them scattering on one side of the path. They ran through the tall grass and behind shrubs of the grove thirty yards from the wagon, seeming to be drawn with the train rather than scared off by it to a distance. Their little pointed heads darted incessantly on long thin necks.

Fred began to shoot rapidly. No sooner had he raised the rifle than he fired—took it down, reloaded, lifted and fired it again. He shot five times at the nearest bird till it made for cover and was lost unhurt. The last shot of his magazine knocked over another, and the speckled white-and-gray heap of feathers tumbled and kicked for a minute before it lay still.

"One out of six shots," commented Maltby.

Fred recharged his rifle, got down and retrieved the fowl. The head was gone. He threw it into the cartel without a word.

"Give us a crack at 'em with your gun," Maltby said, when his son was on the seat and about to put it away. He grinned expectantly.

"What's the matter with your'n?"

"They'll be gone before I get it out."

Fred handed over and took the long whip. He had plenty more cartridges.

Guinea hens still accompanied the wagon, and Maltby fired five ineffective shots at them. "I guess the laugh's on me," he said aggressively, sighting long for his last chance. The report rang out, and a speckled shape dropped and lay quiet in a flurry of flying feathers. He was extravagantly pleased. "Aha! I got him! You didn't beat me at that game." Still pluming himself, he jumped down and found the bird. Then he called out: "All blown to hell! Say, was it soft-nosed bullets?"

Fred nodded as his father brought the mangled remains of the guinea hen to the wagon.

"Nothing left to it." He threw it into the bushes and resumed his seat in front of the cartel. "Didn't smash yours up like that?"

"No. Got it just right, I guess."

"Well, you aint any better, anyhow."

"I aint claiming to be." Fred's quiet accent took any possible challenge out of the words.

LATE in the same day they reached the ford of the Waso Dabash, where a long grade down to the water required a similar ascent on the farther side. From a long way off they could tell by the dense growth of trees the presence of a live stream, for water was a rare growing force in this half-desert country. Fred brought the oxen to a halt with a volley of Cape Dutch words in order that his father might go ahead and see if the road was in good condition before they drove the wagon down to the ford. The sluggish animals stood calmly, switching their tails and making the fat-humps behind their shoulders quiver to shake off the flies that tormented them. The two wheel-oxen were fastened in one heavy wooden yoke attached to the tongue of the wagon, and the other five pair in similar beams dragged their share of the load through a long rope fastened to the end of the tongue. Fred had learned driving from an old Boer neighbor in the course of a few years so that he controlled the beasts entirely by the whiplash and the jargon of outlandish words which South Africans had brought two thousand miles north to this territory.

Watching his father tramp into the woods by the river, he found much to admire in the man who dominated the lives of himself and his mother and, in spite of the frequent caustic sallies which wrung tears from her eyes and wrought grooves in her face, considered him clever and resourceful. The mere fact of his moving the family from a conservative old neighborhood to this frontier of the world, after a chance meeting with a missionary, indicated courage—and ambition! For if one hundred acres of Pennsylvania farmland could yield a sure modest living, ten thousand of African prairie might make anything possible. If Fred ever could go on his own! But he could not even prevent the discordant scenes in their home. Outdoors he naturally stood on a less unequal footing with the strong man; indoors—nothing to it! Because he thought that all was due to the bad luck which dogged his father, and because he was thoroughly under his influence, he saw no way out.

Now the main thing was to cross the river and camp for the night. Squinting around at the sun which warmed his back through the flannel shirt, he saw that its invisible disk was coming close down to the horizon; this meant about five o'clock. With a rapid crossing, they might get over the Waso Dabash within the hour that remained before sunset, outspan the team, arrange their beds in the cartel, build a big fire and sleep by turns till dawn.

He sat on the high seat of the wagon, slouched forward with elbows on his knees, the lash of the short-handled whip gathered in his right hand, and stared ahead above the backs of the oxen. Even the natural buoyancy of youth yielded to the constant repression of his surroundings and was crushed between the brazen sky and the hard-burned surface of the plains. He did not know any other life than this under a driving master, and sometimes it seemed to Fred as if the tales of cowboys, hunters, and pioneers must be false imaginations, made to entice boys to grow up brave and strong so that they could work the more efficiently for those who owned them. Certainly out here he had no fun except potting a few birds and antelope now and then. His attitude, as he sat waiting for orders from his father, was that of any hopeless slave to toil.

Maltby returned after a while and from a little distance began to shout the result of his examination. "The road aint any worse than it was. Careful, and you can make it." As he came closer, he said: "Here's where I see the lion-tracks yesterday. They was fresh in the mud." He rubbed the mustache from his lips with the

back of his hand and spat, pausing in his talk. "There's a little drop of twelve inches or so, and the ground slopes to the left,"—he showed the angle with a stiff hand,—"so's we'll have to ease the wagon down careful over that."

Fred nodded slowly in comprehension. "Maybe I better come down and look her over?"

"No; stick up there, and I'll show you."

"All right, Pa." Fred obediently remained on the driving seat, but stood and prepared his whip for use. At his command the black men sprang to the head of the team, to lead them straight, and the long lash whistled through the air and stung ox after ox with a tingling crack. The wagon pitched as it began to move down the slope toward the belt of dark green vegetation.

BEFORE that, however, the front wheels came to the critical bit of road, and at signs from his father Fred skillfully stopped it on the edge of the break, so that they could wheel it down carefully and avoid upsetting. The leading oxen were just at the small brush which gave place to the large trees of the river-bank.

Fred was in the act of jumping down from the off front wheel to join his father, when loud snorts and trampling at the head of the team threw all the animals into panic. They jerked the wagon forward a yard and stampeded to the right and came back to the higher ground in a mad confusion. Both the white men ran for safety to the tail of the wagon, and Fred whipped the nearest oxen unmercifully to hold them in order. But vainly—the panting, jostling herd kept coming up the slope, and some bellowed as they came. The wagon careened to the left; the right wheels rose from the ground, and the whole great frame thundered over on its side. Bags of grain ready for market poured out and lay still, giving up a dust of fine chaff. The oxen doubled back till they brought the trace-bar tight on the tongue and could not drag the load on the ground, and then stood sweating and stamping in their yokes. Some of them shivered, but the rest gradually quieted and were even soon grazing contentedly on the grass at their feet.

Maltby gave out a string of curses to which Fred could make only a nodding assent. Nothing he thought of expressed the situation more adequately. Perhaps in that moment he and his father were as nearly unanimous as they had ever been. After the first few minutes of vehement cursing, Maltby settled down to mixed oaths and remarks. "An hour's work to get the wagon up again; and a good hour to load her. Damn the luck!" He turned on his son. "Why in hell didn't you hold 'em, instead of letting 'em double on you?"

"Nothing could've held 'em. Something scared 'em in there."

Maltby looked up enlightened. "Smell of the lions!" he exclaimed. "That's what done it!" He called one of the black boys. "Miti!" A native clad in a loin-cloth came out of the bushes where he had taken refuge. "Miti," he said in broken Swahili, "did you see or hear any lion in the bushes there?"

"No, master. The cattle were frightened, and they turned. I think they tasted something." He called his black companion out of the woods, to indicate that no punishment awaited them. The other said practically the same.

"Smelled 'em from yesterday," concluded Maltby, walking toward the wreckage.

FRED kept silence, but his first action was to rescue his rifle from under the seat of the wagon and make sure that it was not injured. He filled his pockets with spare shells from a bag of them under the seat. The rifle he carried, and when he got at the job, propped it handy on a bush or a jutting stone.

Maltby looked up at the declining sun and said: "We got to camp here; that's sure. Miti, get wood for a fire over there." "Fred, we'll pull the wagon that far when we get the stuff out of her. Come on, now."

They went at it hard, taking out their beds and food, rolling the heavy sacks clear, and getting ready to right the wagon. Each bag weighed two hundred pounds or more, and there were twenty of them. Fred soon saw that his father was pressing his lips together as he helped heave them by the corners, and because he was not tired, said: "Take it easy, Pa. Let me wrastle 'em awhile."

The older man straightened up with a grunt of relief and watched his son at the work. "You're getting pretty husky," he said presently. "Aint you tired?"

"Not yet," Fred answered, without looking up, as he seized another bag by the

ears. When all were moved out of the way, he also stood to his usual stooping height, and Maltby looked silently at him.

"Now the damn wagon," said the father. "Let's see if the team can turn her as she lays." Fred shook his head dubiously. "Give 'em the whip, and let's see, anyhow."

THE oxen strained and tugged at the yokes, and the hubs dragged a bit on the soft ground, but they soon dug in and refused to move farther uphill. The wagon lay pointing toward the river, and it was necessary to pull it in exactly the opposite direction, for the sides of the road were worn considerably below the level of the banks. "Wont go," Fred concluded.

"Well, then we'll have to hitch 'em to the off side of the tail and get her up, and then snake her out backwards. The two boys can hang onto the tongue and steer —maybe." He spat, to mark his doubt of their succeeding. Fred too spat thoughtfully.

With the team pulling on one side and Fred lifting on the other, they finally got the wagon on its four wheels and dragged it back to the level ground, where Miti had collected a pile of logs for a fire. The sun had just dipped below the horizon, and darkness was creeping over the land. Already in the shadows of the ford it was impossible to make out details, and in the slight purling of the river current other little sounds were inaudible. They had not yet outspanned the oxen for the night, nor started the fire. Maltby was in the cartel, putting his gun away. "Fred," he called, "bring the beds and grub from down there."

"Here, stick my rifle in with your'n." He passed it up and moved down to the baggage.

In the low part of the road leading to the river he made a big bundle of the things they must have for the night, putting the pots and pans on top of the two blanket-rolls, to carry rather awkwardly the short distance. Squatting there in the obscurity he heard the rippling of the river and the insistent r-r-r-r-k of a tree frog rasping somewhere below him, but no greater sounds than these. Up in the west the black silhouette of the wagon against an orange sky, and the bare bows—some of them broken—from which they had stripped the canvas cover, seemed to stand for the gaunt life of struggle to which he was doomed. The wagon, his plodding inheritance; the vaulting bows, his faint struggle; the brilliant sky, his unattainable hopes. Life was a trek over the plains, contending with difficulties, straining beneath the glory of the sun. And its condition, fastened immovably to the earth, was a mud farmstead containing all the love he had ever known, and that love was harassed by torments that he could not defeat. An inexorable force weighed on him and her, to them a mighty force; and yet he felt sometimes that it too was caught in the grasp of still greater powers which pressed it down on them and crushed them. "The bad luck never drops him," he muttered. "It bangs him down on us. We get it." He put his sinewy arms about the bulky load, rose to his feet and went up toward the wagon.

A CONFUSED scuffling.

"Fred! Quick!" He dropped the burden halfway. "Lions!" A fearful noise of fighting among the oxen. He ran the few steps. Rattling snarls muffled in flesh! He jumped on the hub and up to the seat. His father was fumbling in the cartel. Fred ran through to the tail of the wagon. The double line of animals was chaotic and tossing. The off leader had something big on it, and reared and bellowed. He saw that a lion had one foreleg over its shoulder, the other paw on its nose, pulling the head to one side, and its mouth at the neck. Nothing but a lion could be so big as that: the mane made its head enormous. The ox fell, the neck broke, and a crack sounded. Its mate staggered. He saw a second lion spring at it from the left. He saw others running. They looked more than half the size of the oxen.

Fred dashed to his rifle. Maltby had not fired a shot. "Your gun!" Fred shouted.

"I—I—I—I—" the man stammered. He seemed to be frightened and kept fumbling with his gun, loading it, or something.

Fred's rifle leaped to his hand, and he to the tailboard. His muzzle blared fire into the dusk, and the lion crumbled at the side of the near leader. Another quick bullet killed the first lion, which was dragging the dead ox out of the harness.

More flying shapes came. They rushed so fast that it was hard to make them out in the dark. But each, he knew, was big and strong enough to mash in the skull of a horse with one blow of its paw, to run

carrying a man in its mouth, to pierce the brain or the lungs or the bones with a snap of its long teeth. And they would kill all the oxen, for sheer lust of killing. The cattle were frantic. They bellowed in terror and surged madly to break the yokes. They pulled different ways; the wagon rocked and pitched. It was difficult to shoot from that reeling platform! he had to take snapshots, practically without sighting. A lion leaped at the near leader. He shot it in the head instantly, and the hurtling body thumped to the ground.

He could see lions charging here and there on the outside of the turmoil, but having only three shells, he dared not chance them. Why didn't Father come? Though only a moment, it seemed an intolerable delay. Fred took no time to turn or to speak.

The near leader went down coughing. A lion had it by the throat, tearing out the soft tissues. Its body was hidden by the bulk of the ox, and he could not see to kill it. Too late to save the beast, anyhow.

A yell from his father behind him. Fred whirled and saw a huge form land on the wagon seat. The bed bounded. He fired without aiming, and the lion tumbled backward out of sight. The man also fell at the shot. "My God! I hit him!" Fred thought. He dropped to his knees, and felt him. "Hurt?" Moans. "Are you hurt?"

Maltby began to pick himself up. "No," he said sullenly. "Flash in my face."

"Come on with your gun!" Fred turned to the team. A fifth lion was at the second off ox, both paws over the back, trying to bite through its spine. He shot it full in the shoulder, and the lion sat down on its haunches and pawed the air frantically. It fell back, twisted to its feet, ran at top speed, and plunged to earth dead.

He caught a chance to shoot at the lion which was sucking the neck of the near leader and fired. Evidently the bullet grazed its flank, for it dashed off and disappeared.

THE magazine was empty and the lions all dead or gone. Fred loaded feverishly and was ready for fresh attacks, but none came. His father now stood at his side, with rifle in two hands to raise and shoot. But in those seconds all the vital shooting had been done. Two steers and five lions lay dead around the wagon. Fred leaned heavily against a bow of the cartel and mopped his brow with the sleeve of his shirt. He let his body sag against the support, looked at his father, and gave a little laugh. Release of the strain made him laugh. Otherwise he did not see anything very funny to laugh about.

"Good work!" said Maltby, putting one hand on Fred's shoulder. "You was quicker than me, that time." His hand shook. He also tried to laugh, but stopped as if he remembered something.

The praise and the contact did not stir Fred as they might have done before that upheaval. He still felt lax and flabby and continued to sop the sweat off. Now his hands trembled and his knees were weak; so he went to the seat and sat down with the rifle across his lap. Maltby was alert and gave Fred a spell which he needed. He was dazed by the sudden speed of the attack and the precision with which he alone had met it; for as he sat there watching the red west become dull like a cooling ember, the realization grew on him that he alone had acted swiftly, surely, exactly right in a crisis which many men would call uncommon. He recognized with a sort of extra hard beat of the heart that his father was not there in the pinch, and in the next moment a knowledge that this had rubbed off the keen edge of his awe brought a sickish depression. He felt, indeed, older, but perhaps that was the effect of weariness. Curiously, however, in spite of the fatigue, he sensed a relief about the head—a sort of elevation, as though his head were higher up in pure air, and not low amid heavy gases that lay on the earth. Then came and bathed him a serenity which made him less nervous about the dangers of the night and the coming day.

That the hazard was not over he knew perfectly well. Although he had not counted the lions, he was sure that one had got off wounded, and that one, unfortunately, which had lain tasting blood at the near leader's throat. Unless seriously hurt, the beast would probably come back, though the ground was strewn with its dead comrades. So Fred gave his father the watch only long enough to regain his nerve and then said: "We want some supper; I'll get the stuff I dropped when the circus begun. You start the fire." He jumped off the wagon rather limply, brought up the sleeping-bundles and threw them on the wagon, collected the cooking things and food.

Maltby struck a match, and the blaze at one side lighted a limited scene: the wagon, the rumps and flanks of the oxen, and the near-by shrubs. He called the boys, who answered from the limbs of trees, and told them to come down.

"Let's see what the damage is," Fred proposed, touching on what he knew would be a painful duty, and starting toward the slaughtered animals. Maltby came with him, and both held their rifles. "Red Dirk's done," Fred pronounced, rising from his knees by the near leader.

"And Pieter's neck's broke," said his father from the other side. Moving back to the second steer, he cursed without passion. "They clawed old Jan's withers some, but that'll heal up. One lion dead on this side, Fred; how many over there?"

"Two here. Another run about fifty yards."

"That's four. Then the one that you knocked off the seat in front—" His voice in the dark hesitated. "That's five. Was there any more?"

"The last got away. I grazed him."

Maltby came around the team. "Five lions with six shots. That's going some!" His glance at the tall young man had none of the old sneer. For a little it seemed that he would put out his hand to touch his son, but he did not. They returned to the fire which lighted up the inside of the wagon and leaned their rifles against the rear wheels.

Fred exclaimed: "Well, there's my chicken for supper!" He pulled it out of the nook under the seat and had Miti pluck it, Maltby gazing at the headless neck as it passed. Both servants were down from their trees and timorously helped in the work. When dismissed, they vanished again instead of sleeping under the wagon. Fred could not blame them, and his father made no objection. For a time they were busy tying up the ten living oxen about the wagon for the night and cooking over the hot embers.

"Damn the luck!" said Maltby, throwing the agate plates in a heap for the men to wash in the morning. "Two best steers gone—that's three hundred rupees, and we can't make the trek with ten of 'em."

"Hard luck," Fred agreed slowly. "We got to back-track tomorrow and make another start." He stared thoughtfully at the fire. "Mother'll be scared every time after this."

Maltby moved uneasily. He threw a straggling billet on the fire, and then: "I was thinking maybe I'd put off the trip for a week or two."

"'We need the money,'" Fred quoted, after a pause. It was the first time he had ever used "we" in speaking of his father's finances. He went on, apparently thinking in partnership: "We can see how we feel when we get home."

Maltby looked up quickly at him, but the boy's features were unconscious of presumption.

Fred at length pulled himself to his feet. "We'll have to sit up tonight, Pa; the lion that's hit will maybe come back, and we don't know how many more's in the bush." He took up his gun. "You go to sleep for two hours, and then you take two hours' watch and wake me up for my next turn."

MALTBY, it is true, paid no heed to Fred's actions or spirits; he was evidently occupied with his loss and his luck. He flicked the long whip occasionally and let the boys guide the team. Great urging was unnecessary, for the oxen were willing enough to go home.

But in Fred life continued to sing the song of young manhood loudly and joyously till evening, when they reached the golden gates of the compound. To him now it seemed the strong fortress from which he should one day ride forth to master his heritage.

His mother stood in the doorway shading her eyes with both hands. "What's happened?" she cried as the wagon rolled through the entrance and quit creaking.

Maltby got down, taciturn.

Fred went to the steps and rested his rifle against the wall. "Lions jumped on us at the river." He laid off his felt hat and rumpled the damp hair. "We shot five."

"Lions!" She pressed her hands together. "You didn't get hurt?"

"No. They killed the two best steers, Red Dirk and Pieter." He spoke with a firmness that she could not have previously observed. There was a sort of vibration in his tone, and when he finished, it did not sound as if he intended to go on and say more. He threw the five lion skins by the house wall, and she was almost afraid to look at them.

By anxious questioning she drew the main parts of the story from him in short sentences, but he did not tell that he alone had shot the five lions. Looking at her

in the light of his new-found freedom of feeling, Fred saw that her face was lined too intricately for a woman of her age; it seemed as if a corrosive had etched it too old for her. For the first time in his life he felt a power of examining and criticizing the things that were, not accepting them merely because they were. An impulse of sympathy made him pat her arm and smile slightly at her.

"Oh, Fred!" she cried, putting her hands on his shoulders, "I'm so glad you're all right." And then, exuberantly forgetful of her forced training, she called to her husband: "I got some supper ready for you, Andrew, when I see you coming back." There was a note of deep-felt joy in her voice.

"I got plenty to do before supper," he replied ill-naturedly.

She lost her glad welcome at once and turned to go into the house. Fred's lips tightened over his closed teeth, and he walked very erect to help the off-loading.

SHE had a wood-fire going in the kitchen, for the nights were chilly on these high plains under the equator, and the three sat to the table—Fred at the side, with Mother on his right and Father on his left. Maltby shoveled his food in surly silence for the most part, brooding apparently on the disastrous events of the trip. The other two kept up a desultory talk, she gleaning more details of the upset and the fight, Fred soothing her as well as he could for her future peace of mind. "It's liable to happen any time," he said. "You got to keep your eyes open out here and be quick on the trigger. If a feller's on the job he aint in much danger."

Maltby looked up and glared at him. "I s'pose you told her all about it?" he sneered. "How you did all the shooting?"

Fred knew his mistake and tried to smooth it over: "No, I aint said anything like that, Pa."

"What!" said his mother. "Did you kill all them five lions, Fred? Where was your pa?"

Before he could answer, and it was not easy for him to find an answer, the man's knowledge of shame forced the old habit of bullying them in the house to break the incomplete spell which Fred's action outdoors had put on him. Maltby sprang up and threatened him with a fist, roaring: "Run me down and I'll fix you!"

She pushed between the two men, around the corner of the table, pushed her left arm in front of Fred, as if to keep them apart, shoving the table off a bit to the right.

Maltby vented his anger on her. "You keep out of this! You'll back him up against me, will you? You're always making trouble."

Fred stood up and kicked the chair back from under him. It went *bump-bump,* across the floor. As he straightened to his full height, without a stoop or a cringe in his neck, the little form of his mother slipped into the hollow of his waist, and his right arm fell around her and held her there. He stood sidewise to his father, and the curve of his breast half hid his mother's body. He pressed her to him. She was crying against his shirt. The big, rounded outline of his shoulders and the muscles of his arms molded in the brown flannel sleeves amply inforced his defiance, but it was the gleam of his eyes and the tensity of his mouth when Fred turned his face that stopped Maltby.

His voice was steady and cold. "This is the last time, Pa." He opened his teeth just enough to say the command: "From now on, you treat her right."

Maltby glared at him in amazement. Fred's eyes did not waver. He stood stern of face, supple of body; but the other was rigid, working his face in surprise. The two men looked at each other for a measurable time, and in that time the meeting of two wills melted the old relationship and fused of it another. Then the father let his fist fall and shifted his feet. He turned abruptly and went out of the room.

They waited. After a while they heard him getting ready for bed. Hardly daring to believe, Fred remained standing with his mother. One boot dropped in the bedroom, and after long silence, the other. It was as though something had turned over in the deeps of the aging man's soul, there beyond the partition, and hindered his hand in mechanical habits.

Fred stooped and put his left arm under his mother's knees and carried her to the rocking-chair in front of the fire. He sat down with her on his lap and cuddled her against him. He rocked to and fro and hummed little noises. The firelight playing on his face made it look older; but even in the shadow, hers lay at his breast like a baby in strong arms.

The Night of Reckoning

The career of Fancy Dan, gunman extraordinary, comes to a crisis.

By Robert J. Casey

FANCY DAN DUNHAM, Nemesis of Kerry Patch, sat at a window in an obscure little hotel and watched a policeman in glistening rubber, directing sodden traffic through the rain.

Steaming horses, wet-streaked automobiles, and soaked, hurrying pedestrians moved in a blurred vista along the yellow sidewalks and shining black streets. The corner lamps were alight, although it was barely four o'clock, and the smoke screen of the city had settled to make the mist the more impenetrable. The swirl of life at the bottom of the abyss as seen from Dunham's window was a movement without individual factors, without identity, without shape.

Dunham watched it for a long time without changing his position. The dismal day mirrored his mood. He was an avenger who had harvested the full fruits of hatred, a phantom killer who had sat like one of the Fates with the strings of destiny in his fingers, cutting them ruthlessly as other men worked their own destruction. And he felt the terrible reaction of satiety.

A week ago his brother Steve, victim of a frame-up, had swung from a hempen cord in the courthouse yard, a sacrifice for another man's crime. A week ago, Fancy Dan had felt the fearful grip of an unseen political influence, forcing him on to courses that must lead inevitably to violent death. And he had come out of safe obscurity as an electrical engineer to wreak with his own hands the justice that had been denied his brother in the courts.

And he had succeeded beyond his expectations.

Big Tom Callaghan's mob had been exterminated, root and branch, in battles among themselves and with the police; in battles with which no tangible evidence could connect the man whom rumor, fear, and superstition had named as the presiding strategist and chief beneficiary.

Ostensibly Fancy Dan's work was done; but he knew otherwise.

Despite the removal of the mercenaries who had gone forth with the gun to perform the actual details of his assassination, he knew that the forces responsible for their activities were just as strong now as they had been when they had sent his brother to the scaffold. He realized that he might make his peace with the police.

His influence in that quarter, should he choose to exert it, might bring the city hall to time. But there remained the intangible, insidious powers of darkness that turned the wheels. So long as they remained unidentified and free to work unhampered, his head would continue to bear its price, and the length of his life would depend upon his skill with an automatic.

Back of it all lay Dan Dunham's possession of the report of an original city survey and illuminating evidence concerning a fraudulent title through which an influential newspaper had reaped an annual profit of some forty thousand dollars a year for twenty years. In its effect upon the newspaper alone its blackmailing value would have been enormous, but in its further details, linking as it did the names of several men still active as political leaders with the theft, its price as a weapon was incalculable. For years it had lain in the vault where Dan had hidden it at the climax of a newspaper circulation war that made the Patch run red. He had never so much as mentioned it to the persons principally concerned. But its effect upon city and state politics had been patent for all that. It was like the hidden flywheel of an engine, the unseen pendulum of a grandfather's clock. It had been there and it had functioned. And many men had been honest because of its existence who might have had no scruples had they been without its constant regulatory menace.

Fancy Dan had been a gunman. He had risen to a position of prominence among his own people in the Patch because of an uncanny proficiency in target practice. He had been notorious as a principal through his leadership in a period of gang warfare that had made the city's name synonymous with violence and bloodshed across a continent. If he had walked out of the hotel into the rain and had been shot in the back—as he very promptly would have been—the city would take a deep breath and compliment his executioner.

Could the people have known the truth—he smiled at the grim humor of the thought—he wondered what would be their sentiment upon learning that for more than a decade he had been the State's chief influence for good government. It was too droll—a Warwick with a limber trigger-finger who had purified politics in which he never meddled by controlling the balance of power with a blackmailing instrument which he never used!

True, the city's government had not been ideal. There had been coalitions and secret treaties between interests not affected by the guarded archives in Fancy Dan's safe. And they had built up their machines and distributed their patronage without a concern for the sword that swung by the horsehair over the heads of their rivals. But they had learned that their machine was effective only within certain circumscribed limits.

The influence of the great newspaper, for instance, was a factor without the support of which no political combination could hope to control the State. And the bosses involved in its shame were potent elements in the county. Forced to be honest themselves, they were jealous guardians of public weal, except in the case of minor offices below their sphere of activity.

SUCH an office was that held by Hallowell Grew, district attorney. He had been one of those figureheads of politics familiar in every community: a Frankenstein creation of local origin. He had been plucked out of obscurity and groomed for election by one of the city's minor party cliques. He had been allowed to slide into office to insure a fusion of interests in support of a greater machine's candidate for the senate in a future election.

Whence he had come, what were his antecedents, few persons knew. He had come to the city unheralded, and had gained a sort of odorous repute as a skillful criminal attorney. His mental equipment and lack of scruples had made him the choice of the ring for district attorney.

Once elected, it was said, he had been hard to manage. There were fat fees accruing to the office—thanks to a law enacted in the days when the city was too small to pay a district attorney enough of a salary to tempt him from the more fruitful pursuits of private practice. And Hallowell Grew, so the story went, had proved content to sacrifice his political future and ignore his obligations in the garnering of benefits that lay close to his hand.

Dunham had not been surprised to learn that the district attorney was strategist-in-chief for one of the Apache bands that had been mobilized against him. But as yet he could not guess who might be

Grew's associates in the plot, or their motives. He could only keep on the alert, without friends or associates, constantly expectant of a shot in the dark or a treacherous knife-thrust.

THERE was a knock at the door.

Fancy Dan promptly left the window for a position at the side of the room, slid a bullet into the chamber of his Luger, held it at his hip, out of sight, but aimed at the door, and called an invitation to the unexpected visitor to enter. The knob was hastily turned, the hinges squealed a sudden protest and a woman stepped into the room, a wraith of the storm with dripping cape and tam-o'shanter and wind-tossed hair. She hurriedly closed the door and turned the key in the lock. Dan Dunham lowered his pistol in surprise.

The girl was Helen Crandall—like himself a phantom of the Patch—who had crossed his path more than once in the mission that had made him the most feared man in the badlands. Once he might have married Helen had she not favored his brother Steve. And Steve might have married her had she not changed her mind a second time and eloped.

He gazed at her in puzzlement, the spontaneous pleasure of seeing her, and the unquenchable doubt of her motives struggling for dominance in his greeting.

"Well, Helen," he said, "This is something of a surprise. How did you know that I was here?"

"You ought to keep your door locked," she told him, ignoring his query.

"Yes, and attract the attention of every chambermaid and porter in the place," he countered. "Why don't you answer my question?"

"No time. I'm not the only one who knows where you are. The police have a fair idea and the district attorney's crew are on their way here now. Take my advice and leave while you still have the chance."

Dan Dunham's face clouded momentarily. It seemed that every time he met the girl she must prove her intimate connection with his enemies. But there was no gainsaying that her information usually had proved correct. He picked up his hat and raincoat.

"Whether the cops are coming or not, it's time for me to go," he said. "It's evident that this hole isn't going to be safe much longer."

"Very true," she replied, with no outward sign that she had noticed the suspicion in his attitude. "I should say not for ten minutes longer. The police are probably out in front of the hotel at this minute."

"Then you'd better go and give me a chance to clear out. There's no use in your being mixed up with me if it comes to a show-down."

"I'd better do nothing of the sort. What do you suppose I came here for?"

As usual throughout his acquaintance with her, particularly since they had been thrown together in a partnership of risk in the Patch, Fancy Dan felt his resolution weakening.

She had arranged her hair with a deft twist and stood with an assurance as complacent as if she had been at home in a dry house dress, instead of here, at a gangland crossroads, in a gown that dripped cold rivulets. She was as beautiful as a wave-kissed Lorelei, and as irresistible.

"All right," agreed Dunham, smiling, "Lead away."

She unlocked the door, cast a wary eye up and down the deserted corridor, and stepped rapidly past the elevator to an unnumbered door. She opened it, disclosing an iron staircase descending in a spiral about a standpipe. Dunham could not suppress a smile of surprised approbation. It was nothing out of the ordinary, this standpipe shaft. All public buildings had them in compliance with the city's fire ordinances. But he realized that the use of one as a means of secret flight would never have suggested itself to him.

They wound down past four other doors, emerging presently in a concrete corridor that smelled of hot oil and steam.

"These basements connect," she whispered. "I made it a point to ask the janitor before I came in. The same heating plant supplies all the buildings in this block. But I don't believe the police will think about it, Danny."

There was a mischievous note in her voice, a childish glee over the success of her trick wholly out of keeping with her character as a woman of the world, and as tantalizing as her mystery.

They were very close together in the narrow passageway—so close that when she shuddered with the chill of her wet clothing, he felt the involuntary tremor against his body—and what happened was inevitable. He seized her suddenly in both

arms and kissed her full upon her moist, cold lips. She gasped a single instinctive expression of contentment and yielded momentarily to his embrace. Then suddenly her lithe body stiffened in his grasp, and two tightly clenched little fists beat a noticeable protest against his breast.

"Danny!" she remonstrated in a shocked tone as she broke away from him. "Are you going to be like all the others?"

He was thoroughly penitent when he answered her, though inwardly his regret was that of the iron man who has caught himself in a betrayal of sentiment rather than that of the rebuked and contrite swain.

"I suppose I am, Helen," he told her in a voice not the less sincere because matter of fact. "If loving you means being 'like all the rest,' then I am going to be like all the rest."

"But you have no right."

"Admitted," he agreed. "And the denial of that right is the only one I have ever respected. I have loved you since we were kids in the Patch together. I have loved you in spite of your betrayal of Steve—in spite of continuous evidence that you have betrayed me. The memory of you has kept women out of my life. But you won't hear of it again, Helen."

She hung her head but did not answer him, and they walked on through damp, hot pipe-tunnels and dark, drippy chambers in a constraint the more noticeable because of their enforced contact. They came presently to an iron stairway and passed up into what apparently was an unused shipping-room that opened into an alley a few feet from the point where it debouched into a crowded street. The girl made a cautious reconnaissance, then turned to her companion.

"The way is clear," she announced. "I don't think you will have any trouble if you go out into the street and turn to the left."

And then she did a very incomprehensible thing. She raised herself suddenly on tiptoe and kissed him. Fancy Dan Dunham, the man of action, the wily tactician whom quickness of decision had made invulnerable, stood for a moment amazed and powerless. He was conscious vaguely of her mounting blush and trickling laughter as she ran from him and merged with other dim figures fleeing before the sweep of the rain. She was gone before he could obey the impulse to follow her.

FANCY DAN followed the steadily thinning traffic aimlessly. Flight, after all, seemed hopeless. It put off the inevitable conflict with the foe for a short time, but accomplished nothing toward bettering his situation. If the police could discover one hiding place, they could discover another. And traitorous acquaintances were constantly ready to give them what information they required.

Even now, with the kiss of Helen Crandall on his lips and the yearning for her threatening to eclipse even his instinct of self-preservation, he could not be certain that she was not leagued with those who would willingly have stabbed him between the shoulder blades.

He strode on westward, past men who would have welcomed the opportunity to kill him, effectively masked by the collar of his raincoat. And he would have wandered indefinitely had not the increasing downpour, forcing pedestrians to seek shelter, rendered him conspicuous. He was virtually alone in the storm, the single bit of driftwood afloat on the torrent that surged through the city's streets, when a traffic policeman who once had traveled a beat in the Patch glanced at him sharply. There was no recognition in the glance—merely the suspicious inquiry prompted by his heedlessness of the weather, and, perhaps, by something vaguely familiar in his carriage. The policeman turned about to resume his guidance of the negligible traffic, but his brief interest had made Dan Dunham uncomfortable. The next policeman might prove more inquisitive.

He considered for a moment the elevated that clattered overhead, then voted against it with an instinctive distrust of enclosed places from which there can be no emergency exit. In front of a big hotel, about half a block away, a number of taxicabs were mobilizing for the rush of business that the rain would bring when shops and office buildings should pour their thousands into the streets. He hailed a cab, directed the driver to a point on the edge of Kerry Patch and opened the door.

Then came catastrophe. He felt the sharp prod of an unyielding point against his ribs and a harsh voice sounded in his ear:

"Stick 'em up, Dan, we want you."

Two plain-clothes men who had just come out of the hotel stood behind him blocking his escape. Had Fancy Dan not foreseen just such a turn of events, he might

have been tempted to a spirited though useless resistance. But he had realized when first he returned to the active warfare of the Patch that sooner or later he would encounter the irresistible force of the law and that when he did so, force must be abandoned in favor of strategic maneuver. He promptly elevated his hands and stood motionless while one of the detectives removed all his weapons except a .25 caliber Mauser pistol strapped to his wrist.

"Get into the cab," ordered the man who had searched him, as the other gave new instructions to the driver. Again Fancy Dan complied.

The detectives by unspoken agreement gave him the broad rear seat to himself as they turned down the smaller chairs across the doors facing him. The cab swung north toward the river. Dan noticed this circumstance with interest. It proved that he had fallen into the hands of the district attorney's investigators rather than the police.

"Where do we go from here?" he inquired, as he settled back in the cushions.

"I think you go to stir for a long stretch," commented one of the detectives, "That is if you don't take the bumps at the end of a rope."

Fancy Dan grinned exasperatingly.

"Maybe," he conceded cheerfully. "But they'll have a lot to prove before I do either."

"Think so?" returned the detective. "Don't be too sure. At least three birds saw you when you knocked off that cop last night."

DAN continued to smile with difficulty. Here was a new development. He had taken no part in the killing of a policeman on the preceding night or any other night. He had not heard of any recent affray in which a policeman had been a victim. But he recognized the situation instantly. Since tangible evidence against him in the taking off of Callaghan's mob was lacking, he was to be confronted with manufactured evidence in a case in which he had no interest.

His grin twisted suddenly into a contemptuous sneer.

"Don't think that you're dealing with Rocco the Monk, or Gyppie the Dip," he counseled. "You're not going to get by with any frame on me. Even a dick ought to have sense enough to know that." He turned to gaze out of the rain-streaked window, unmindful of the profane comment that answered his declaration.

And so they rode across the river and over rough cobbled roads until the grim red turrets of the criminal courts building bulked out of the mist. One on each side of him, and patently afraid that he might elude them on the very threshhold of captivity, the two detectives escorted Dunham up the worn stairway and through a narrow hall to a door over which the title DISTRICT ATTORNEY appeared in shadowy letters of faded gold. They opened the door without knocking and ushered him in.

Hallowell Grew sat writing at a mahogany desk in the light of a green lamp that gave a cadaverous tint to a colorless complexion. He was an old young man with beady, deep-set eyes, a hard mouth that seemed made for lying, cheeks a bit sunken, and sparse but deep wrinkles that gave him a continual expression of saturnine mirth.

He greeted Dunham with a leer, dismissed the detectives and motioned his unwilling guest to a chair.

"You've caused us a lot of trouble, Dunham," he said, as the door closed behind the man hunters. "But you might have known that you'd be picked up eventually. I've had men trailing you ever since we found out you were at that hotel."

"I wasn't caught at the hotel," broke in Fancy Dan. "I ran into your dicks by accident and I could have got away then if I'd felt like killing one of them."

"No matter where you were caught," declared Grew, with a display of irritation. "You're caught. It's our turn now, and we intend to give you the limit."

"I had expected that," commented Dunham dryly. "I understand that I'm supposed to have killed a cop."

"And, of course, you didn't?" queried Grew sarcastically. "I suppose that this is another of those frame-ups that are continually sending innocent young gunmen to the gallows—victims of the pernicious police system."

"You've just about half described it," agreed Dunham, wondering where all this was going to lead.

"Three witnesses saw you fire the shot that killed Policeman Craig," charged Grew.

"That makes it more intricate," replied Fancy Dan, unmoved.

"That makes it almost certain that you'll follow your brother through a trap."

DUNHAM shrugged. Manufactured evidence was a fearful weapon in the hands of authority. But nothing was to be gained by admitting it.

"Come clean, Grew," he advised. "What do you want me to do?"

"I haven't said that I want you to do anything—although, of course, a complete confession might get you a prison sentence instead of the gallows."

"I'm no Hick," Dunham reminded him. "You wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of doping this out if you hadn't some play to make."

"The play I'm making," returned Grew piously, "is to rid the community of you. Of course, if I find that the community can be better served by pulling your teeth and keeping you alive, I shall take some such course." He paused, but Fancy Dan made no comment.

"You have been for ten years the city's most flagrant example of lawlessness," Grew continued. "You have been allowed to prey upon the public because of a few pusillanimous officials did not dare to cross you. You will understand before you get through with me that I do not fear you. I intend to free this city of your influence."

"Yes, I know all about that," interrupted Dunham. "But I'm not voting in this ward. Save your speech for your next campaign and let's get squared away on this. What's your proposition?"

"Just this: surrender to me the instruments of blackmail that you've held over the heads of the city administration for the past ten years and I'll show you leniency."

"Won't that be grand! And what if I don't?"

"I'll take every precaution to see that you're properly hanged."

"But that wont prevent my making a lot of unpleasant publicity for some one."

Grew smiled.

"You've dodged jail so long that you don't know much about it," he observed. "When you get locked up we'll select your attorney for you. We'll try you in a court that we can depend upon to see that you get just what's coming to you. We'll act as your press-agents in dealing with the reporters. And that ought to hold you. The papers have been clamoring for your arrest for a week, and if you did squawk now, nobody would listen to you."

"Admitted. But still I can't see that my hands would be tied. You can't get away from the facts in the case, Grew, even should you succeed in throttling me. All arrangements have been completed for the release of the evidence concerning the *Telegram's* land title and the men responsible for the fraud, the moment I pass out. Let's start from that as a basis of understanding."

"Don't forget that such publication isn't going to harm me," Grew cautioned. "And remember that should anything slip in the plans I have detailed to you, there is always the possibility that you might be shot while attempting to break ja ."

THERE was a moment of silence. Fancy Dan Dunham knew that in many particulars the district attorney was telling the truth. It seemed difficult to believe that in a city of free, law-abiding Americans, a man could be railroaded to the gallows after a mock trial and a total subversion of constitutional rights. But it had been done before. The hanging of dogs with bad names was no new undertaking for the local machine. And there was an element of fact in Grew's claim that the land-fraud revelations would have no direct effect upon him. But Fancy Dan was not deceived in his own strength and the time had not yet arrived for him to feel alarmed.

"If you aren't concerned with the evidence in my possession, what do you want it for?" he inquired suddenly.

"As I told you, for the peace of the community," returned Grew.

But Fancy Dan barely heard him. Even as he put the question he had realized the answer and was wondering why he had not guessed it before. Grew's desire for the spiked club of potential blackmail was prompted not by fear, but by the desire for mastery. He wished to get rid of Dunham, not to remove a menace but to take his place.

"I think I get you," said Dan slowly. "You are going to be a candidate for governor next fall and you have a strong combination against you—everything but the City Hall. If you could stand in my shoes awhile you could dispose of the opposition. Am I right?"

"I wont discuss that with you."

"But it's the truth. Whether you discuss it or not doesn't change the situation. Wouldn't it be easier to line me up as a partner instead of attempting to slaughter me as an enemy?"

The question was purely strategic. Dunham had no intention of allying himself with Grew or of yielding without a struggle the leadership that had been his since the days when first gun warfare had been brought to the Patch. Grew seemed to sense a trick. He stared sharply and his lips twisted into a snarl when he answered.

"You seem to forget that I hold the whip. I don't need your partnership. I don't want to have you dealing with me as you did with Callaghan's mob. If I'm going to let you remain alive, I'm going to be sure that you can't do any more harm, see?" There was triumphant menace in his attitude, assurance in his tone. Fancy Dan felt glad that the little Mauser still was strapped to his wrist. It was obvious that there was to be no compromise with Grew. The man had become a victim of his own tremendous egotism. For weeks he had plotted this scene—the discomfiture of Fancy Dan—and having obtained his object he was no longer troubled by doubts of his own indisputable supremacy. But Dunham's face remained placid as he considered his plight. He replied without loss of composure.

"That being the case, my dear Mr. Grew," he observed, "You can go as far as you like. I'll take my chances."

GREW'S malevolent face went pale, then purple. It was plain that he had expected no such opposition, and he was hardly prepared for it. But confidence in his weapons carried him across the breach when self-assurance might otherwise have failed him.

"You'll go to jail," he declared venomously. "You'll lie rotting in a pit until you get a gleam of intelligence."

Then he reached toward a button on his desk that Dunham knew would summon the detectives. But he did not press the button. As his hand was raised above it, there came the sound of a commotion at the door, a woman's voice and a man's, a brief struggle and the quick turning of the door-knob. The door flew open and a woman in the grasp of a policeman was thrust toward the center of the room.

It was Helen Crandall.

But Fancy Dan scarcely noticed her. He was gazing in fascination at Grew who had risen in his chair, staring at the woman with the manner of a man who, in deadly fright, peers at a ghost he cannot flee.

"Tell this man to get out," she ordered Grew, indicating the astonished policeman with a sweep of her arm.

Automatically the district attorney nodded his head.

"Now," she commanded, stamping a small foot. "Release Mr. Dunham at once. I have several things to say to you."

Grew sank back in his chair. All the life seemed to have gone out of him. His saturnine face, a shade or two more ghastly, was the perfect picture of that of a gambler who has watched a fortune raked in by the croupier because the little ball stopped at black instead of red.

"Mr. Dunham," he said, in a voice that Fancy Dan did not recognize. "You may go. I'll tell the detectives."

He reached over wearily and pressed the button on his desk.

IT had stopped raining when Dan Dunham reached the street. The air was close, unbreathable with the sticky, moist heat that follows a summer shower. He could not rid himself of its depressing influence.

The detectives who had captured him followed him to the door and stood on the steps watching him as he walked out into thickening twilight. They were good soldiers, obeying to the letter orders that they could not understand. In his release they saw the glimmering of their credit for a spectacular arrest and they glowered at him in farewell. But he did not see them. He was pondering upon the all-obsessing fact that before daylight he must kill Hallowell Grew.

It was not so much the completed evidence of Helen Crandall's connection with the men who plotted his death that drove him on. With reference to her he felt as though a woman who had miraculously risen from the dead had clothed herself once more in her grave clothes and gone back to her tomb. Had she been a man he would gladly have throttled her. But she was a woman—more than that, a woman whom he had kissed not three hours gone. He could not feel toward her the hate that her perfidy should have inspired. It came to him that so thoroughly was she a creature apart from the rest of the world that she could not be fettered by the codes of honor and ethics that governed less-favored mortals. And having chosen her way, she could travel it in peace for all of him.

But Grew's case was different. He had raised the cry of no quarter and Fancy Dan had lived in the powder-pocked badlands of the Patch long enough to know what that meant. The city had become suddenly too small to hold both of them. If Grew remained alive, Dunham's life would be forfeit. Whatever was the strange influence exerted by the girl, it was impossible that it could long restrain the unscrupulous ambitions of the district attorney. Fancy Dan released the Mauser from its wrist holster by a simple pressure on the spring that held the trigger guard. He examined it carefully as he laid his plans for the coming execution.

There was a sardonic humor in the situation. He could kill Grew in cold blood with only average regard for concealment, apply the screws to a few official thumbs the next day, and go free. For no one else in the city's political crime bund would have so strong a motive of crazy ambition and personal hatred for railroading him. Or he could wait until the intriguer in the criminal court building rearranged his plans and had him shot down by an unseen assassin in the streets or hanged as his brother had been in expiation of a crime he had not committed. To avoid blame for murder he must commit murder.

HALLOWELL GREW was a man of fixed habit in one respect. He visited Madam Lisenderella's restaurant every night at midnight. There was the office from which he pulled the wires that reached down to the underworld that did his bidding. There he passed out and received the gratuities that enabled his régime to function. There he met the representatives of the invisible government who for divers reasons did not care to present themselves at the criminal courts building.

Fancy Dan knew of this habit as did everyone else conversant with the ways of the badlands. And he gave no second thought to the possible scene of his encounter. Madam Lisenderella's simplified everything.

The Madam's place was a going proof of the adage that merit brings a path to one's door. For the street in which her restaurant was situated was dismally removed from the highways of traffic. It paralleled the river and provided an unbeautiful passageway between row upon row of boarding-houses, squalid little shops, and out-at-the-elbow apartment-buildings, a panorama of genteel poverty.

At eleven o'clock when Fancy Dan Dunham stepped into a booth along the wall for a cup of coffee and a bit of food, only a few tables were occupied.

The sleepy-eyed waiter gave him scarcely a glance. The few belated patrons paid close attention to coffee or cigarettes and seemed not at all concerned with his coming or the casual scrutiny to which he subjected them.

He sipped his coffee complacently, assured himself that no detectives from the district attorney's office were loitering there, paid his bill and passed out into the street.

Fancy Dan walked a few steps to the corner, effaced himself in the shadows of a doorway, and waited.

The street was dark and melancholy and empty. Opposite the restaurant a flickering gas-lamp cast weird silhouettes against the blue and red panes of a fanlight above the door of a flat building. In the distance glowed a green point in a frame of white—a jar of fluid in a druggist's window. In the near foreground an undertaker's assistant, asleep at his desk, gave a grotesque note to the somber hangings of a funeral parlor. Otherwise, the scene was a long vista of a deserted canyon. Fancy Dan congratulated himself. Barring some untoward accident he could not have wished for an arrangement of circumstances better suited to his ends. He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to twelve.

His quick ear caught the sound of hurrying footsteps. Instinctively he shrank back farther into the shadows and listened. . . . . There were two persons. No midnight loiterers, these! There was purposeful rythm in their steps. The click of heels sounded like drum beats. . . . . Women!

They were coming from the direction of Hallowell Grew's office, within a very few seconds of the schedule that he invariably followed. Fancy Dan was cursing the fate that had sent them into the neighborhood as they passed under the corner lamp. He started in spite of himself. One was a woman he had never seen before. He caught a glimpse of wild eyes, flying hair and tear-streaked cheeks. Her companion was Helen Crandall.

Both passed without seeing him and turned into the restaurant. Fancy Dan

Dunham was out of his shelter and following them before he had time to analyze his reasons. Intuitively he realized that here was a development worth his investigation, outside of the necessity for making certain that they would be out of his way when he should settle his final score with Hallowell Grew. Through the glass doors he watched them pass through the little foyer into the restaurant. He opened the door and went in after them.

He had believed that he would be able to discover the location of their table and booth in a very few seconds without disclosing his presence either to the attachés of the café, or the women he was watching. But then occurred one of those mischances that no amount of skillful preparation can obviate. Helen Crandall and her companion had not taken a table. They had merely passed into the big dining-room, turned about and come out again. They met him with disconcerting suddenness, face to face.

Helen's worried face lighted joyously.

"Danny," she cried. "I knew you'd be here. And I'm so glad." She seized him by the arm and led him toward the door.

"I need your help, Danny," she told him excitedly. "We have to get this girl across the State line to some town where she can get a train East. The police are guarding every station."

Her ardent appeal stirred no answering enthusiasm.

"I'm going to be busy tonight," he told her. His lack of concern was worse than bitterness. "I have a score to settle with a friend of yours tonight."

She interrupted him by patting his lips with her gloved hand.

"Wait, boy," she urged him. "The score's all settled."

He looked at her in incredulous amazement.

"Hallowell Grew—" he began incoherently.

"Hallowell Grew is dead," the girl stated with a harshness scarcely less astonishing than the announcement itself.

"Dead!" he repeated, unable to doubt her, unable to believe.

For the first time he gave attention to the worn little woman at Helen's side. She had gone ghastly white and was shaking violently.

"Dead!" she laughed hysterically. "I shot him when he came out of his office. And he knew I did it. He knows it in hell where he is now—" She collapsed in Dunham's arms.

IT was well on toward daybreak as Fancy Dan and Helen Crandall sped back from the South Shore State line in Dunham's car. To Dan the streaks of purple across the east were harbingers of a new era that would last indefinitely longer than the day they ushered in. The man hunt was over. Shoptown could put its guns back into the rack and the sons of the Patch could die peacefully in their beds once more. It was still unexplainable, but very real.

The girl at his side snuggled close to him.

"Have you nothing to ask me, Dan?" she queried.

"Yes, if you care to answer," he said. "Who was that woman?"

"She was Hallowell Grew's legal wife. He deserted her years ago to marry another girl, bigamously."

Dunham started, but was silent for a while as he pondered upon the night's fateful events. The little kinks of the puzzle were straightening themselves one by one.

"And you, Helen?" he asked at length. "Why did you come back to the Patch?"

"I was looking for Grew to avenge an injustice," she said. "It never occurred to me that he might have risen so high in the world. Friends on the police force kept me informed of everything except that. I did not learn for certain until tonight that he was district attorney. His name wasn't Grew when I knew him—It was Crandall—"

Dunham turned upon her sharply.

"Then you—"

"Righto, Danny. I'm the girl he 'married' after he deserted his wife. Before I found it out, he deserted me."

"Poor little girl," murmured Fancy Dan. But there was an elation in his heart that gave a strange inflection to the pity in his words.

"Free," he told himself. "Helen, back again and free."

"Do you wish to know anything else, Danny?" she inquired after a pause.

"Yes," he declared, as he brought the car to a sudden stop. "Will you marry me?"

And after the fashion of a musketeer of the Patch, he took her answer for granted.

Partnership Retained

A strange drama of the Louisiana swamps.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

WHEN Lui Wun Wing first turned up in New Orleans, he was, to white men, only a a tall, lean, rather vindictive-looking Chinaman, who spoke excellent English and was a stranger in Louisiana.

Nine out of ten yellow men in the United States are Cantonese, or of the six families. Lui Wun Wing spoke Cantonese with difficulty, Mandarin with great fluency. The name on his red visiting cards was not Lui Wun Wing at all, and was followed by certain curious pothooks. These were Manchu characters, and were all Greek to the Cantonese merchants whom he interviewed. In effect, this man was not a Chinaman. He was a Manchu and a hunter.

The merchants, learning his business, directed him to one Colonel Slade.

"Slade is a person of vile character," they told Lui Wun Wing. "He is powerful among evil men, and rules the Gulf coast; the law cannot touch him. He has no reverence for his ancestors. However, we understand that he keeps his word."

Lui Wun Wing went to see Colonel Slade, and found him directing the overhaul of a motor-cruiser, in a shop of Latouche, on the bayou of like name. Slade was a young fellow not much over twenty years old—an astonishing fact, in virtue of his reputation. His features were a perfect mask of cold cruelty, vice, passionate iniquity. His underworld influence was tremendous. He actually ruled this section of the coast.

The yellow man gave his name, gravely shook hands, waited. They were standing in the shop, beside the updrawn launch. The eyes of the two men met searchingly, inquiringly. Then Slade spoke, and since he knew nothing more of Lui Wun Wing than his eyes told him, the words did him infinite credit.

"Glad to meet you. I've been wishing a man like you would come along."

They went up to the bare little house which Slade had rented for the winter, and sat down. Lui Wun Wing wasted no time beating about the bush, but set forth his proposition bluntly—not as one would expect of an Oriental.

"I understand that you control Bayou Latouche—shrimpers, fishermen, outlaws and negroes," he said calmly. "I desire to introduce a philanthropy here."

Slade's thin lips twitched. "Name it."

"There is much gin and abominable whisky being circulated. I desire to change this. I will bring in a number of

Chinese, and we will make rice wine and arak—good liquors instead of bad. You will handle the distribution."

Slade looked into those blank, imperturbable eyes, and drummed with his fingers on the table-top. No man knew better than Slade of the present traffic in illicit liquors, since it was all under his own thumb. He was forced to a swift decision.

"Very well," he said quietly, knowing that the words portended a revolution in underworld circles. "We have a perfectly secure place at Cypremort. I'll turn it over to you, guarantee protection against any except Federal officers, and handle the distribution. I will take fifty per cent of the profits."

"That is satisfactory," said the tall Manchu, with a searching glance. "I am glad I came to you, Mr. Slade. I had much rather be your ally than your enemy."

Slade laughed in his thin fashion.

"I was thinking the same thing about you, Lui Wun Wing! We'll get on."

Get on they did. Often, in the weeks and months that followed, the tall, spare figure of Lui Wun Wing might be seen beneath the awning of some fast launch, or alone in a wide-bellied canoe. He became a familiar figure on the streets of Latouche, the parish seat; by the deep sea-channels that emptied between the Delavergne and Banfield plantations into the Gulf itself; among the secluded and moss-trailed bayous where blacksnake and rattler fought, and where outlaws peered forth from the gray moss over gun-sights—the warm bayous where no honest man ventured and no stranger was allowed.

Slade throve exceedingly on the new diet of rice wine and arak, financially speaking. So, presumably, did Lui Wun Wing, who never mentioned his private affairs. It will be perceived that they were vile and vicious characters; one grants that readily. In both was a genius for subtle intrigue and villainy, for callous self-determination at the expense of any who interfered; a sublime indifference to any law save that of the individual.

CORDELIA BANFIELD was walking dreamily along a path at the upper end of the Banfield plantation, a volume of Shakespeare in her hand, when she first met Lui Wun Wing. Since she was only eighteen, and the average person does not read Shakespeare from choice until arriving at years of weariness and hunger, it will be perceived that Cordelia was no average person.

What lifted her from the ordinary was difficult to say. It was some intangible inner quality, some *élan vital,* beyond words. Frail and delicate as finest steel, a fair flower topped by waves of brownish hair and lighted by eyes of golden hazel—ah, the eyes held the secret! Whoever met those eyes felt a deep peace stealing into his soul. Now, was this some quality of the girl's personality, or was it something which she evoked from others? Who knows?

She became aware of Lui Wun Wing striding along the path toward her, a tall figure in his soiled khaki garments, his face stern and cold and untouched by human warmth. They came face to face, and halted. Cordelia perceived that he was a stranger to her.

"Who are you?" she asked, unstartled. "What are you looking for here?"

She inspected Lui Wun Wing curiously. Under her gaze something stirred in that blank saffron face; some invisible thing warmed into life, brought a human glint into the black eyes, gave the thin lips and nostrils a touch of gentleness. Suddenly the cruel harshness of that face had been transmuted to refined delicacy.

"I am looking," said Lui Wun Wing reflectively, "as we would say in China, for a balanced heart—*p'ing-an,* we would call it. And for what are you seeking?"

His words banished all the prosaic. The depth in his eyes frightened her, and yet strangely attracted her. Cordelia Banfield smiled faintly.

"A balanced heart!" she repeated. "I like that. It means something. What am I seeking? I do not know; but I think life is very unhappy."

A smile warmed on the lips of Lui Wun Wing.

"That is because you see with the eyes of youth," he said gently, "and they are very wonderful eyes. I am an old man, and to me life seems good—too rare a thing lightly to be risked."

Into her cheeks rose a faint color. Smiling, she went her way and forgot that she had meant to ask this man's business on her land. He was an astonishing person, in his look and diction and in his entire personality!

A week after this, Cordelia, alone in a canoe, was garnering a huge mass of

yellow-belled lilies from one of the backwaters up the bayou. She had pushed close in to the moss-hung bank to gather some huge white blooms, when she perceived two black objects in the grass. They were shoes. Startled, she looked up to perceive the immobile, silent figure of Lui Wun Wing standing there, watching her with a grave smile. The girl broke into a laugh, for beneath his gaze the fear fled out of her.

"Why, your shoes startled me! Have you been there all the time?"

He inclined his head. "I was thinking. I did not wish to startle you."

Her eyes widened upon him questingly, inquiringly, reflectively.

"I should like to know your thoughts," she said simply. "I think they must be good."

"They were of you," he responded. "You seem to me like a narcissus. Do you know what a narcissus is called in China? *Shui-hien,* or water-fairy; and I think you are a water-fairy, so I shall give you that name."

"And I shall call you Balanced Heart," she returned, a flame in her hazel eyes. "Will you come down and talk? And where did you learn to speak such excellent English?"

"From those who spoke it badly," said Lui Wun Wing.

Now, such was the beginning of their friendship, which grew firmly from week to week along certain natural lines. They met often after this, perhaps not altogether by chance, and discussed many abstract topics, such as music and poetry and the greatness of the deep longings of the heart. The strange thing was that Lui Wun Wing could understand the young-girl sadness and happiness and indefinable spirituality of Cordelia, and that he could answer it in kind. There are few men of fifty who can discuss a glowing thought, or even recognize it, in the wonderful light of *vingt ans* —with the heart uncorroded by experience, the brain untouched by too much knowledge, the singing soul unquenched by elder years. Perhaps he could do this because he was an Oriental. Who knows?

And if Cordelia dreamed about this strange man who in the far-off years of his own land had been a prince and a ruler, and whom she now knew quaintly as Balanced Heart, her dream held the essential simplicity and personal detachment of a child unhurt.

MEANWHILE the outlaws of the canebrakes and the negroes of the bayous and the thousands of Chinese and Filipino shrimpers were drinking liquor made from soured rice, and were paying good prices for the luxury.

The power of Colonel Slade grew with increasing riches. A singular man, this Slade—young, yet infamously old for his years, with good blood somewhere behind him. None knew who he was for a certainty, although there were many evil whispers aslant through the Spanish moss, and the bayous murmured many a frightful secret to the stars. Perhaps it was no secret, after all. Perhaps it was one of those things which everyone knows but which no one dares to breathe.

One day, when he was in Latouche buying some supplies, Lui Wun Wing surprised a terrible utterance on the lips of Slade.

They were standing together beneath an awning and looking down the street, when Lui Wun Wing saw the face of Slade change imperceptibly. He sought for the reason and saw Cordelia Banfield, silk parasol above her head, walking across the street at the end of the block. She had not observed them. Lui Wun Wing looked again at his partner.

Slade was staring at the girl's figure, a frightful look in his eyes. They were eyes of iron, deadly and unyielding; but now there was deep emotion in them. The keen sophistication of that face was touched with the breath of some hidden passion. From level brows to thin lips, the face was aflame.

"She is very beautiful," said Lui Wun Wing calmly.

"My—my mother looked like that," said Slade, and then turned away and was gone.

Frowning a little, Lui Wun Wing went his way. He was not sure of his partner, not certain of the man at all; there were strange depths to this old-young man which evaded even the piercing eye of Lui Wun Wing. He had never asked many questions of Slade, and few of other people. He was content with his own observations. Yet suddenly his observations frightened him. So far as he knew, Slade had nothing to do with women; still, such men often preyed upon silent victims, and in silence.

The Manchus have ever been, by tradition, a race of pure fighters and huntsmen. This was why Manchus were supported by the state, solely to bear arms;

this was why they lived in the quarters of bannermen outside every Chinese city. This was why the imperial family, until late emperors abandoned the custom, spent a large share of each year in the chase, with as much ritual and formal observance as was ever in vogue under the Valois or the Bourbons. It was in the blood of Lui Wun Wing, who once had worshiped before the great Altar of Heaven, to be a hunter.

One day, when he was talking with Cordelia, Lui Wun Wing casually mentioned the name of Colonel Slade. At this name a subtle change took place in the features of the girl; it was as though a thin shadow had fallen athwart the sun. A swift pallor edged her lips for an instant. Her hazel eyes darkened and deepened, as though far inside of her the sound of that name had produced a numbing sense of shock. Lui Wun Wing smoothly abandoned his topic, and the look went out of her face.

Now, at this, Lui Wun Wing became terribly frightened—not for himself, but for Cordelia Banfield. When a Manchu is angry, he becomes no longer fully master of himself. But when he is frightened, he becomes dangerous.

Lui Wun Wing was extremely frightened.

WHEN Lui Wun Wing was next in Latouche, he announced to Slade a change of policy.

"I am not coming here any more," he said briefly. "I do not think it is wise for us to be seen together so much. I shall remain at Cypremort."

Slade regarded him with a thin smile. Those iron eyes were deadly and inscrutable; now, however, one might fancy that they held a lurking devil of suspicion, and that the smile upon the cruelly chiseled lips was sneering with hostility.

"As you prefer," said Slade. "What's the attraction there?"

"The pursuit of a balanced heart," returned Lui Wun Wing placidly.

Slade shrugged his shoulders. Lui Wun Wing departed to the ruined plantation house of Cypremort, lost amid the canebrakes of the upper bayou—returned to his dozen yellow men sweating naked among the vats of soured rice, and to his queer account-book kept in pothook Manchu characters that not five Chinamen in America could read.

These days, Slade was much away from Latouche. His organization was composed mainly of fishermen—Cajuns, Italians and others. He was often gone for days, taking kegs of liquid fire in fast motorboats up and down the bayous, sometimes even up to Lake Pontchartrain itself. He was returning from one such trip up the Atchafalaya, when he encountered a Cajun member of his band, a man who had a message for him. This man came to the stern of the motorboat and spoke privately with Slade.

"They have been together again," he said, with animal-like indifference to the effect of his words. "She spent an entire afternoon alone with him, in his canoe. They went toward Cypremort, where one might not follow them because of the yellow men."

A mortal pallor overspread the features of Colonel Slade.

"Her father is still away?" he asked, in a curiously level voice.

"But yes. There is no word of his return."

Colonel Slade went on home to Latouche. Almost the first person he encountered in the street of the town was John Coffee; and Coffee was drunk.

A strange man, this Coffee, who was overseer of the Banfield plantation—and since Banfield was away from home much of the time, second father to the motherless Cordelia. He was a huge fellow with unkempt gray beard, singular strength and power about his eyes, curious lines of weakness and sentiment about his lips. Drunk or sober, he was master of himself, a man to be trusted, a man who loved Cordelia with all his soul. Slade knew that the man wrote poetry in secret, and Slade was mildly contemptuous of Coffee; he knew also that Coffee both hated and feared him.

But now, with whisky lending him heart, Coffee planted himself in Slade's path.

"I want to tell you something, Colonel Slade!" he growled. "You an' your gang quit sellin' rotten liquor to my niggers—heah me, suh? The next man of yours I catch on my land, I'll tie him to a post an' take a blacksnake to him!"

Slade regarded him with bitter venom.

"You old fool!" he said softly. "One of these days I'll land you in hell."

He caught Coffee's wrist, jerked it, sent the old man staggering, and walked on. Presently he halted and looked after the gaunt gray figure.

"And that's the man," he said aloud, as though speaking to himself, "that's the man who's responsible for Cordelia Banfield's safekeeping!"

A thin smile was upon his lips as he went his way; but a yellow man, who had been placidly smoking in the shade of an umbrella-tree, carried word of these things to Cypremort.

UPON another day Slade was going down the bayou, alone in his light-draft cruiser, when he perceived Cordelia Banfield in a canoe gathering lilies near the bank. He shut off his power and glided down upon her canoe.

"Good afternoon, Cordelia!" he said, sweeping off his hat with a hint of mockery in eyes and voice. "Don't you know you should not be prowling around these bayous alone?"

Cordelia gazed at him without fear, but with a curious mingling of detestation and sadness widening her eyes.

"Is that any business of yours, Colonel Slade?" she asked quietly. The man's face changed imperceptibly, softening in a most singular manner.

"Of course it is, Cordelia," he responded. "Haven't you a single atom of love left for me in your heart?"

"No," she said calmly. "You are not the man you used to be."

Slade's lips clenched for an instant. Then:

"Get aboard here," he curtly ordered. "I'll take you home and tow your canoe. Get aboard, before I lift you in!"

The girl stood up, a flash of scorn in her eyes.

"You are—insufferable!" she cried angrily.

"Conceded," said Slade, smiling thinly. "None the less, I intend to look after you, Cordelia. Some day you shall love me again. Will you get in, or shall I lift you in?"

A hot flush of anger in her face, the girl came aboard the motorboat. Slade attached the painter of the canoe, and started his craft down the bayou toward the Banfield place.

What lay between these two? There was none to answer. But when Slade's boat had gone, the hanging tendrils of moss on the bayou bank were parted, and between them appeared the figure of Lui Wun Wing, gazing after the motor-cruiser in his immobile, placid fashion.

When Colonel Slade returned to Latouche that evening, he summoned to his rented house the two men who served him best of all his organization. These two were the Agousti brethren, Jean and Hypolite. There was a price on the head of each man, but being under the protection of Colonel Slade, they could appear in the town without hindrance from the law.

Slade gave each of these men a hundred dollars in crisp new bills.

"Who is it to be?" asked Hypolite indifferently, after counting the money.

"Lui Wun Wing," said Slade. The two brethren chuckled.

"When?" inquired Jean.

"At once."

"And where shall we report?"

"Here."

"Now we can buy new rifles," said Hypolite with a nod of assent. "The good God is kind to brave men!"

"*A demain,*" said Jean, who was a person of few words. "Come!"

"Not at all," returned Hypolite, a man who loved to correct his brother. "*A lendemain,* you mean! It is necessary to buy the rifles which we shall christen, and to re-calk the bow plank of the boat—"

"As you will," said Jean. "Come!"

The iron eyes of Slade dwelt upon them as they departed. He knew that he could depend upon these two brethren to the death. The execution of his partner was now certain.

"*A lendemain!*" he murmured.

FOR fifty years Cypremort had been abandoned and forgotten. It lay remote amid canebrakes; wild rice had choked the bayou channels and left it inaccessible, an island amid swamps. Its great house had been swallowed up amid trees. The only sign of life now remaining here, to a casual eye, was the landing-place where boats were moored.

On this landing stood Lui Wun Wing, talking with two yellow men. Since they did not understand Mandarin, he addressed them in the oldest tongue of China, which is Cantonese.

"You will be at Slade's house at eight o'clock tonight," he said.

"We understand, Excellency," they returned in unison, their faces dull and lifeless, their hands thrust up their sleeves, their shoulders rounded.

"At the signal, you will strike. Your hatchets are sharp?"

The question was needless. One of these twain had slain seven men in Pell Street before his own *tong* outlawed him. The other had cut down three Hip Sings in Grant Avenue before the *fan quai* obtained his fingerprints and caused him to flee.

Lui Wun Wing stepped into his wide-bellied canoe and paddled away.

He was not an expert canoeist; he was something much better—a Manchu. He had come to know shortcuts and little twining creeks among the canes which even the outlaws of the brakes had never learned. Instead of kneeling to paddle, he sat upon a cushion, his feet crossed, a revolver under one knee. Upon his head was the thing which rendered him distinctive, the wide, bowl-like hat of straw. It was a coolie's hat, stained black, coming down and concealing his features from the sunlight. That hat was known everywhere for the hat of Lui Wun Wing. Men never needed to see his face to recognize the man.

Under his propelling arms the canoe slid through long, sunlit alleys of water, along which trailed aimless lengths of clustering gray-green moss from the trees above. It followed trackless ways of wild rice and cane, where silent things slithered away from its approach, where thin snakes passed through the water like black flames. Perhaps a sun-blackened hand would push away a tangle of greenery, and a wildly bearded face would look down at the intruder, only to recognize the black straw hat of Lui Wun Wing, and vanish.

The recesses of the bayous have their own secrets, many of them. No man knows what happens there. No mind can conjecture what may happen there, where the sunlight filters down in greenish masses of heat. Amid those aisles of intolerable desolation sound is lessened and lost. A rifle-shot becames an echo. A human voice becomes an absurdity, unless it utters a death-cry. In this event it becomes a natural phenomenon, nothing more.

WITHIN these recesses, where agents of death both human and divine might lurk at every turning, the two Agousti brethren had separated in order to watch two certain channels which issued from Cypremort. Jean took the flat-bottomed boat, and poled it away into silence and green depths. Hypolite sat upon a fallen log where he could watch the twist of the channel from behind a curtain of moss.

As he sat there, waiting, Hypolite Agousti fondled his new rifle with loving pride. He had an affection for good weapons, this man-killer of the brakes. By these he lived, and for them he lived. He might forget his packet of food, his bottle of water, but not the oil for his rifle. He might lose his footing while poling his boat and upset into the bayou; but while he sank, his arm would hold his rifle above the corroding touch of the water.

Hypolite Agousti had been waiting here a long while, immobile, wide awake and yet sound asleep. His senses might slumber, but the first sight of a boat through the matted moss would set his snaky eye to quivering. He sat so motionless and relaxed that a gray squirrel ran across his foot without perceiving his existence.

But suddenly Hypolite Agousti moved.

His eye saw something move—something that was not part of the bayou life. Instantly he was wide awake, and his rifle was lifting. Around the twisting turn of the bayou came the shape of a canoe, slowly drifting on the sluggish current. She came stern first. In the stern, his back to Hypolite, sat a man who was bent over.

It appeared that this man was leaning forward, his hands fumbling at a shoelace or some object in the bottom of the canoe. He had evidently just paused for the work, since across the canoe in front of him lay his paddle, still wet. Although his back was turned, there was no possible doubt of his identity. Hypolite Agousti recognized that black straw hat, like an inverted bowl; he also recognized the canoe. They belonged to Lui Wun Wing.

Without moving from where he sat, Hypolite lifted his rifle, put it through the screen of moss without causing a stir of the hanging clusters, and sighted upon the back of the man in the canoe, now slowly drifting to him. A glint of satisfaction, even of amusement, came into his eyes as he sighted over his new rifle for his first shot.

He fired.

The sound of the shot lifted heavily, appeared to be oppressed by the frightful desolation of the bayou solitude, and died. Hypolite grunted, and leaned forward, as he saw the figure in the boat topple over and fall sidewise. The canoe rocked to the thrust of weight, and the black straw hat fell away.

A cry of incredulous horror broke from Hypolite. The face of the man he had shot was not the face of Lui Wun Wing

at all—it was not even a yellow face! It was the face of a white man, a Cajun outlaw, and it bore a blue bullet-hole between the eyes—not the mark of Hypolite's bullet! It was the face of Jean Agousti.

"Dieu!" cried out the horrified man making a strangled noise in his throat. The cry rang dead upon the bayou recesses. *"Dieu!* What have I done?"

"You have failed," said the voice of Lui Wun Wing, from behind him.

There was another sound that lifted among the bayous. It was only the bark of a revolver, however, and the silence crushed it out almost at once, without even an echo.

AT eight o'clock in the evening Colonel Slade sat in the front room of his house, reading. The negro woman who cooked his meals had departed. He was alone.

This house of his was a bare place, carelessly furnished. An oil lamp hung in chains from the ceiling. In one corner was a buhl escritoire gone to sad decay, the brasses spiraling upward at odd angles. In another was a bookcase overflowing with books.

The night was sultry, humid with coming rain and storm. Colonel Slade, for coolness, sat as usual in the corner of the room where the two large windows gave an occasional current of air; one window was at his left, the other at his right. These windows, whose openings were now covered only by mosquito-bar, gave upon the darkness of the vine-shrouded "gallery," as a veranda is termed in Louisiana.

There was no sound in the room, save the steady turn of a page, or the rustling of huge leaves of a banana-tree outside. Colonel Slade was absorbed in the book on his knee, reading it with an intent con centration; he was entirely relaxed, his brain keenly busied with the printed words before him. What was this book, which could so interest this singular man—some lewdly translated "Decameron," perhaps, or the dialogues of the *heteræ,* or the famous Liber Crypticus that was stolen from Diane de Poictiers upon a night of August in the year 1553?

Not at all. It was "The Confessions of St. Augustine."

Suddenly a step sounded from the gallery outside. A slight frown crossed the face of Slade, but he did not glance up from his book for a moment, until the door opened. Then his eyes lifted, and he saw Lui Wun Wing, hatless, standing in the doorway.

At this, Slade closed the volume and laid it on the floor beside him.

"You need not get up," said Lui Wun Wing calmly. The words held a menace which was clear and evident.

"Very well," said Slade. "Will you sit down? I am surprised to see you. I hope nothing has gone wrong?"

Lui Wun Wing smiled grimly. He pulled up a chair, seated himself, produced cigarettes and extended the case. Slade accepted a cigarette and proffered matches.

"Nothing has gone wrong," said Lui Wun Wing after a moment of silence. Then he added, as by an afterthought: "Yet!"

Silence again. Slade, had he not been watching his visitor intently, would have then observed an extremely remarkable incident. The mosquito-bar over the window to his right was suddenly and swiftly parted asunder, from top to bottom, by a thin wedge of steel. At the same instant, the netting over the window to Slade's left was sundered with the same swift silence by a second wedge of steel. Then the strange instruments vanished.

These wedges were hatchets, which might well have served as razors.

"I have something important to say, which you may or may not understand," Lui Wun Wing was grave, unimpassioned, inscrutable. "It concerns Miss Cordelia Banfield."

In the face of Slade was visible a slight convulsion, which might have come from surprise or passion, or both. It vanished.

"I have for some time observed," pursued the Manchu, emotionless as bronze, "that you are deeply interested in her, while she is in fear and dislike of you. Your interest cannot be blamed; it is accounted for by a natural law. You are a vile and evil person, steeped in the lowest of iniquity, without conscience and with only a certain lingering sense of higher qualities left to you. She is a spirit incarnate, the essence of all that is finest and purest in the world. It is natural that you should desire her. That is to say, it is natural—but it is also frightful. The gods have sent me to save her from you."

"So the pot calls the kettle black!" he observed. "Very interesting! Only, Lui, I have been thinking exactly the same thoughts about you, which you have so feelingly voiced about me! And, if I may ask, by what right do you feel such solici-

tude for a girl not of your race? Perhaps you love her?"

Lui Wun Wing did not miss the bitter threat in the voice, the venom in the iron eyes. Yet he gazed at Slade with unchanged gravity.

"Certainly," he admitted. "I love her." His voice became hushed and reverent, as when one speaks of some high and sacred thing. "Not as a white man thinks of love—no. I love her as one loves a flower, a shining star, a mountain, the curled crest of a wave!"

"Likely!" sneered Slade.

"Perhaps you cannot understand." The Manchu's tone was inflexible. "You are young; you can see only the love of passion. Well, I too was once young! That is why I, who have come to like and to admire you in many ways, have come here to kill you—in order to save her from your ill-considered passion. She is my friend; and to me, friendship means a great deal."

SLADE leaned forward. His eyes were intent, troubled, startled.

"If I thought you were telling the truth!" he murmured. "It is impossible—"

"The truth?" Lui Wun Wing smiled ironically. "Have I any reason to lie to you, when I am about to kill you?"

Slade drew a deep breath.

"I believe you—upon my soul, I believe you!" he exclaimed. "Fool that I was! It seemed to me that you were meeting her deviously, that you were plotting and scheming to entrap her, that you, a Chinaman—"

Lui Wun Wing started. His brows drew down, and bent upon Slade a sudden, piercing look that was terrible to meet. Yet Slade met it, unfaltering.

"What is this?" asked the Manchu in a changed voice. "Was this the reason you had me spied upon and followed? No, no—she fears you! You are lying to me."

Colonel Slade leaned forward. All the callous cynicism was ripped away from his cruel face; one would have said that in this moment his face warmed into life for the first time.

"Fears me!" he repeated. "Yes, it is true, Lui. She fears me. They all fear and hate me—she and old Coffee and Banfield himself. And why? Simply because they once loved me, when—when times were different, when I was a boy—before I became an old man, before I had plunged into crime and evil, before I was disinherited and outcast—when I bore another name than the one I now bear!"

His head dropped, and he remained sunk in a profound dejection.

"That does not matter—I shall kill you none the less," said Lui Wun Wing calmly. "I shall not allow you to prey upon that girl. So you thought such things of *me!* That was because your mind was evil. This was the reason you put the Agousti brothers on my trail?"

At this question the head of Slade jerked up. Startled alarm flashed in his eyes.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten. But how do you know this? You did not meet them, surely? I am sorry that I was so mistaken, Lui—I did not know."

"No, I did not meet them," said Lui Wun Wing, brushing aside this miracle of an apology which he had extorted. "But they met me."

To these words his air imparted a dreadful significance. Slade stared at him, transfixed.

"You understand my purpose?" went on the Manchu, inflexible as bronze. "Then there remains nothing more to be said. You understand why I shall kill you—for the same reason you would have killed me."

"Because I love Cordelia," said Slade, and suddenly smiled. "But you are mistaken, Lui." He leaned forward and whispered four words.

The face of Lui Wun Wing altered; its terrible immobility became shaken, fluxed, distorted. He regarded Slade attentively for a long moment. Then his lips parted and he uttered two low words in Cantonese.

In the windows to right and left of Slade appeared the passive figures of the two hatchetmen. They stood motionless, silent, their dull eyes fastened upon Lui Wun Wing. He made a gesture, and they departed, melting into the night.

There was an instant of silence. Then Lui Wun Wing rose to his feet and stretched out his hand to Slade, who rose and grasped it.

"You see, I believe you," he said with quiet dignity. "So, then, your real name—"

"My real name is Banfield," said Slade, and he repeated the four words which had created so profound an impression on the Manchu. "She is my sister."

Lui Wun Wing turned to the door.

"The shipment of arak will be ready in two days," he said, and departed.

The partnership was retained.

December Corn

A Romance of the Stock-Market

By Vernie E. Connelly

SOME young people start their married life by trying to outdo their friends in the great game of spending. The Forbes reversed this well-established American custom and began by seeing how much they could save. Not that they were stingy, indeed not! You couldn't find a more comfortable and artistic four-room flat anywhere on the South Side than theirs. And as for hospitality! Jerry's bachelor friends angled quite openly for dinner invitations and dropped in without them on Sunday evening, being certain of biscuits with home-made jelly, or waffles and maple syrup. No, there wasn't a bit of scrimping from start to finish in their mode of living, yet the figures in their bank book simply grew like a husky infant.

And it was all because Betty was a household wizard, Jerry vaingloriously declared. He never tired of repeating the story of his mother's visit to them, at the conclusion of which she dutifully proffered the advice that extravagant meals were well enough if you could afford them, but!

But Betty wasn't angry, not a bit. She simply laughed good-naturedly and with pardonable pride produced her housekeeping books to prove that she had actually locked the H. C. L. out in an inhospitable world, while she continued to feed her Jerry on the daintiest food ever cooked in a kitchen.

After which, no young woman ever had a more admiring mother-in-law, and Jerry was heartily admonished always to keep his appreciation of so model a wife at white heat. Which warning was not needed. Betty was worth all the radium in the universe, Jerry vowed, this eulogy being inspired at that particular moment by the amazing balance of five hundred dollars in their bank book. With this sum as an initial payment they were going to find a snug little bungalow on the South Shore. This business of paying rent, well, excuse Jerry! Betty, too.

AND once having seen Betty you would excuse her anything under the sun. Suppose you take a mental peep into her immaculate little kitchen one afternoon the end of June. She wasn't quite dressed, in fact, far from it, but if you will ask her, she will explain very prettily that when a Queen of Pudding is done, why, it is done, and not one single instant does it wait for a fair lady to dress. So Betty had

flung a scrap of frothy negligee about her and skipped out to the kitchen where she was just assisting the pudding to a cooler atmosphere when the front door opened and closed. She lifted her head and tossed back her rippling brown hair, while she posed like a lovely young faun in an attitude of listening, her cheeks pink, her sparkling brown eyes asking questions of space. Jerry didn't usually come home at three o'clock.

"Oo-oo-oo, Betty! Home?" came the clear call in Jerry's big voice.

"Righto," Betty called back as she slid along the hall and darted into her room. "One minute, dear."

And in exactly fifty-nine seconds, her hair was twisted into a knot as artistic as anything Bernhardt, herself, had ever achieved, and a sheer white dress tied itself into a butterfly bow at her back that made her look all of sixteen, counting the dimple in her left cheek and the roses on both, of course. But if ever a woman was a deceptive little fraud when it came to looks, Betty was the lady, because as indicated by the bank book, she was just as practical and sensible as she looked frivolous.

"Now what does this mean, Jerry Forbes?" she demanded as she swooped down upon her impatiently waiting husband. Kissing.

"Just listen, Betty, carefully, to what I am going to say," Jerry began with a serious expression as Betty curled up on the couch prepared to listen to her husband's newest scheme for getting rich. "You know I wouldn't make a business move without consulting you—"

"A good thing for you," came the terse comment.

Jerry waved an impatient hand. "I met a man in the club lounge today, a friend of Ackerman's—leaving for California tonight. Say, girl, he looked like he owned the earth—and talked it, too. We had lunch together and got quite friendly. He told me he made his money in corn—"

"Stop! If you're going to suggest that we buy a farm you might as well save your breath," Betty broke in with considerable fire. "You'd make a punk farmer, Jerry."

"A farmer—that's good! This man, his name is Clark, never saw a farm. He made his money right here in Chicago—on the Board of Trade, in corn futures. The funny thing about it is that he only had five hundred dollars when he started." However, Jerry did not look as if it were a very funny matter, he looked at Betty's inscrutable countenance most anxiously and no remark being forthcoming, he continued. "With five hundred dollars you can buy five thousand bushels of corn—"

"How silly, Jerry! What would we do with five thousand bushels of corn?"

"Sell it at a profit, of course. This is how. You go to a broker and get him to buy you five thousand bushels of corn on a ten-cent margin—"

"What is a margin?"

"Why, something like this. You don't pay the full amount for the corn—you simply pay down ten cents a bushel. Every time corn goes up a penny you make fifty dollars on a five hundred investment."

"What if it goes down?" demanded practical Betty.

"Nothing, generally. It often goes down a couple of cents—then you simply wait until it goes up four or five, which it invariably does, and sell out at a profit of two or three cents. Clark says he catches the market for a seven-cent raise every once in a while. It looks like easy money."

"I don't quite get it," Betty said, impressed, but puzzled.

"Here, I'll show you the paper." Jerry turned to the market news and pointed out the corn quotations. "See, here is July, September and December corn futures. Cash corn is different and represents actual corn. The futures are bought and sold, the deal to be consummated in the month appearing on the bill of sale, but it never is, because you buy and sell over and over again. For instance, I may buy September corn tomorrow morning and sell it within an hour, not a grain of corn appearing in the transaction. Corn futures are something like stocks are to industries. You might buy and sell one hundred shares of United States Steel, yet you wouldn't see any steel. See?"

BETTY nodded. "Go on."

"Well, here is July corn—it opened at $1.89, the high was $1.92, the low $1.88, the close $1.91¾. If I had bought at the opening and sold at $1.92 I'd have made $150. Rather simple, eh? Sometimes there is a rise of several cents. Clark says a man can make nearly every day, all the way from $50 to $300 and vastly more, of course, if he has a large amount of capital invested. He says a man is crazy to work for a living when the picking is as easy as that."

"Jerry, aren't there any good reasons for the rise and fall of prices?" Betty's bee of practicality was buzzing.

"Certainly, but please remember, young lady, that I am merely human and can't learn everything about this game in a few hours. However, one thing that Clark said along that line was that last year's corn crop was short and both July and September corn represent what remains of last year's crop. He says experts do not think that the old crop will last until the new crop comes in—the new crop is December corn. Clark says we are in for a big bull market—of course, you don't know what that means and I'll tell you—it means that prices are going away up; listen and I'll read you a little of what this market writer says:

" 'Bulls send September corn five cents higher. They bring out the fact that there is very little corn left in the country and that the shorts in July and September are likely to suffer heavy losses before they have evened up their positions. They refer to the fact that hogs at new high levels mean that corn is worth more for feeding purposes than ever before.' Why, Betty, even a greenhorn like me can see that September corn is bound to go to two dollars and I might as well make a little money as the other fellow. A man out in Omaha made two million dollars in corn futures last year; before that he was working in a grain elevator at seventy-five dollars a month. I tell you, girl, it looks to me like I've stumbled onto something good."

"Do you think it is square, Jerry? Looks a lot like gambling to me."

"Nonsense," floundered Jerry, "why—well, see here, Betty, suppose we buy a bungalow—take that one we were looking at Sunday for five thousand dollars; if we buy it and real-estate values go up and we sell it for seven thousand dollars, would you call that gambling?"

"Why no, dear, of course not."

"We aim to pay five hundred dollars down on the house and if the very next week we could sell it with a profit of two thousand dollars you would be quite willing for us to take the profit, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"But nothing. The principle is identical. All I want to do is pay five hundred dollars down on five thousand bushels of corn and when it goes up a few cents sell out and take my profit instead of waiting ten years for a profit as you have to do with a house, and then often not get it. Isn't that reasonable?"

"It does look that way," conceded Betty, reluctantly convinced. "You feel quite sure, don't you, dear?"

"Never felt so sure of anything in my life, but it sort of takes the joy out of living for you not to warm up to the thing."

"Cheer up. I'm tickled to death, but too hungry to talk, so I'll run and finish dinner."

"You wont be cooking dinner much longer, sweet girl, I'll take you out of the kitchen—"

"Now you know I love to cook."

"Sure, you'd love to scrub floors and wash clothes if you thought it would help along this partnership of ours. Never mind, I'm planning to get even with you for all your sacrifices."

AND while Betty prepared dinner, Jerry read the market news and dreamed dreams of sudden riches. In an incredibly short time he was called to the most tempting, delectable dinner, he vowed, that a man ever sat down to and when dessert appeared he grew positively ecstatic.

"Queen of Pudding, by all the shades of housewifely camouflage. Take it from me, Betty, if all the married men in town knew what you could do with a piece of stale bread and a lemon rind, they'd camp on your doorstep 'till you taught their wives the trick."

"There's only one egg in this, too," beamed the artful Betty, as she balanced a quivering morsel on the tip of her spoon. "I'll bet you'd never have known it, would you?"

"Not in a hundred years! I'd have sworn there were a full dozen, shell and all."

"Jerry Forbes!" And then, of course, he had to come around to her side of the table to apologize.

The following morning before Jerry left the house, Betty surrendered their little bank book with their joint names thereon, and to Betty's credit let it be said, she surrendered that precious symbol of many Queen of Puddings, croquettes and unsuspected economies, without the flicker of a satiny eyelash.

"You'll call me up, wont you?" she asked, as she offered a good-by.

"Will I! You stay close to the phone

and see. I'll rush to the bank and try to make the broker's office Clark recommended before the market opens. Five thousand bushels of September corn is my order today."

"If you don't sell it all bring home a bushel or so and maybe we could grind it."

"Nix on the grind! I tell you the grind is over for you and yours."

"Aren't you going to the office?"

"Not this morning. That's the beauty of working on commission; you are your own boss. I've got a big deal pending with the Brighton people, but I have to wait until a shipment of Mexican Java gets in before I complete the sale. I'll quit the coffee business, though, as soon as I make good in corn."

BETTY went about her work that morning with one ear tuned to the music of the telephone bell, but the expected call from Jerry did not come. She had just clamped the lid on the sixth jar of strawberry preserves and was perched on one corner of the kitchen table, making a woman's idea of a substantial lunch on a dish of leftover strawberry preserves and a breakfast roll, when the door bell rang. Leisurely she proceeded to answer it, adjusting the belt of her adorable pink gingham house dress and fluffing out her hair as she proceeded frontward.

She answered through the speaking tube, but there was no reply and then as the doorknob was shaken, she knew it was Jerry. And a very excited Jerry it was.

"Come and sit down," he greeted her.

"What?"

"Betty, I'm actually scared it was so easy; I made two hundred dollars in a flash!" He was shaking from excitement.

"You did! But how could you so quickly?"

"It does seem incredible, but it was as simple as A, B, C. I bought at the opening as I told you I intended and in less than an hour it went up four and a quarter cents, so I gave a selling order. That's all. The quarter cent pays the broker's commission on the deal. It's the biggest pipe I ever ran across in my life!"

"Oh, I think it is simply great, Jerry!" and Betty, never backward in demonstrating her affection for big, tow-haired Jerry, heaped him with expressions of appreciation.

"Here," said Jerry, holding her at arm's length, meanwhile regarding her sternly, "you've been eating strawberry preserves and never once offered to divvy up; all right for you!"

"Oh, if you must, come on," laughed Betty, "but you'll have to eat in the kitchen."

And Jerry ate strawberry preserves and homemade bread from Betty's snow-white kitchen table while they sailed through the future on golden-winged dreams inspired by Jerry's first venture into the great game of chance. For three solid hours they sat there, Jerry enthusiastically figuring out paper profits which soon mounted well into the millions, while Betty, elbows on table, face cupped in her hands and eyes shining with anticipation, eagerly drank the nectar of hope her husband poured.

"And when we do get our car, Jerry, we'll take everybody riding who hasn't a car of their own, wont we?"

"Well, most everybody," generously conceded Jerry.

"Do you think you can make that much every day?" queried Betty, a little pucker between her brows, "because if you can we ought to save a lot."

"Nothing doing. I suspect you are pretty tired of that saving stunt. You are going to have some new clothes and a maid the first thing and as soon as our lease expires we'll get a decent flat. We are going to enjoy life. By George, it looks to me like there would be no end to it! Of course, I wont make two hundred dollars every day, some days it will be less, some more, and occasionally nothing, but the average is going to be whopping big."

"Jerry, why don't you just let your profits accumulate—you can make more the more capital you have, can't you?—and you keep right on selling coffee and we'll live on your commissions until you have a lot of money; then you could go in business for yourself."

"No!" Jerry actually banged his fist down on the table. "What do I want any other business for? Think I want to work my head off the rest of my life? I've been working like a dog ever since I left college—six years this May, and I guess that's about enough."

"Well, if you want to know what I think, Jerry Forbes, it's that work never hurt any one," flared Betty.

"Ah, come now, girlie. It's no fun at all if I can't buy you pretty things—"

"Well, let's agree on a certain sum, say sixty dollars a week."

"Sixty dollars a week! That's rich! I'll be making six or seven hundred a week, likely very much more as soon as my capital accumulates. Now, listen here, Betty, turn-about is fair play, isn't it? Ever since we've been married I've let you have your way about this saving business and you've sure been a wonder and I can't tell you how much I appreciate it, but it's my turn; instead of saving I'm going to spend. You aren't going to spoil it for me, are you?"

"Why—no—," came the reluctant yielding and then Betty's face broke into smiles. "You see it's pretty hard for the leopard to change his spots, at least, in a twinkling, but I'll try."

"That's the stuff. Now put on your prettiest frock and we'll go over to the Cooper-Carlton for dinner."

Betty's eyes exclaimed, but she caught her lips between her even teeth and said nothing. She was nearly dressed when she heard Jerry at the phone. She opened her door a bit and listened without compunction.

"Jerry, we don't need a taxi for that short distance!"

But Jerry motioned her to silence. "Right away—yes, that's right. I see you'll need a lot of educating, Betty," Jerry declared as he hung up the receiver.

"Well, you needn't think I don't like to ride in taxis!"

FOR a novice, Jerry did remarkably well, picking up a surface knowledge of corn futures, cash corn, primary receipts, and all the peculiar vernacular incident to corn trading more quickly than he ever learned anything in his life. In fact, as he himself modestly admitted, he took to it "like a duck to water," and it was only a very short time until he was calling himself a student of the corn market. "Specialize, that's the way to succeed," he would pompously expound to Betty, not realizing he was quoting Clark, who now remained only a grateful memory to him. As for oats, rye, barley or anything in the provision line, Jerry looked at them with contempt. Corn was good enough for him and you couldn't blame him, for he was really making good. Just plain common sense and a little caution, he told Betty. And Betty sighed a blissful sigh as she murmured:

"Who'd ever have thought that plain old corn that you feed to horrid, squealing pigs, would buy silks and velvets and lovely things to eat and cars—"

Betty's previous knowledge of corn had meant only the vaguest of things in the way of a rather difficult substitute for bread, forced on a warring nation by a man named Hoover.

Among other things Jerry learned was to get down to his broker's office before the opening of the market and read the market letters provided for the convenience and information of his customers. With the information gleaned from these letters and the market writers in the newspapers, Jerry would make a guess at the opening price. If it seemed likely that the market would open higher, he shrewdly waited an hour or so for a dip, which generally occurred sometime during the day, if not in the morning. Sometimes he bought one day and sold out the next, becoming quite a clever over-night long, he confided to his wife. And still the market climbed, a break never amounting to more than four or five cents, only to come back at a new high figure, for that was the raging bull market of the early summer of 1919, when every commodity that poor humanity either ate, drank, or wore, winged its way skyward. And Jerry's confidence increased with his success. He soon reached the point where he considered that city salesman for the Banner Coffee Company was not in keeping with his plutocratic dignity.

"I was in to see the boss today, Betty; told him I thought I was through as soon as he could find some one to take my place," Jerry remarked in rather a bored tone, one evening.

"And what did he say?"

"Peculiar old duck. Worked hard all his life and even though he is rich, he clings to his desk for dear life. Easy money has no charms for him."

"Yes, but what did he say?" persisted Betty.

"That's the queer part of it; he said darned little. I told him right out what I was doing; he looked sort of odd and grunted a couple of times. Asked me as a favor to him not to hand in my resignation, but take a month's vacation and let him know at the end of that time how I felt about it. Mighty nice old fellow, but I came away feeling like a school kid that had bragged over earning a dime. He's mistaken, though, if he thinks I'll come back. There is a lot of talk of cash corn going as high as two dollars and a half. Hogs go a little higher every day and high hogs mean high corn, or vice versa."

"Well, I think it is a shame what people have to pay for bacon," Betty flashed back.

"You needn't worry. You can afford to buy bacon now if it goes to a dollar a pound."

"I've still got a heart, even if I can, and when I think how poor people must live with prices as high as they are now it simply makes me sick."

"It is a shame," hastily agreed Jerry. "When we make enough money we'll do our share toward helping out the poor—build a model tenement or something like that. I cleaned up three hundred and forty-seven dollars today—my biggest single haul yet. By the way I stopped at an employment office today and picked you out a maid—she'll be here the first thing in the morning. I knew if I'd wait on you it would never be done."

"And what am I supposed to do?"

"Oh, shop mornings and play with your husband in the afternoon. Didn't I tell you we were going to live? I got tickets for the Woods tomorrow afternoon."

"I'll have to stay at home and train the maid."

"Nonsense. I hired one already trained."

"Thanks."

And the next morning Betty was dispossessed, bodily put out of her favorite domain, the kitchen. As Jerry said, he had employed a trained servant, so after a few futile attempts to give orders, Betty put on her bathing suit and went swimming, coming home to eat a meager lunch in solitary grandeur. She wiped a tear out of one, and then the other of her baffled brown eyes as the automaton stalked glumly in and out. She hated "Jerry's old maid" from the start.

JERRY'S success was making him swagger a bit. In fact, he began to look down a trifle on his plodding old-time friends. At the Dance-a-bit club one evening, which was just a nice little dancing club of normal young couples with normal incomes, Jerry talked "market" to a group of men in such a lordly fashion that he almost made himself obnoxious. Betty caught snatches of what he said as she was whirled past the group and a swift blush covered her face. They went home early and on the way Jerry remarked:

"I never knew before those men were such a bunch of dubs. Very poorly informed. Not one of them knows a thing about the market."

"But, Jerry, they aren't interested! They know other things, though. You used to like them a lot."

"Well, a man who progresses usually does outgrow his old friends, so I suppose we might as well accept it."

And it was much the same with Billy West. He dropped in to tea on Sunday evening, declaring himself starved for biscuits. But he ate rather sparingly.

"Jerry's maid made the biscuit," Betty explained with a gleam of mischief in her eye that was completely lost on Jerry for he was at that instant absent-mindedly reflecting upon what a market writer had said in the morning paper.

"The technical position of the corn market couldn't be better," he broke into speech. "Undertone firm and the trend decidedly upward."

"What's that?" replied the startled Billy, who never knew the market had a technical position. "I say, Jerry, what's come over you, anyhow? I believe he needs a good dose of liver medicine, Betty."

And the heartless Betty laughed. Jerry's disgust was deep.

IT was the following day that Jerry suffered his first loss. "Suffered" is the wrong word, however, for he didn't really mind it a bit. At dinner he laughed deprecatingly, but in a sophisticated, man-of-the-world manner as he remarked nonchalantly:

"I dropped three hundred today. There has been a big slump in foreign exchange and the opinion seemed to be that corn is going to sink a good bit, so I got frightened and sold out, but I see now that it was premature. I'll go back in again, tomorrow."

"But what has foreign exchange to do with corn in Chicago?"

"Honestly, I don't know, Betty," Jerry admitted. "You see any unfavorable rumor depresses the market, just as a favorable one sends it up, and it's not for an ignoramus like me to 'reason why.' In this game you play 'follow the leader' for all it's worth, unless your own good judgment tells you that the trend is stronger than the news. And as much as I've studied the market and conditions lately I should have known that foreign exchange couldn't have any appreciable effect on the corn market at this time—a few cents more or less makes no difference and I should have held on. Next time I'll know better. I've

got no kick coming, though—I'm certainly making money fast.

"Wouldn't you like to take a little trip, Betty? Mountains, or the seashore?"

"Will you come?"

"Don't think I better. The market needs watching now. You see I switched to December corn a couple of weeks ago—"

"Why December?"

"December is the new crop future, and everyone, or at least a good many, dropped the old crop futures and took on December because there is more action. Uncertainty. It is getting toward the critical time in corn now. There is a drouth and if it continues a little longer the crop will be short and the price higher, but if good rains occur there will be a fall in price, so I want to be here."

"I'll stay, too. No fun to go away without you."

"I hate to see you stay in town this hot weather."

"Don't be so swanky, Jerry, especially in private. You know I've always stayed here in the summer time."

AS Jerry stood in his broker's office one morning watching the big blackboard on which the quotations were being chalked up, and saw his own paper profits mounting upward, he was a very self-satisfied young man. Near by him stood two well-dressed men, hands deep in their pockets, gloom enveloping their tense, lined countenances. Their eyes, too, were glued to the board.

"I wish to God it would rain," said one in low, desperate tones.

"So do I," returned his companion.

"Shorts!" thought Jerry contemptuously. He was glad he wasn't crazy enough to be on the short side of a bull market.

Directly after noon, however, the shorts seemed to be in luck. A rumor that it was raining in Peoria went the rounds and immediately selling became brisk. The market broke five cents in an hour. Not that a little rain in Peoria would save the entire corn belt or even an important fraction of it, but such is the psychology of market sheep that only a rumor is needed to start them over the fence. But Jerry did not lose a dollar. He mentally patted himself on the back for his sagacity. He had long known that when rain came the market would drop. When the rumor was posted he already had a snug profit for the day and quite cockily he gave a selling order, then went home covered with complacency.

But it developed after closing time that the rain in Peoria had not materialized; it had only been cloudy. Unfortunately, Jerry did not hear this because he went home early, but as it happened, it made no difference. When he got down late the next morning, he found December corn three cents above the close of the previous day.

"It's a run-away market," was the comment frequently heard, so Jerry made all haste to put in a buying order.

Reports said the dry area was spreading and if rain did not come soon the government's estimate of a 2,800,000,000 bushel corn crop would be greatly discounted. Talk of cash corn at $2.50 became rife. Hogs sprouted new wings. All price precedents were smashed.

A hot wave swept the country at that time and fear of hot winds damaging the corn which was then at the tasseling period, the critical time with corn, caused increased apprehension for a greatly curtailed corn crop, thus adding another strong bullish feature to an already very bullish market. Day after day Jerry bought in and sold out at a profit, his capital growing magically, for though he made no effort to save, yet he did not spend a tenth of his winnings.

ONE morning December corn opened at $1.70, the highest price it had yet attained. Cash corn was already at $2.00 and better, and the feeling that it would go to $2.50 became more probable daily. There was a strong possibility of December going to $2.00. Jerry bought in that day at $1.71¼, the market having climbed one and a quarter cents in the interval of his giving a buying order and its execution. Then, a sluggish interval set in, the high of the day being $1.73. Scorning a small profit like that, Jerry went home, well content to stay in the market over night.

Corn in some sections was reported as already firing. Some experts advanced the opinion that irreparable damage had already been done and that no amount of rain could now save the crop. On the other hand many declared that rain as late as August had been known to wrest a bumper crop from an unpromising outlook.

The next day the market dropped a couple of cents on account of a strike at one of the industrial plants that bought

corn in considerable quantities. But Jerry wasn't worried. He understood the situation very well and knew that two dollar corn was a certainty. In his egotism, he disregarded the opinion of some writers that a weather market was a dangerous market.

Nevertheless, there was a noticeable falling off in trading. The market was becoming very nervous, jumping up or down a cent or two with every rumor. Jerry's own nerves were on edge, but he stubbornly maintained that the market was going up and still up, being supported in his views by many far more experienced in the corn game than he.

"Why, it is bound to go up, Betty," he declared. "Look at Argentine corn—more than half is reported unfit for export on account of soaking rains; our own crop will be short."

"What if it should rain?" pertinently inquired Betty.

"Suppose it does. There will be a drop of maybe five or six cents, but that is all, because it is likely that the damage to corn is already done. Hot winds struck Kansas yesterday. Weather reports say there isn't a bit of rain in sight anywhere."

"That's too bad. Of course, we want it to rain, Jerry. We don't want crops to be short and people to suffer just so we can make money," Betty announced firmly, holding Jerry's eyes with her own.

"Oh yes, yes, certainly," Jerry agreed.

The hot wave had been broken, only to be followed by two days of sizzling weather and an inactive market. Fear gripped the heart of speculators in the corn market, rain being the thing feared by the bulls and hoped for by the bears. A few more days of heat and drouth and the corn crop would be cut in two. On the other hand some good rains would insure a splendid yield many believed.

About that time came a strike in the stockyards. Without men to work in the killing beds, hogs accumulated and the price dropped, carrying corn down a couple of cents.

Jerry had bought December corn at $1.71¼. It now stood at $1.68¼.

"I'm not worried, Betty, but I am annoyed. Of course I could sell out now and take a little loss, but I'm sure it isn't necessary."

"This paper says the market is weak and trade mostly confined to the country," said Betty.

"That shows corn is bound to go up, because those country traders know how short the new crop will be and that the old one is almost exhausted now. Heavens, but this heat is fierce!"

AND so intense was the heat during the night that sleep was almost impossible, and when it did come it was a sleep of exhaustion. The following morning Betty awoke with a startled look in her eyes as she sat up in bed and strained her ears in an attitude of listening. Slipping to the floor she flitted noiselessly into the living-room and stopped thunderstruck before the window. It was raining, pouring! She turned and rushed to Jerry's side, shaking him as violently as her small hands could compass.

"Jerry, Jerry! It's raining!"

"What's that! The devil!"

Jerry struggled to a sitting posture, fighting back the sleep that still bound his senses.

"What will happen, Jerry?"

"How do I know?" was the irritable reply as he swung himself out of bed and began to dress hurriedly. Suddenly, he paused and began to laugh.

"What a pair of chumps we are, Betty. We don't raise corn in Chicago. It could rain oceans here and never touch the corn belt."

"I never thought of that," laughed Betty.

However, when Jerry got downtown he found that pretty good rains had fallen in Illinois and scattered sections of the corn belt.

December corn fell to $1.64 and Jerry put in a bad day. His position was getting perilous. He had five hundred in his broker's office for extra margin, but even with that he could not stand a much further decline. Still his luck held. It was learned that the rain which had fallen was totally inadequate to the needs and December corn closed at $1.65¼. The stock yards strike was settled, as well as that of the cereal company. Buying power was stronger and the bulls took new courage.

"It will open higher in the morning, Betty, I'm sure. This rain scare is about discounted," Jerry remarked.

And sure enough, even though there were further good rains in the corn belt, the market was comparatively firm for the first hour. Jerry again congratulated himself on his excellent judgment.

IT was then that the blow came.

News that the government was about to investigate the high cost of living caused a veritable panic. Bullish opinion became bearish in a trice. Everyone knew that hogs were too high. Corn was too high. Every thing on earth was too high. White-faced men gave selling orders. Jerry was a little slow to catch the significance of the news, but when December corn tumbled five points, he did hurry to a telephone.

"How much money have we in the bank, Betty?" he asked, trying hard to keep the tremolo out of his tones. "Two hundred? I'm sorry, dear, but I think I'll have to use it. If the market drops to $1.56, even with this, I'm wiped out—yes. I don't think it will."

Jerry handed a check for $200 to the cashier and taking another look at the board which now showed December corn at $1.61¼, an advance of one and a quarter cents, he brightened a little. But it was of short duration. $1.60 soon followed—$1.59¾.

Jerry went outside, unable to stand the strain. He groped in his numb brain but his boasted judgment had deserted him.

A friendly hand slapped him on the shoulder; a familiar voice rang in his ears.

"Well, old man, how goes it?"

"Hello, Mr. Clark—when did you get back from California?" Jerry inquired of the instigator of his present misery.

"About an hour ago," laughed Clark stentoriously. "Just in the nick of time, too." He lowered his voice. "Say, if you want to make some money, go short of December corn. She is going to hit bottom. I just sold one hundred thousand bushels. So long—see you later."

"Short! God!" Jerry became a shade of pale green as he turned weakly and went back into his broker's office for one last look at the symbols of his melting fortune.

In the meantime, Betty spent a restless day. Jerry did not telephone again. She tried to sew, tried to read, then finally set the talking-machine going. But at the first sound from its now strangely, raucous throat, her tense nerves shrieked in protest and she choked Gluck's "Mocking Bird" with heartless fingers.

The hours passed; still Jerry did not telephone. Finally, the little jeweled wrist watch on Betty's arm softly whispered that the market had closed. Their financial fate was sealed; for better, for worse. But Jerry did not telephone.

Then, desperately, Betty did a thing she had often heard Jerry do. She called his broker's office. And when the connection was made she sat an instant in frightened silence, then in a strange, metallic voice, she asked quite firmly:

"Will you please give me the high, low and close on December corn? No, no, not cotton—yes, December corn. Yes, I got that—did you say the close was one dollar and fifty-five cents? Thank you."

Betty hung up and for a long time sat there, thinking deeply. At the end of which time, though it sounds heartless, she actually laughed.

A LITTLE later Jerry came up the stairs like an old man. He did not ring as in his exuberant moments. Instead, there was a portentous quietness about the way he fitted his key in the lock and closed the door after him, very quietly. His face was white and drawn.

"Well, Betty, we're all through," he said grimly, tossing his hat to the library table and sinking his listless weight in the depths of the couch cushions. Betty ran to him and put her arms about him.

"Jerry, darling, what's a little old money!"

"It's because of you that I care, Betty. I wanted to make good for your sake and I'm ashamed all through."

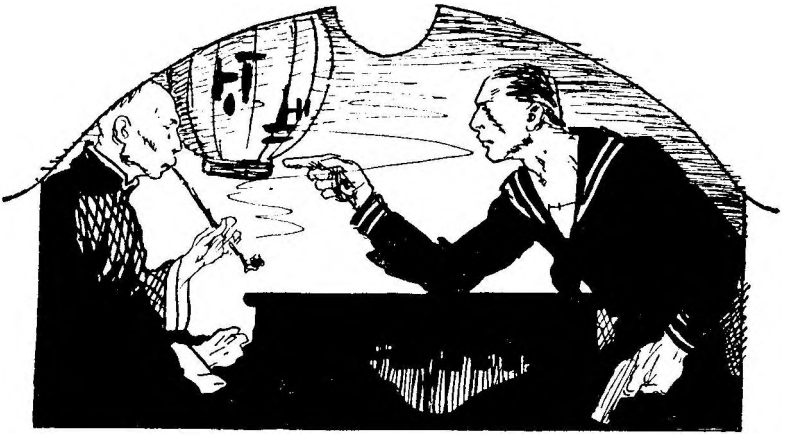
"It's all past now, Jerry, and we'll be happy again. I'll start to save right away and I'll bet I save another five hundred dollars in a jiffy. I've got clothes enough to last me two years."

"Of all the wooden-headed chumps!" interrupted Jerry. "Betty, girl, I've got nearly six hundred dollars left! I was hoping against hope that the market would swing up again when Clark came along and told me there wasn't a chance, so I figured if I sold out I'd have carfare, at least. That is why I was late. I waited after closing hours for a settlement. Wait—here's the check. Put it where I can't get my hands on it again. Why, what's the matter now, dearest?"

Betty had gone limp in his arms. For an astonished, alarmed second, Jerry regarded her. Then she opened her eyes and as Jerry looked anxiously into them, a roguish twinkle appeared as she murmured:

"Then Jerry Junior can have a real home after all."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" cried Jerry.



Deep Water Men

"The Atonement of Chang Feng" is the title of this fascinating story of a young man on his uppers in Singapore and the swift events which brought him fortune.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

THERE were at least four men on the *Melchior Treub,* going up from Batavia to Singapore, who stood well with the other passengers because of a basic adaptability and cheerful disposition which made them good mixers in almost any sort of crowd—in short, the kind who invariably come to the top on shipboard, where one either is a good fellow or a crab. For some reason which they could not have expressed, several of the women might have given Harry Bartlett preference over the others. He never talked about the war or the army if he could avoid it; but they generally understood that he had been in one or two of the big actions and had sported two slugs on his shoulder when demobilized. His manner showed breeding; he seemed to have plenty of money, and it was rumored that he was the only heir of a rich Wall Street uncle—in the Javanese ports he had spent it as one does who is used more to spending than counting pennies. The dark-haired Armitage girl had managed to get a shade more of his attention than the others. They were leaning over the port gangway rail, up forward, as the boat ran up Rhio Strait for Singapore.

"I hope we're going to see a lot of you ashore, Mr. Bartlett? Father says he's going to leave us here while he runs up to Bangkok on business. Will you be in the Straits for some time?"

"Why—I hardly know. Blessed if I can find out what's the matter with me, anyhow! When we were demobbed, I didn't feel like settling down to work—it was too much of a let-down. Fact is, I think the majority of us were morbid, we hated to talk or think of what we'd been through—our capacity for enjoyment or keen interest in things was blunted. The old boy was mighty nice when I came back—said what I needed was a long rest—told me to beat it for any place I wanted to go and he'd follow me up with drafts in the larger ports. I took him up on that—headed for South America, then around through the South Sea Islands. Thought at first I could live down there for years—just forgetting, loafing in the shade of the palms, listening to the Kanakas singing and telling their ghost stories. The life began to get me—until a live he-man came along with a copra-schooner, in the Marequesas, and began talking about fellows who had been down there forty or fifty years. Good families at home, educated, but just couldn't get away from it—from the soft

moonlit nights, the lapping of water in the lagoons, the echo of surf on the reefs, the living one scented day after another without having really to work at all. So I hiked over to Sydney to see how a little action would feel again. Sydney's one swell little town—I'll say so! But it's different from New York—some. Came along up to the China Sea ports—then Batavia and Sourabaya. And I'll say I've 'eard the East a-callin' here just about as strong as I did in the Paumotus or the Solomons. An old Tahiti woman told me I didn't quite fit into the lazy island picture—that good and bad spirits were always scrapping over my head, that I was due to have pretty rotten luck, sometime, but that if I had a drop or two of chief's blood in me, as she kinda thought, I'd run across a lot of good luck too. She was so blamed serious about it that she got my goat. I've been thinking about her all this morning—blessed if I don't feel as if I were up against a hoodoo somewhere."

"Probably you haven't entirely gotten over the effects of the war—your nerves are still supersensitive. Anyhow—they say there are lovely motor-roads all over the Island, and I hope you're going to show me some of them! That is—of course, if you haven't something of more importance to do. We shall be staying with General Mount's family out in one of the suburbs—Tanglin, I think they call it. . . . . Oh, look! We're going in back of those two islands. If that one on the port side is Pulau Brani, Kepper Harbor is behind it."

AS the boat drew in toward the Koninklijke wharf, they remained leaning over the rail—speaking occasionally, then lapsing into a revery in which vastly different thoughts were busy in the two heads. Bartlett's sense of depression increased rather than gave way to the holiday feeling in the crowd of many different races on the wharf who had come down from the city in motorcars, electric-trams and rikishas to meet friends on the steamer. Eventually he went off down the wharf with his luggage in a rikisha, waving back at them as he disappeared.

Bartlett went to the Raffles partly because most of the people he knew went there, partly for the cosmopolitan something about the place which he liked. And it gave him a pleasant feeling inside when several of the coolies and the clerk called him by name. He had only stopped there once before. Perhaps his tips might have had something to do with it—or the fact that he was said to be a wealthy American. The war had left him with a good deal of cynicism. Still, it was nice to be remembered, even if there were an object in it. After inspecting the room given him, he strolled down to the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation to draw some money for current expenses, thinking there might be also letters addressed to him in the bank's care. He inquired for these before making out his check and sat down to glance over them.

There was none from his uncle, as he had expected—but a long envelope from a firm of lawyers in New York brought back a little of the apprehension he had confessed to Miss Armitage on the boat. He knew of no reason why they should be writing, nor how they had obtained an address where letters were likely to reach him. The letter was comparatively short, considering the amount of unpleasant news it contained. His uncle, it seemed, had died very suddenly of heart-failure after a panic in the money-market which had completely wiped out his fortune. His real estate and personal effects were being sold by the attorneys to settle the estate, but there was little prospect of there being anything left after all claims had been adjusted. As sole heir, according to his uncle's will, Bartlett was being notified as a matter of form—but that was about all it amounted to.

Scarcely knowing what he expected to gain by it, Bartlett asked to see the manager, and was told that an appointment was customary. Nevertheless one of the clerks took his card—and returned to fetch him into the manager's office.

The interview was a pleasant one—the manager stating that their New York branch had written them of his uncle's attempt to corner the market on certain stocks, and the combination which had been formed against him. It was regrettable, very, but from the information at hand, must have been a pretty bad smash. When asked if there was anything remaining to Bartlett's credit in Singapore, he consulted a slip which had been handed to him by the clerk.

"Three thousand dollars were cabled to your credit with us, Mr. Bartlett, about two months ago. Since then we've paid drafts from you in various parts of the Dutch Indies amounting to something over twenty-seven hundred. There is still a bal-

ance due you of two hundred and ninety-one—gold."

"Phew! Not enough to get me home—unless I go steerage and emigrant-coach!"

"Er—is it necessary for you to return just now?"

"Why—no. I don't suppose it is. My uncle is dead and buried—he had no other relatives who have not sufficient incomes to get along comfortably."

"Then it would seem that your chance of finding an opening is as good or better out here than it would be at home—and you've nearly three hundred to keep you going meanwhile. Eh?"

"I think you're right, sir. Guess I'll take a hundred dollars of that for immediate expenses and leave the rest on deposit. There are a few little things I'll have to square up."

"Er—quite so. I'll have the bills fetched while you're making out a check. This is rather a facer, Mr. Bartlett—I'm sorry! If I can be of service at any time, don't hesitate about dropping in for suggestions."

"That's very kind of you, I'm sure. I feel more cut up over the old boy's death than I do about the money. Army training puts a fellow in condition for most anything—so I'm not worrying much over my end of it. There's plenty to do anywhere, I suppose."

RATHER to Bartlett's surprise, when he got out into the street, he found that the sense of impending calamity had left him. The worst he could think of just then had happened. The rugged face of Silas Bartlett was now among the shadows, a personality he was never to see again in the flesh, and this, he knew, would be a lasting regret for some time. But it presently occurred to him that one cause for his morbidness and distaste for the humdrum details of everyday life had been the fact that income and future were presumably assured. No matter where he might travel, or what adventures he might strike in out-of-the-way places, there had never been any anxiety about money or whether he would get all he wanted to eat. Now, on the contrary, he was free—to starve or freeze, if he hadn't the wit to provide food for his belly and clothes for his back, the wherewithal to pay for shelter in heavy weather when he hadn't built it with his own hands. He decided that the let-up from responsibility after leaving the army had caused much of his mental lassitude.

What his immediate course should be he had no idea. It occurred to him that he couldn't afford to stay at the Raffles; but with a spirit of adventure, he felt that his brains should at least be good enough to provide him with comfortable shelter. He would stay where he was for a while, anyhow—trying to find himself. When his money ran out—well, that bridge needn't be crossed today, or tomorrow. Just to give himself breathing-space, however, he got the bookkeeper to figure up what his room and meals would run to for a couple of weeks and paid the amount in advance. Then he had the Number One call a motor-car of respectable appearance and went out to see Miss Armitage at Tanglin. As some of the other girls who had been on the *Melchior Treub* were with her, a party was made up to drive around the Island—with dinner at General Mount's afterward. During the week, he repeated the drive—twice, then decided it was eating into his resources too rapidly.

Meantime a rumor had been creeping about Singapore that instead of being a wealthy American, he was really about at the end of his rope—which had the effect of making certain former acquaintances decidedly cool. According to their belief, men who were down on their luck usually drifted over the line of self-respect very shortly and had no compunction about sponging upon their friends. Grace Armitage, however, was less of a fair-weather friend than others who had been on the steamer. Few who were not artists would have called her handsome—at first glance. Her features were cleanly modeled but not effeminate—perhaps a trifle heavy in repose. But when they lighted up, it gave her a charm of far more lasting quality than mere prettiness. Bartlett had purposely kept away from her several days when she telephoned him at the Raffles. And when he called at General Mount's an hour later, she took him to a corner of the bungalow veranda screened with vines, and proceeded to clear away possible misunderstandings.

"Don't get scared! I'm going to call you Harry for this once, anyhow! Harry—people are whispering about that you've lost all your money and are up against it. Is that really true?"

"My uncle died six weeks ago without leaving a cent, and I've nothing of my own—as yet. But just how much I'm up against it is another matter. I'm not wor-

rying very much at present. I noticed that some of the folks have been a little cool the last few days—didn't know but you might be feeling the same way. So I quit coming around."

"I'd consider that—well, a bit insulting if there were not so many mean people in the world. It's not easy to distinguish between them. But I shall expect you to see me just as often as you care to—the Mount's all feel the same way, I'm sure. They like you. Of course I'm sorry about your uncle—awfully sorry. You seemed to like him a lot, and I think you told me he was your only near relative. As far as the money's concerned, I'll be interested in seeing how you'll go at it to get some of your own. Now come along for a walk through these lovely Botanical Gardens with me! There are lots of things I like to do which don't cost anything."

THAT sort of thing makes a hit with any man, whether he happens to be down on his luck or not. It keeps alive some of that faith in human nature which contact with the world—and more particularly such experiences as living through a part of the German War—almost wipes out. Bartlett didn't impress her as a man down on his luck; but knowing that he must have very little money left, she couldn't make his cheerful bearing harmonize with the facts. Presently, her curiosity—and personal interest—would no longer be denied.

"Harry, it's none of my business, of course, and if you think the question impertinent, why, say so. But I'd like to know what you think of trying first? I know I should be quite at sea if I suddenly found that I had to earn my own living."

"Why, I'm prefectly willing to explain what I'm up to, Grace—only, so far, there isn't much to explain. I've been figuring the proposition over, trying to decide what I really want to do. Of course, I may have to take something I don't want, in the wind-up—but I'm shoving that off as far as I can, because it's a handicap at the start. You see, I've got to get those heavenly islands out of my blood—first. It was probably a mistake to go there. It made office-work almost impossible—innoculated me with too much need of the out-of-doors. I've been thinking about shipping, quite a lot—but I don't want to get into a narrow groove where my whole attention will be fixed so close to the ground that I can't see anything bigger if it comes along.

"Leaving burglary or piracy out of the question, a chap with the experience I've had should be able to root out and put through some of the bigger things where real money is made, instead of aiming at a piking game which never pays anything but day's wages. Know what I did yesterday? You'll say it was a fool stunt—I guess anybody would! Got the idea from something I read in a magazine once. Man himself thought I was crazy, at first. There's a chap whose office is over on the Boat Quay—I suppose he'd call himself a merchant—buys and sells whole cargoes at a time—any old cargoes, wrecks, unsuccessful industries—and makes pots of money on the turn-over. Well, I went to him with an offer of thirty dollars if he'd let me sit in his office just one day and listen to the way he talked business with the men who came in to see him. Told him just what my circumstances were and about how much I had left. He doesn't wait more than a minute or two for a snap judgment on anything. Said he'd take my thirty on the understanding that if any really confidential dicker came up, I'd have to get out—that was my risk.

"Last night, I figured that I was ahead on the investment. People came in all day—I was supposed to be going through some old filing-cases in the corner. Only had to get out once—and what I saw of that caller was some education in itself—reminded me of a German spy we put through the third-degree in France before we shot him. That's about as far as I've got, up to date. Haven't a job—no immediate prospect of one. But I think I'm considerably nearer some understanding of how to make a living, at that."

BARTLETT had really spent more time looking for employment than he admitted—but in three or four instances where he could easily have obtained a twenty-dollar clerkship from his army experience and knowledge of French, he had shied off before asking for it. He thought the confinement would be intolerable and the progress to something bigger too slow. Yet he found his sense of observation becoming sharper every day—caught himself listening to business discussions in the hotel-lobby, studying the manner and appearance of successful men about the city.

It was this sharpening of his faculties which led him to overhear, quite unintentionally, a few words between two sea-captains in one of the shipping-houses which made a point of posting marine information upon a bulletin-board in their main office. There were on the board, at the time, weather reports, notices of steamship movements, including Lloyds' reports of those overdue; and one bronzed shipmaster had run his finger down the list until it rested upon the name of a certain cargo-boat.

"See that there boat, Tommy? Lloyds' says she was last spoken off San Bernardino, August sixteenth—an' not since heard from. Waal—my Number One aboard the *Rajah,* he says diff'ren! He's got a brother who cruises down in them waters an' through the Moluccas in a Malay tradin'-junk—saw this brother in Zamboanga when we touched there comin' up. An' the Chink, he says he passed that boat in his junk, near enough to make out the name on her stern, about thirty miles off Cape Sapey—no'thwest coast of Papua. Said she was under Dutch colors at the time, but he was dead sure about the name. First-off, I was goin' to send in a report to Lloyds'—but shucks! It's the word of a Chink that mebbe don't savvy English letters on a boat much better than I savvy their hen-tracks! The laugh would be on me if the log of some other cargo-boat showed her passin' that spot at the time."

There was no particular reason why this fragment of talk should have impressed itself upon Bartlett's mind, or why, afterward, he should have stepped over to glance at the spot on the list where the shipmaster's finger had left a faint greasy smudge. He hadn't mentioned the name of the steamer, but there was only one posted as "missing" on that part of the list—so the name also remained in his memory, though temporarily obliterated by other things.

BARTLETT was now pretty well into his last hundred dollars—but felt that he didn't want to make a definite move until after he had looked about a little more. So he overhauled his luggage at the Raffles and decided to sell a ruby scarf-pin for which he had paid three hundred dollars in New York. It was only in little streaks of this sort that any inclination toward extravagance had showed. He seldom wore jewelry—but when he did, the stone or the watch had to be a good one. The clerk at the Raffles mentioned two or three reliable dealers in jewels around the city when Bartlett made a casual inquiry for an honest one—but the Number One Boy afterward approached him in the lobby and said the last one mentioned would prove the more satisfactory to deal with if he wanted to sell anything. For some reason of their own—possibly his cheerful and courteous manner—every Chinese about the hotel liked him. And though he had said nothing to the clerk about selling anything, the Number One understood his situation perfectly when he recommended a certain Chang Feng in the narrower part of Waterloo Road, beyond the Rochore quarter.

When he reached the place in a rikisha, the shop proved to be a small, unpretentious one—with a much larger *godown* behind it, not seen from the street. The appearance of the place didn't impress him as unfavorably as it might the average American tourist, for he had learned something about Chinese tradesmen since his arrival in the Archipelago. And he at once sensed in Chang Feng an individuality very much out of the common. His over-vest and under-jacket, at a closer glance, were of silk not to be found in the average *godown,* though the cut was that worn by the shopkeeping caste. The jade button on his black-silk cap was rather pretentious for one not of Manchu blood—and the man's English was amazingly good when he fancied that pidgin would not be understood by his customer.

Chang took the pin over near his single window and examined the ruby through a jeweler's glass.

"When you buy this?"

"January—last year. In New York."

"Ah—yes. Tiffany—I theenk. You pay about three hundred—then. Rubies a little higher now. This is good stone. I give you three hundred an' eighty, gold. Or you come this side when I close shop tonight, I show you other stone allee same look like good as this. Mebbe so you like um. I give you that an' two hundred dollah fo' this." The Chinaman had been looking at his customer rather closely in occasional side-glances—as if trying to recall a resemblance to some one he knew.

"Would you be willing to give me the two hundred now—and leave the balance until I decide about the other stone this evening?"

"Oh, yes. Can do." He put the pin in some mysterious pocket and laid several

crisp bank-notes upon the little counter. "Whatch name?"

"Bartlett—Henry M. Bartlett. Staying at the Raffles."

"You catchee lelative one time—allee same John Ba'tlett—Bos'n side?"

"Why—yes. That was my father's name. We lived in Boston when I was a kid. Did you know him?"

"Yep—savvy um plenty one time. Savvy eyes an' mouth allee same when you look out window."

It seemed almost incredible that the man really could have known his father—and yet, it was pleasant. He was pleased that chance had directed him to Chang's shop. After all, one should see at a closer glance that he was several grades above the ordinary coolie or tradesman. There had been a strong resemblance between father and son.

ABOUT ten o'clock Bartlett got himself into a rikisha and went over to Waterloo Road again. The little shop was closed when he arrived, but after knocking twice upon the closed door, a coolie presently opened it—without unfastening a heavy chain. When the American mentioned his name, however, he was promptly admitted, the door securely barred after he was inside and a rather dim spot-light from an electric torch thrown upon the floor near an inner passage.

"You catchee come-along lat side one time—in *godown*. See Chang Feng plitty soon."

Bartlett wasn't always successful in getting what a Chinese was trying to convey in pidgin, but he gathered that he was expected to proceed into some other building. For what seemed at least fifteen minutes, in that stuffy darkness, he followed the moving patch of light on the floor—along narrow passages between matting-covered boxes, solidly-filled gunny-sacks, piles of camphor-wood cases—until he finally emerged through a narrow door into the softened light of the most wonderfully furnished room he had ever seen. His first glance at the rugs, bronzes, lacquered furniture, gold and satin embroideries, carved ivories and ebony, and onyx tables, gave him the impression of being surrounded by almost priceless things.

At the farther end of the room there was a raised platform with two beautifully carved ebony chairs at either side of the customary guest-table. In one of them sat Chang Feng in a gorgeous over-vest of quilted opaline satin, puffing meditatively upon a silver Chinese water-pipe of a size to rest comfortably in his right hand. Motioning Bartlett to the chair which stood sidewise at the opposite side of the table, he opened a carved sandalwood box and handed him a stick-pin with a ruby which he would have pronounced so nearly equal to his own in value that there was little choice between them. But at a motion from Chang a coolie mysteriously appeared with a black-iron box which seemed to be rather hot. When the man pushed a little slide on one face of it, this proved to be a lantern so constructed that an intense white light—possibly acetylene—came through a circular opening not over a quarter of an inch in diameter—there being no crack or pinhole through which the light escaped in any other place. Chang's English appeared to have improved immensely since afternoon.

"You might wear that stone until your children were grown men before it would be subjected to any such test—which is why the other will possibly answer your purpose fully as well. But—place each of them against the little opening and let the light shine through. See if you can detect any real difference."

WITH interest born of his appreciation for jewels, Bartlett held first one and then the other stone against the little orifice in the lantern—noticing that the settings were so nearly identical that he couldn't tell them apart save by close inspection. The first showed a clear translucency of excellent color. Off-hand, he would have pronounced it a valuable gem. The second, however, was crystal-clear with the crimson of old wine against the light—markedly different from the other—and seemed to possess a latent fire of its own.

"I didn't know my stone was really as good as this! Thought the price was rather stiff when I bought it, but they said it was worth the money."

"They dealt with you honorably. Many dealers would have charged more. Mebbe-so you like to keep him? Yes?"

"I'm afraid I need the money more than I do a scarf-pin just at present. Guess I'd better have the odd hundred and eighty in cash—but if you're willing to hold it a few months, I'd like to buy it back again—with interest, of course."

"Can happen. I have many stones that are worth even more. Now, if you think I may have been temporarily of service to you in this matter—I have a small accommodation to ask in return. John Bartlett would have undertaken it willingly, for the friendship that was between us. I do not doubt that his son will be equally courteous. One of my coolies is standing just outside that door—waiting to say that a man has called to see me and is being detained in the shop until I send for him. I am not positive as to his errand, but reasonably sure—because I have been told where he came from and the sort of men seen in his company by those who sent him to me fifteen days ago. That rug which appears to be hanging flat against the wall really conceals a recess in which there is a divan. From there you can hear every word spoken in this room. I wish you to remember carefully what is said. After the man has gone away, I will give you a *chit* which I would like to have delivered to a certain most honorable American, telling him also what you have heard. In this matter, I am asking you to act merely as a messenger, it is true—but the service is one I do not care to risk with anyone else—greater than it appears. As an evidence of my appreciation of your services, I will make the price for your stone four hundred and fifty, gold."

AT this point a few words of explanation will give the reader a clearer understanding of what lay in Chang's mind, and its connection with Bartlett. Several years before, in a certain port, the elder Bartlett had, just by chance, saved the ex-pirate's life. Subsequently a number of business transactions had been handled between them to their mutual profit and satisfaction. The Chinese had been certain of the relationship when he saw Harry Bartlett on the veranda of the Raffles one day—and had subsequently learned of his altered circumstances. With the efficient organization he had built up for the carrying out of many secret enterprises, it was a simple matter to have the American directed to his shop when he began to inquire for a reliable dealer in jewels—it having occurred to Chang that his deceased friend's son would be a most opportune selection to carry out what he had in mind.

Several months previously—in complete ignorance that Miss Pauline Buckner of the Nawab Line was anything to that Captain Medford who for excellent reasons was more admired by Chinese and Malays than any other man in the East—Chang had contracted, after some haggling with the Rajah of Sikayam, to abduct the lady in Hongkong and deliver her unharmed at the Rajah's palace in the interior of Borneo. It was purely a matter of business—carried out with such thorough efficiency that the young lady was on one of Chang's junks within three miles of the aforesaid palace when Medford rescued her, and the old ex-pirate learned for the first time the outrage he had been committing against one for whom he would have gladly done the greatest service in his power. As Medford had shot the Rajah in a duel, there was no getting square with the Malay for the regrettable mess—though Chang had been cursing his Malay ancestors with system and much burning of paper "cash." But he had been concentrating ever since upon some acceptable reparation which he could make for his part in the affair. And if what had been hinted to him about this bucko steamer-mate who was then waiting in the outer shop for an interview should be anywhere near the truth, Chang thought he had finally come upon a way. Which brings us to the moment when Bartlett hid himself behind the rug as instructed—and the hard-looking sailor-adventurer was admitted to the room.

Moran—whose muscles were even harder than his looks in repose—had sailed the Seven Seas for enough years to make him callous in the matter of surprises. But the appearance of that room, and the imperturbable Chinese who sat waiting for him, brought a low exclamation which he couldn't entirely suppress:

"Some museum, bo! You the guy they call Chang Feng?" (The Oriental features were absolutely expressionless; the basilisk-eyes might have been black diamonds under the drooping yellow lids.) "Huh! No need o' gettin' a grouch! Come out of it—an' talk business! If you don't mind, I'll set down here where I c'n spiel to you!" He pulled the carved ebony chair around until it faced the guest-table—giving, by this act, offense of which he never dreamed. "Friend o' mine says you're the best jedge o' stones anywhere along the China Sea. Here! Take a look at this—an' say what you think she's worth!"

He took from his fob-pocket something about the size of a hickory-nut which

rolled upon the onyx surface of the guest-table with a clear greenish glow which seemed to come from the thing itself. In a very deliberate manner Chang lifted the peculiar black lantern from the floor behind the table and held the green object against the light-aperture.

"That is an emerald which probably has been listed in some collection among the Russian nobility. I cannot recall which one. Some, I believe, have never been photographed—superstition or prejudice upon the part of the owner. Purchased merely for speculation, this stone might bring thirty thousand—if the buyer cared to risk possible claims upon it. You certainly never paid any such amount. Clearly you cannot be the owner—who would sell to a reputable dealer if he disposed of such a gem at all. The emerald was undoubtedly stolen. Still—it is a matchless stone. I will give ten thousand—and take the chances."

"Like hell you will! After just tellin' me it's worth thirty! Oh, well—mebbe we'll dicker a bit after a while. That aint what I reelly came to see you about. This here stone belonged in a collection—you're dead right it did! A whale of a collection! You say it was stole'! All right—let it go at that. Stole' by one o' Lenine's gang—after cuttin' the owner's throat an' all his fam'ly with him! Well, the guy carries 'em in his boots, in his dirty hair, sewed into his drawers—an' gets as far as 'Vostok. Hell-bent on gittin' outa the country. Gits the master of a British tramp to give him passage to some port, brings his dunnage aboard, hides all but three o' them jewels in a place on that boat where he swore nobody could find 'em but him, cause nobody'd ever think o' lookin' in such a place—an' then he goes ashore f'r a horn or two, the boat not clearin' until next mornin'. Gits plenty soused, naturally,—drinkin' with me at the time,—an' just before he's completely out, he spills the dope 'bout where he's hid the stuff on the boat.

"Me—I puts knockout drops in his last glass, figurin' I'd go aboard that boat myself—*pronto*. Before I gits far, I'm wise that the bloke must ha' put somethin' in my drinks—'cause I lays down an' goes by-by in the gutter. 'Bout next afternoon I comes outa it in some joint an' starts huntin' f'r the bolshevik—steamer gone, o' course! Finds him—an' he tried to start somethin'. We're walkin' up an alley after dark when he slips a knife into me an' I has to do him in. Went through his clo'es an' found the stones he was carryin' around with him—tryin' to sell f'r expenses, I s'pose. Well—fur's I can see, I'm the only feller alive that knows where the bunch o' loot is hid on that there boat. Aint nobody goin' to find it, 'cause nobody aint goin' to think o' lookin' f'r it. Now—you wise me on where that there boat is, today—git me aboard of her, with some feller to help, an' the chance to look f'r 'em—then fix it so's we c'n git away from her before anyone tumbles—an' I'll split fifty-fifty."

FOR two or three minutes the former pirate, hatchet-man and smuggler, who had looked anything but that for twenty years or more, puffed upon his silver water-pipe in silence. A slight rippling of the beautifully embroidered satin which covered the farther wall of the room was a signal from one of his coolies that the sailor had a weapon in his hand below the edge of table. In this deadly game of Asiatic chess, it was Chang's move.

"What was the name of the steamer—and the owners—at the time?"

"You wanta know a lot before ye say will you go in or not—don't ye, 'bo! W-a-a-l—I'll tell you that much! Try to double-cross me, an' I'll make cat's-meat o' ye before ye c'n leave this here museum o' yourn!"

Moran leaned across the table, his right fist clenching the automatic under it. But without the slightest evidence that he appreciated the tenseness of the situation, Chang placed a box of cigars at the sailor's elbow and struck a match for him. "Thankee!" Puff—puff—puff! "Damn fine tobaccy, this! She"—puff—puff—"was the *Clan Bromarty*—Trefforth an' Caldwell, owners—South Shields. Now, tell me when she last cleared—an' f'r where? I aint makin' no fool inquiries among the shippin'-houses, ye know—I'm gittin' you to do that fur me!"

Moran was beginning to feel queer around the heart. Doctors had told him that he smoked too much—but he'd never been really scared before. His breath was coming in shorter gasps as he leaned heavily upon the guest-table and waited for Chang's reply.

"The *Clan Bromarty* left Vladivostok four months ago for Manila and Sydney. Cleared from Manila two weeks later—and has never been spoken since. Posted 'Missing' last month, at Lloyd's—supposed

to have gone to the bottom in the Banda sea. Typhoon."

Moran dimly sensed a belief that this was a lie, intended to make him give up all thought of recovering the jewels—and decided that he had better shoot the Asiatic where he sat. But something made it apparently impossible for him to move; and while it settled more crushingly on his mind, he lost consciousness, pitching from the guest-chair to the floor.

TUCKING up his long under-jacket, Chang very deliberately got up and knelt by the motionless form, going through pocket after pocket, palming the stones in one of them before his fingers were withdrawn, glancing hastily over letters and memoranda, but apparently finding nothing of interest in them. Feeling of the linings with a touch which had been sensitized by long years of practice, he could detect no scrap of paper within the garments; yet he was positive that Moran had carried with him some key to the hiding-place of the jewels on the cargo-boat. Removing the left shoe, he examined it carefully—and presently scratched up an edge of the inner sole with a long finger-nail until it could be pulled loose. On the underside of this, several words had been roughly printed with India-ink. Stuffing the strip of leather into one of his pockets, he was lacing the shoe onto Moran's foot again when Bartlett, curious as to the long silence, came out from behind the rug to see what was happening.

"What's the matter with him—apoplexy?" He had heard no sound of a quarrel or struggle. There was no evidence of a wound.

"More like weak heart-action, I theenk. Sit down for a few moments while I have my coolies prepare a room and put the fellow to bed until he recovers. No! I would not advise your trying those cigars! They are too strong for the average smoker. Light one from this other box."

In a few moments a couple of coolies silently appeared, lifted the motionless figure from the floor and carried it out of the room. Then Chang returned with a carefully wrapped and sealed package which he handed to Bartlett.

"There is a motor-ship lying down in Keppel Harbor which has been used by a scientific expedition engaged in hydrographic work for a year or more among the Islands—the *Bandarwallah*. Recently the leader of the expedition has been taking a marriage cruise on her with his woman, and has just returned. I would like to have you go abroad tonight in a launch manned by my coolies and place this package in the hands of Captain Jim Medford—no one else! He must not open it until he is below, in his after saloon—in the presence of his woman and yourself. Kindly repeat to them, carefully, the talk you heard from this fellow Moran. After that, your service to me is finished. Here is the balance of the money for your pin, and the extra seventy dollars—which completes our business transaction. When my wishes regarding Captain Medford are carried out, you are at liberty to proceed with your own affairs—accepting my thanks and best wishes."

THERE was something mysterious about Moran's sudden illness—and the Chinaman's caution against smoking the strong cigars. Of course, Moran would recover presently, and was apparently being taken better care of than he had any right to expect. But—suppose—suppose he should *not* recover! Suppose the man had been dead when Bartlett saw him on the floor? It brought back a fleeting vision or two of certain war-scenes which he had been trying to blot from his mind. Still, from what he had seen and heard behind the rug, it had been a toss-up as to which of them struck first. Anything Chang might have done was clearly in self-defense.

It was midnight when Bartlett went up the *Bandawallah's* accommodation-ladder—in a clear tropic starlight which was reflected, here and there, in the nearly motionless waters of Keppel Harbor. The riding-lights of anchored steamers gleamed like fireflies a short distance away. Occasionally a faint echo of music came from the residential quarter of the city where a ball was evidently going on in one of the larger bungalows—but the rows of port-lights had disappeared from the liners at their wharves, and except for echoes from the mass of sampans over by Collyer Quay, the port was asleep.

The Medfords had just come abroad and had not yet retired—so Wun Hop was told to fetch Bartlett below as soon as they understood his errand. When Medford had unfolded the many wrappings of soft Chinese paper, he came first to a small and

beautifully-carved ivory box in a separate covering—addressed, in painfully neat writing: *The Fortunate Woman of Honorable Jim Medford.* Beneath it lay a discolored strip of leather upon the under side of which certain memoranda had been inked—the innersole of a man's shoe. Passing the box over to his wife with a puzzled smile, the Captain said:

"There's a story which goes with this—of course! Perhaps Mr. Bartlett has it? But open your box, Paulie—let's see what sort of shoe-leather you have in that, first."

When the lid was removed, they saw a mass of soft white cotton, upon which lay a magnificent emerald of possibly twenty carats—so beautifully cut, of such marvelous green translucency, that its value could be guessed only approximately.

"Oh, Jim! Isn't it perfectly lovely! But—it can't be for *me!* Who sent it, Mr. Bartlett—and why?"

"I guess you'll have to give us the story, old chap—if you know it. Er—just a moment! We might as well be comfortable—hope you're not thinking of going ashore again at this time of night! Wun! Hello, there! Wun! Mix us some mint-juleps and fetch along a few cigars this side! Then put some pajamas in Torrey's room."

IT took Bartlett close to an hour, giving them his recent experiences—with the side-lights of his own impressions concerning the various happenings. They listened with absorbing interest.

"Hmph! Every time I begin to think I understand something of Asiatic mental processes, I run across a new slant. You evidently know nothing of old Chang Feng—who looks like an active man of forty-five, yet must be close to seventy—except what you've learned today. But we've had cause to know him a lot deeper than that. From his dealings with you, he would seem to be an exceptionally honest man—of the educated class. Speaks good enough English to have learned it in one of our colleges. Perhaps he did—who can say? But for years he was a pirate, a smuggler, hatchet-man—in every part of the Archipelago—likely enough in most of the world's big ports. For the last twenty years or so he has conducted a perfectly respectable business in Singapore and Hongkong, building up a secret organization which probably undertakes a good many contracts that are anything but respectable. He bargained, for instance, with a Bornese Rajah to abduct Mrs. Medford—actually got away with it, as you may have heard—purely as a matter of business and without knowing that I had any interest in her. Now, as this affair is beginning to look, he is evidently making amends to us in some way for what he did in ignorance. You might have slept in his house in perfect safety with all the money he paid you. On the other hand, he evidently killed that sailor Moran, with no more compunction than he would a rat! And I'll bet he did it in some way that had no appearance whatever of murder!"

"You think that too, do you? I had an impression it might be so when his coolies were carrying the man out of the room, but was in some doubt as to his being actually dead, at the time."

"From your story, the man first threatened him, and then came across with the steamer's name—which made Chang dangerous if he decided to double-cross him. I've no doubt that one of his coolies—hidden somewhere—gave a signal that Moran was fingering a weapon under the table. Is this emerald the one Moran showed him?"

"Why—I think not! Of course, I couldn't see the stone from where I sat in that alcove, because Moran had his back to me. But if you're right in thinking Chang is trying to make amends of some sort, he certainly wouldn't send Mrs. Medford that particular emerald, in the circumstances!"

"THAT'S where you judge from the Occidental viewpoint, Bartlett, instead of the Asiatic," replied Medford. "Consider! Moran was a self-confessed thief and murderer, having no right whatever to the jewel. Of course the bolshevist was too—though technically, ownership of loot taken in actual warfare has been tacitly admitted. Now, Chang is obliged to kill the scoundrel in self-defense—I've no doubt whatever as to that being cold fact. A wandering scoundrel of that type has no heirs. When he's plenty dead, he has no further use for what may be in his pockets. Your Asiatic is a materialist in everything but his religious superstitions. Considering that every great jewel has been soaked in blood during the time since it was mined, one is foolish to feel any great repugnance on that account. At all events, your testimony leaves a reassuring doubt

that this may be the same stone, so there's no reason why my wife shouldn't keep and enjoy it, if she can forgive old Chang —which she really did from the start, knowing it was purely a matter of business with him. His people really treated her amazingly well. Now—what do you make of this leather scrap?"

"Haven't the least idea! He did that up while he was in some other part of the *godown*—I never saw it until you opened the package. What are the words printed on it?"

"*'Bottom of hollow binnacle-standard —under two half-discs, painted wood.'*"

"Considering this as part of your story—Exhibit B, as it were—I'd say it refers to the place where the bolshevik hid the bulk of the looted jewels on that cargo-boat, the *Clan Bromarty*. Unquestionably, Chang went through Moran's clothes with Chinese thoroughness, after killing him, and ripped this from inside his left shoe. To the best of my recollection, he told Moran the literal truth concerning that cargo-boat—I think she *was* posted as 'Missing' last month. Wait a minute! It's a simple matter to find out." He took down a filing-case from a shelf over the broad chart-table and drew from it the last quarterly list of marine casualties published by Lloyds.' "Ah! Here we are! '*Clan Bromarty*—Vladivostok to Sydney via Manila and Thursday Island. Cleared, Manila, August 12th. Spoken off San Bernardino Strait August 16th. Not since heard from.'"

"But—but—if she's gone to the bottom, Captain, I don't see— What was his object in sending you the secret of where they were hidden! What possible good can it do you—supposing that Chang meant to do you a favor?"

"Well—the Asiatics all know that I and my two friends once recovered over a million dollars' worth of jewels from a steamer lying on bottom in over twenty fathom—and gave them back to their rightful owner, the Rajah of Trelak. Chang probably assumes that I might have the luck to locate that sunken hulk if I cared to go hunting for it. He doesn't know himself how many jewels there were or what they might have been worth—but Moran's story would imply that they may have been the private collection of some Russian grand duke who was murdered, with all his family. In which case, their value would have been up in the millions, very likely. There is also another possibility which would have occurred to the old pirate. Suppose the *Clan Bromarty* is still afloat somewhere—not sunk at all?"

"BUT," protested Bartlett, "isn't that impossible—considering how long she has been missing?"

"No. You may not have heard that a gang of Prussians have been stealing boats out here for the last year—until the game got to be almighty serious. H-m-m—that bolshevik had a fairly good idea, hiding the stones in that binnacle-standard! The binnacle itself—that is, the hood, compass and bowl, with their adjusting-gear—is frequently unscrewed in port for readjustment. But unless a new and different one were installed in place of the old one, the hollow iron standard wouldn't be unbolted from the deck-planking—perhaps for years. Then—he cut a disc of board just the inner diameter of the standard where it flares at the bottom, split it in half to go through the narrower top-opening, gave it a coat of dark paint so it wouldn't be noticed by anyone looking down when the compass-bowl was removed—and put his bag of jewels under it. Well—it's a better proposition than the pot of gold at the rainbow's end—but there seems to be hardly enough to use as a basis in locating her."

"Oh—*say!* Hold on a minute! I wonder if—Just let me see if I can recollect exactly what those two captains were saying in Sedlar, Phillips and Company's office the other day! They were looking at that same Lloyds' list, tacked up on the bulletin-board—talking about this same boat! I'm sure of that because I went over afterward and looked at the name under a finger-smudge from the Captain's finger. He said that one of his Chinamen had a brother who owned a trading-junk down there in the Moluccas—and that the brother passed this same *Clan Bromarty* thirty miles west of some cape on Papua, August twentieth—near enough for him to read the name on the stern."

Bartlett was conscious that Mrs. Medford's eyes were boring into him like twin stars from across the table—he thought she was one of the loveliest women he had ever seen, and had the impression that she was fairly crazy over Captain Jim in her own quiet way. The Captain himself was looking at him closely, in a speculative way, as he lighted a fresh cheroot;

then he got up and fetched from a locker an Admiralty chart of the Moluccas and neighboring waters, which he spread upon the table.

"Don't happen to remember what cape that was they mentioned, do you, Bartlett?"

"Something that begun with 'S'—Sappy, I think."

"Humph! *Sapey!* Just about what I've been thinking ever since you gave us the story! That boat never was sunk at all! Captain and crew drowned or murdered—ship stolen and laid up in one of those blind inlets on the west coast of Papua until they change her rig and paint, and put her in the trade again somewhere under another flag. The Dutch aren't responsible for it, they wouldn't dare—and have no notion of risking international complications anyhow. Well, your bit of information is the missing-link, old chap! It simplifies the whole proposition. We examined six or eight inlets on that strip of uninhabited coast at the time Sam Torrey sank the submarine in one of them—and can undoubtedly find the *Clan Bromarty* within a few days after we get down there. Probably have something of a fight to get possession if we tackle it alone without the help of a Navy boat—but unless it's a regular rendezvous with a whole nest of 'em, there may not be over three or four aboard of her, as caretakers. Of course, what you've told us brings you into the game! You might have kept it to yourself and managed somehow to get down there on your own hook. Want to go with us on the *Bandarwallah* and split whatever we get in three equal shares?"

"I'll go with you like a shot,—and thank you for asking me,—but a third share would be plumb ridiculous! I can't take any credit for happening to remember a chance conversation between two sea-captains—and in the circumstances, telling you of it was the only decent thing to do. You see, Chang Feng meant whatever you got out of this to be a sort of evening-up for what he did to Mrs. Medford. Because he once knew my father, he thought it likely that I might be straight also—and trusted me to carry out something he'd set his heart on doing, yet didn't want to handle personally. He was under no obligations whatever to me—"

"How do you know that? Looks somewhat as if Chang may have had a double object—possibly some obligation he was under to your father—and deliberately brought you into the affair for your own possible good as well. Eh?"

"Nonsense!" replied Bartlett.

IT was some time after their return to Singapore before Grace Armitage succeeded in getting anything but fragmentary references to that cruise from Bartlett. There would be sketches of isolated occurrences on different evenings—in a veranda-corner of the bungalow her father had leased when he found that his business affairs in the East would keep him there for six or eight months longer. She got, for example, a vivid picture of Pauline Medford in oilskins on the bridge of the *Bandarwallah,* clinging to a stanchion and bringing her ship safely through a Malay Archipelago typhoon. Until Grace dragged it out of him, he forgot to mention the strategy by which he lured the crew of pirates some distance away, enabling Medford to get possession of the *Clan Bromarty* in a winding Papuan inlet; but he sketched in broad colors another picture she never forgot—that of Captain Jim in nothing much but linen trousers and a pith helmet, standing upon the forward-deck of the old cargo-boat, blazing into, the mob of pirates with two automatics, as they tried to board him—until his engineer could turn steam into a hose and scald them by the wholesale.

"As far as I was concerned, Grace, it was just a fluke. That sort of thing isn't earning a man's living! It doesn't solve the problem at all! I've got a pot of money—yes; but no thanks to any effort of mine that I can see!"

"Wait a minute, Harry! You'd just had some pretty bad luck—hadn't you? Exactly! Then I can't see anything out of the way in your tumbling into a lot of good luck to even up! We'll say the two squared each other. But how about the difference in your point of view? Would you undertake a business deal now with more certainty of success than you felt before—or not?"

"Hmph! From what I saw of Smiley's methods that day I sat in his office, I see no reason why I shouldn't double my money out here in two or three years. Of course, I'll get stung occasionally—good and plenty; but I think I'll win out more frequently than I'll lose. You're going to stick around for a while yet, aren't you, Grace? That'll help a lot!"

Wind Along the Waste

(What Has Already Happened:)

DESPERATELY in need of employment, Ann Belmont accepted a position as governess in an isolated, mystery-steeped house among the sand dunes on the California coast. On the night of her arrival, her sense of security was by no means enhanced when she discovered that she had been locked in her room during the night. The next morning, although her door was unlocked, she found Hoang, the Chinese man-of-all work, eyeing her furtively as she left the room. Then she was warned that her sickly-looking charges, Joan and Harry, were never to leave the house even for a walk on the beach, and Joan told of the "Bluebeard Chamber" at the foot of an unused staircase, where she had once seen a face "all terrible and shiny."

At length, Ann's employer, Miss Haldayne, reluctantly owned to receiving threatening anonymous letters on the day that Ann thought she saw the lupine branches swaying in the gully to the east of the house, as if a man were wriggling under their shelter. The next day her suspicions were confirmed when she found the imprint of a man's body clearly outlined in the sand and two eyes—Chinese eyes—peering at her through the bushes. As she returned, paralyzed with fear, it was evident Hoang had been watching her from the windows. What had he to do with the watcher in the dunes?

That night Ann was awakened by a shot—and the Chinese death-howl. But except that Hoang wore a bandage on his arm the next morning, and was dressed in mourning, there was no sign that anything unusual had taken place.

Determined to solve the mystery of the secret room, Ann went clue-searching at midnight, and came face to face with George Rogers, Miss Haldayne's nephew. He had come to the house a short time before as a blind, war-torn paralytic. Now he was forced to show his hand—he too wished to solve the mystery of Dune House.

CHAPTER XIII

In the Night

TO my guilty fancy the old clock in the sitting-room appeared to strike eleven-thirty with malevolent clearness. There was a tinge of alarm to its clamor; it was more a clarion call to arms than an announcement of the hour of rest for Dune House.

The moon was gracing us with her presence that night. White pools of light lay in

A Three-part Novel

By GLADYS E. JOHNSON

the hollowed scoop of the stairs and trembled on the worn floor-boards. Through the far window I could see the dunes stretching away interminably, blue-white billows, under the unwinking orb. This, however, was in the front of the house. The back of the hall, the stairs toward which I was stealing my way, were draped in plushy blackness.

It seemed an unending time that I was groping my way blindly along the passage. My tongue was cleaving dryly to the roof of my mouth; each nerve was tensed.

"Ann!"

I more sensed than heard the soft whisper in the darkness. My outstretched fingers brushed something tangible; then they were clasped in George Rogers' firm grip. I had reached the head of the stairs.

Without communication other than that warm clasp, we continued to steal down the stairs, the man first, automatic drawn —I trailing behind, with the electric torch he had handed me tight-clutched in my cold, dry hand.

We passed the gray rectangle of window by stooping low to avoid presenting a silhouette lest sleepless eyes be watching from the upper hall, made the sharp turn and felt our way to the lower landing. Here the darkness seemed so thick as to be almost tangible. Only our outstretched finger-tips told when we had reached the door of the secret room. George Rogers was in advance. I stopped by bumping into him.

For a breathless moment we waited, heads atilt to the stairs overhead lest a creak of our progress had betrayed us. Unknown to the man, one hand of mine remained outstretched, lightly touching his sleeve. The rough feel of the cloth was indescribably comforting.

The silence was so deep that it rang in our ears. The tide was out; the surge of the water came from very far away; we might have been miles within the earth, so far as other evidence to the senses was concerned.

After what seemed an eternity, I felt the man stir, felt his right hand move toward his pocket; the other, I knew, still held the automatic.

"The light," he breathed close to my face.

The beam which leaped out at the pressure of my finger was uncomfortably bright. As it splashed across the dark, shiny wood of the door and came to a wavering focus on the keyhole, I had the unpleasant conviction that it attracted myriads of unseen eyes from the dark to watch us. George Rogers' hand came within its arc, grasping the skeleton key;

it moved toward the knob—then abruptly the light winked out, and my other hand had shot to his wrist and clung there in silent agony.

"What?" came his startled whisper.

For a moment I did not answer, just clung frantically, eyes and ears painfully alert in the blackness. I had to moisten my lips first when I did reply, my words breathed close to his ear.

"I don't know—for sure. I didn't hear anything, but—I seemed to *feel* it! Hark!"

Again that paralyzing interval of silence, during which we remained motionless, every sense strained. Five minutes perhaps went by in this maddening inactivity—five centuries of heart-breaking uncertainty before I drew a long, quivering breath and my hand dropped from that warm pulsing wrist.

"It was nothing, I guess."

I could feel by the sway of his body that the man had turned his head, that it was inclined, listening, to the door behind us. Beyond that door there was no sound. The hall stretched grimly in front of us.

THE light flashed into being once more and directed itself to the keyhole. The skeleton key sought for the lock, found it, then was as abruptly withdrawn with a little rasp that seemed as though it filed across my raw nerves. Again the light winked out, and this time there was no exclamation. We had both heard it—an alien noise somewhere up there in the front of the house—an inexplicable noise, a noise which we knew was never created by wind, or wave or moisture.

I found my knuckles painfully crushed in George Rogers' fingers, felt my damp hair stir with his breath as he whispered: "There's some one up in the front, I think. I'm going to have a look."

With the last word he began cautiously feeling his way forward; I promptly imitated him, my leashed breath not knowing whether to come out in a gasp or be swallowed in a gulp.

Around the bend in the wall the coal-chute darkness surrendered to the advance guard of the moonlight. Things took on a gray tinge; I could see the dark bulk of the man just before me.

We stopped twice to listen, flattened there against the wall, eyes strained to the menace ahead, ears sharpened by fear, stockinged feet poised to flee whichever way alarm gave the signal. Each time the silence reassured us, and we resumed our stealthy stalking through the grayness. We passed the dark cavern of the little sitting-room with its door ajar. The thin shaft of an investigating moonbeam suddenly thrust itself through the parlor entrance to tremble on the edge of the lowest hall stairs. I became aware of the acute surprise that the door should be open at all. Save on cleaning days, it was kept religiously closed, a New England custom transplanted bodily to this Western dwelling. Then my heart contracted painfully, and once more my knuckles were crushed in the man's. A slight sound came from the front room, a brushing sound, as of a body passing close to the wall; and the thin shaft of moonlight was blotted out for the moment by a shadow.

I was grateful then for the strong pressure of that hand, for my head reeled. For the next few seconds the moon-dappled hall swam before my sick eyes; then, with a gallant roar the blood pounded back and I was cognizant of my surroundings.

It was again ominously still in the front room. Following what seemed an eon of inactivity, I felt my hand released with a reassuring squeeze, and my guide moved forward. My feet automatically did the same, and moving silently as shadows among shadows, we came abreast the open parlor door.

It was very dark in there, and very still. Our eyes, used by now to the thin grayness of the hall, could make nothing of the gloom, beyond where it was cleft by that fitful beam of moonlight; but our eyes followed it up to its source. It sloped between the dark velvet window-hangings pulled ajar! It sloped over and around a black bulk half draped by the curtain on either side—some one standing back toward us, I felt instinctively, his face flattened to the glass of the locked window looking over the moon-flooded dunes.

The silence was leaden; I found that I had forgotten to breathe. Then the beam of moonlight broadened; the figure had turned and the next moment the moonlight blinked out in blackness as the curtains swung together and through the inky darkness of the parlor we could hear the soft brush of feet on the carpet.

That fearful inertia would have chained me there to be discovered had not my arm been suddenly gripped in a warm clasp. I was half carried into the ambush of the thick shadows farther up the hall, swept

along and held in the firm circle of an arm which was all that saved my cowardly knees from giving way beneath me.

The soft scuffling came louder to our ears; a board squeaked in the hall just outside the parlor. We could barely make the figure out—a grayness hardly darker than the grayness which surrounded it. Nothing in the whole dim scene appeared to have solidity, but was all a sea of half-light, and the sound of its surf was the ringing of silence in our ears.

A small eternity elapsed; then from behind came a low, menacing whir. I started in that protecting embrace, but I did not scream; and the next moment a hot wave of relief flooded the back of my neck, leaving me weak. The Grandfather clock in the sitting-room was striking twelve.

The long strokes died out in the upper reaches of the house; the cogwheels slipped back into place with a little jar; silence closed over our heads again; then up there in the shadows the gray figure stirred. Came the soft scuffing once more; a stair creaked under a weight; the prowler, whoever it was, was about to make a nocturnal visit to the upper hall.

I was both relieved and chilled. The man about me loosened a trifle, and we moved forward with one accord. The window in the bend of the stairs would reveal the intruder even as it had once revealed the man who now stood my ally. The moonlight lay in a white pool on the half-way landing; it glanced in high-lights off the spindle-shaped balusters and painted the whole replica on the lighted square of plaster wall opposite. A portion of the lighted rectangle was blotted out, the figure toiling upward paused, back to us, and flattened its face against the hall window.

IT was a woman. The disheveled hair stood out in wild silhouette about her head. The body was swathed in the voluminous folds of some heavy garment. I felt that I gasped. As if that light sound had penetrated to her, the figure suddenly wheeled and remained tensely poised. The moon sharply illuminated that listening face. The man beside me stiffened, and I gasped again. It was Miss Haldayne. But what a Miss Haldayne! Between the rumpled twists of her iron-gray hair, her face peered, harshly outlined, the black eyes wild and watchful.

For perhaps a moment the three of us held the tableau. The man and I were sick with dread lest those wild black eyes would pierce the shadows of the lower hall and see the white patches of our faces against the plaster wall. The strained expression gradually faded—we could see this, even in the moon's uncertain light. Then a change more terrible, more inexplicable, passed over it. The familiar features took on an expression I had never seen them wear. They lighted as though shining by the light of a wild, inward glee—an almost ferocious cunning. Gone was the iron self-control, the unconscious appeal, or—the expression I liked best to see them assume—the stamp of grim humor I had known. The same features, but how changed! It was as though some diabolical overgrown child had stolen the mask of Eliza Haldayne's plain, efficient face.

The next minute the moonlit area was empty; the figure had been swallowed up in the blackness of the upper stairs. Terrorized surprise kept us chained in the shadows. We heard the creak of the board we had learned to avoid in the upper hall, and then, full of meaning to our overstrained ears, the soft introduction of a key in a door-lock, more recognized by our nerves than our hearing.

"God!" I heard the whisper of the man beside me, and he tightened his clasp. I found that I had been drawn into his arms, that the physical contact was full of unutterable relief, that I clung frantically back, my hair pressed against his cheek, while he patted one shoulder reassuringly with his free hand. Nor was I at all daunted by the discovery. Conventions had no place that night in that dark house with its nerve-racking inmates.

"What does it mean? What can it mean?" I demanded in a frightened whisper. In that brief space I had found time to entertain the wild theory that the place harbored some fantastic twin sister of the odd woman's. But reason rejected this.

The man's whisper was grim when it reached my ears. "I don't know, but by God I'm going to, tomorrow! I'm through with mystery. There's going to be a thorough explanation."

"From Miss Haldayne?"

I felt his nod in the dark.

A long moment passed, while I could almost see the wild surmises passing through our minds. Finally I drew a long, quivering breath. "I can't—seem to believe it!" my whisper broke.

His own came very warm and close on

my ear. "Poor little girl, you poor little tired, spunky thing! This confounded house has worn you out."

This brought me to the realization that he was still patting my shoulder, while his other arm pressed me tightly to him. I drew away with as much dignity as I could drum up, tucking up my hair with shaking fingers.

"I don't want to explore the secret room tonight," I quavered like a scared child, as Joan herself might have done. "I want to go to bed!"

And indeed the one place I fervently desired to be was in my own room, the bedclothes securely pulled over my head.

"Ann—listen, dear."

HIS whisper was guarded but intense. It brought a warm glow to my cold cheeks, not unpleasant after the chill of fear they had known, but I had had enough of emotion that night. Noiselessly I broke from his clasp and darted to the stairs. My foot was on the first one when I stopped, frozen into immobility, my face tilted up to the shadows. Onto the patch of moonlight landing slid the figure of Hoang, chin outthrust as he peered down toward me in the gloom.

I know now that it could only have been a few seconds while I stood there, feeling the blood drain from my almost stilled heart, but it seemed then to be an eternity of torture. It was long enough, in all events, for several things to flash into my over-alert brain. Had Hoang heard the sound of our voices? Had it been that which disturbed him? It was hardly possible, we had barely heard them ourselves close as we had stood. Was he prowling about the house on uncanny business of his own, or was our venturesome expedition known to him? If it was, George Rogers' disguise was completely pierced; still, on the other hand, it might have been that creak upstairs which had wakened him—some slight noise of Miss Haldayne's passing. Then our best refuge was to hide.

I had placed one back-thrust arm against George Rogers' chest, and by his quick retreat to the shadows near the sitting-room door, I knew that he had leaped to the same conclusion. Praying that my moving figure might not be conspicuous among the surrounding grayness, I was following suit when my heart leaped painfully to action and my knees threatened to give way beneath me.

The Chinese bent still farther forward; I saw the moonlight glitter on the whites of his eyes, narrowed to the merest slits in an effort to concentrate. His voice floated sibilantly down through shadows.

"Missy Belmont—you there?"

Amid the sick reeling which the moon-splashed hall took on, I tried to keep my head. I could feel the man behind me gather as though for a spring, and I gave him my most vicious backward thrust. Time enough to spring to the rescue when a rescue was needed. Until then the sight of a paralytic man walking required more explanations than we felt inclined to make.

There was nothing more to be gained by concealment. Hoang must have been very sure of me to call my name. I answered in a voice which wabbled painfully: "Yes, Hoang. Did I wake you?"

I stepped forward boldly as I said this, aware that the man in the shadows behind me was an unwilling follower of my silent advice. I could picture him, tensely alert, the automatic trained on the unwitting figure of the Oriental on the landing.

I advanced up the stairs boldly enough, my outward demeanor giving no inkling of my shaking limbs; but I was rather at a loss when the Chinaman remained planted squarely across my path. His face and neck projected almost belligerently from the collar of a hastily flung-on coat. The black sharp shadows made his cheek-bones appear abnormally high; his eyes were glittering slits opening pocketlike in the flat face.

Their cold venom made me pause quite as much as his form blocking my way. They held my own with a terrible steadiness as on that morning in the breakfast-room.

I tore my mind away from the control of his own as if by a physical effort, felt my thoughts hurl themselves back to the comforting realization of George Rogers standing behind me with a blessedly real automatic. With this, a grateful burst of warmth came over my chilled body and my heart received a new gush of courage.

As though sensing the mental resistance, the Chinaman capitulated. He spoke in a dull, sulky voice.

"Why you come down here?"

"I heard a shutter creaking and I couldn't sleep," I lied promptly. It was clumsy but the only one which came readily.

Again the black venom of that gaze held

me. There had been no wind tonight. His voice was heavy with meaning when it finally came, ominously slow.

"I think no good to walk at night. Once I tell you. Now I tell again. You stay in your room, Missy Belmont. I think so."

He made a sudden quick movement, and my heart fainted within me; but it had only been to move aside on the landing to allow me a couple of grudging feet to pass. I could feel the hatred of his stare as I did so, his head turning slowly to keep me ever in full view. There was a heart-sickening moment while my skirts brushed his rigid body; then I continued on up the stairs, my back prickling with the disturbing knowledge that he had turned and was silently following a few paces behind.

No further word was spoken; we made our noiseless way up the hall. At his own door Hoang paused, but I knew that he was standing rigid in the dark hall waiting for the click which would tell that I had entered my room.

The knob did click as I released it and turned the key in the lock, but I remained just on the other side in the same position, my cold wet forehead pressed against the closing crack, my ears strained to catch something other than the frightened beating of my own heart.

It was long after—very long after indeed, it seemed—before I caught that for which I had been waiting. The dream of a hand brushed across the panels of the door; there was the infinitesimal release of a lock in the night. George Rogers had reached his own room in safety. And only then did I relax.

CHAPTER XIV

More Things in Heaven and Earth

I AWOKE to a strange feeling of unrest, to an imperative need for haste, for which I was at a loss to account. I lay stupidly blinking at the plaster ceiling until a door banged sharply downstairs. That told of some one's presence, though by the light of the fog-filled square of window I judged it to be much earlier than my usual rising-hour.

That curious sense of alertness continued. The old house seemed uneasy. I slipped to the floor and ran to the window. The next moment found me, face and palms flattened against the cold wire mesh, strained eyes staring ahead to the exotic growth sprung by our dreary little beach in the night.

The fog was lifting, dissipated by the dawn wind. On all sides the water appeared to be steaming; and amid these fog-wraiths, now shrouded by their ragged wisps, now half revealed as a current of atmosphere lifted them for a brief moment, rocked the strangest craft which had ever nosed its way into the dismal little bay.

Time might have turned back four centuries. The ship was not unlike an old Spanish galley, jutting high, fore and aft. Her one mast had a crazy tilt forward; one enormous oar extended out to one side like the lame flapper of a lobster. So high she rode that one looked to see her turn turtle with each oily swell but always she righted herself like a piece of cork bobbing on the surface of the water. From either side of her bow I saw painted two enormous red eyes glaring inland.

The sloping beach had sprung a new growth amid its jelly fish and murderous brown kelp. It fairly swarmed with fantastic creatures: brown, lithe, half-naked figures scrambling over the dunes on skinny bare legs, squatting on their heels about small crackling fires of driftwood, a few standing ankle deep in the little creek seeping through the sand as they bailed up the water. They raced like monkeys over the wet sand, seemingly impervious to the chill wind which was blowing the bunch grass. Grouped in jabbering masses, they shaded their eyes and pointed skinny forefingers at the silent great house staring blankly back at them. From my high vantage-point they were unpleasantly like a mass of larvæ squirming busily in the lap of the dunes. Their shrill voices carried to me in a high singsong on the fitful gusts of wind.

Never before had I laid eyes on such spawn; yet the high-riding junk behind and the shrill-flung voices served to identify them. They were Chinese—not the placid *Han Ren* with which the Pacific coast of this country has grown so familiar, but a type which was almost aboriginal—undersized, apelike beings with matted black hair falling in filthy confusion beneath enormous basket hats.

A MILLION wild conjectures fought in my dazed brain as I pulled my clothes on with shaking hands. Were these the mysterious "They" referred to in the threatening notes? What part did Hoang

play in this? Was it for this ship, long expected, that he had been silently slipping downstairs last night, only to confront me in the hall?

Not stopping to pin up the hair flying in brown confusion about my shoulders, I ran out into the hall. Now, indeed, I heard the commotion which had caused that uneasiness in my sleep. Hurrying steps sounded on the bare boards of the lower hall. Doors banged; a window-shutter was slammed in the rear of the house, and its lock screeched into place. Harry began to cry, and turning to enter the children's room, I came face to face with George Rogers, not disguised this morning as the paralytic invalid, but somehow startlingly tall, seen upright for the first time in daylight. His eyes were innocent of dark glasses; his mouth was grim, amazingly like his aunt's in that moment.

He hurried down the hall to me. "You've seen it? The junk? And those yellow vermin swarming over the beach. Ann, we're about due for that explanation, I think."

"Wait for me! I must quiet the children." I was secretly proud at the calmness of my tone.

He was reassuringly close as I entered the room. Harry, plastered at the window in his cotton pajamas, gulped down a sob and joined Joan in staring in round-eyed wonder at the amazing sight of their cousin walking, and without the dark glasses. For the moment this served completely to overshadow the disturbing sights of the beach.

I hustled the children into their bathrobes, for the room was cold, and gave them a few hurried orders.

"You're not to leave this room, neither you nor Harry; Joan, promise me that. We'll be right downstairs, your cousin and I, and we'll take care of you the first of all. Promise you'll stay here."

Between teeth that chattered with fright and chill, Joan gulped out a promise, then quavered: "But Miss Belmont, why are they there? They're Chinamen, aren't they? Why do they look so funny?"

"I don't know," I answered truthfully enough, shaking small arms into refractory sleeves. "Maybe they just came in to get water. Anyway, there's nothing to be afraid of, you know."

Adult company had bolstered Harry's martial spirit. "Ho!" he gave out belligerently, "*I'm* not afraid. Joan. Boys aren't afraid, never!" This in the light of the fat round tears not yet dried on his small cheeks! "If they come up here, I'll shoot 'em with my popgun. Bang!"

WE left the small warrior and his sister in not unpleasurable excitement watching our weird visitors through a slit in the shutters, and hurried down the stairs, those same stairs up which I had crept trembling a few hours ago.

Midway of the lower hall Miss Haldayne suddenly swooped out of the dim back parlor and came flying toward us. The faint red light slanting through the side panels of the front door struck full on her advancing figure, and unconsciously I fell back a step. This was the Miss Haldayne of the night before. Any doubt I may have harbored that it had been she we had seen on the moonlit landing was dissipated.

Her hair, ever before so rigidly immaculate, stood out in a stiff gray halo about her head; her black eyes were wild—more than that, unseeing. They galloped over my companion without appearing to register the amazing fact of his walking, then came back to me like a steel to the magnet. I felt the absolute panic of the woman.

"They've come, Ann. The notes were right; they knew, Ann! They knew! It couldn't be hid. It called, and they came."

I recoiled as she suddenly thrust a hand out at me. It held a revolver.

"Here!" she repeated with a touch of the old asperity. "There's Hoang and I to the front of the house. You two guard the side. The back and east's safe enough for a time, if we keep 'em bottled up on the beach. Drusilla's to stay with the children and to keep out from under my feet. She's a white rabbit—you had it right, Ann, that day in the sitting-room. She's always had the soul of a lizard—I despise her! Let her crawl to cover now. Here."

Again the revolver was shaken impatiently, this time in the direction of George Rogers.

"One moment, Aunt Eliza," the man's voice came with comforting firmness. "We'll have to know what we're fighting for before we do it. Ann and I have an explanation coming."

"Ha!" For the first time she appeared really to see him. Her eyes stared glassily for a moment, appearing to focus with difficulty; then she gave a short, dry laugh. "So you can walk, and you're not blind! That has some meaning, I suppose, or else

you are a very personal devil. What's one more or less—if they're on our side. It doesn't matter if you can shoot. Ann's here. Ann has brains!"

The door of the front parlor suddenly burst open, and Hoang appeared.

"Missy Haldayne, come—look, look! They come—" His eyes, blazing with excitement, wider than I had ever seen them, fell on our incongruous little group. It was the first time I had really seen Hoang betray surprise. As his gaze took in the supposed paralytic, his jaw dropped, and a stupefied amazement froze his features. Truly George Rogers' disguise had been efficacious.

Miss Haldayne, unheeding his stupefaction, sprang to the red panel of the front door and pressed her face against it for a moment, wheeling almost immediately.

"The yellow swine!" She fairly spat it out. "A truce, they want, do they! I'll show them! I'll truce them!" She suddenly raised the pistol and darted to the front room, aiming through the window. George Rogers, quite as quick, gripped her wrist, and the shot rang through the ceiling.

"Not on a flag of truce, no! No matter who carries it!" he panted as the frantic woman struggled in his arms.

I stared fearfully through the shutters.

THE scene on the beach had changed with theatric suddenness. The invaders were gathered in a disordered, ragged group between the creek and the house, yellow faces turned to us, blinking black eyes squinting through the growing morning light. The chill wind blew their blouses and ragged jeans about their skinny bodies and swept the coarse black hair in dirty mats from their shoulders. The only comparison I could make was that of a cageful of filthy and amazing apes huddled together, staring and chattering in half hysterical expectation. Behind them, an astonishing back-drop, the incongruous junk rode the gray bay, the one red eye visible as the craft swung broadside, appearing to stare inland with baleful intent.

Directly before us, advancing along the straggling sandy path with a slow steadiness which was not entirely devoid of a fantastic dignity, came two figures holding aloof a splinter of bamboo from the top of which floated a rag of dirty white. One was dressed in the same loose blouse and jeans as adorned the jabbering crew in the background. His stature was perhaps half a head taller than his fellows as an average; his head, innocent of the usual basket hat, showed the coarse black hair growing close down on the sloping forehead where it shaded the small blinking eyes and the outjutting lower portion of his face. His was the bearing of a chief.

As the sound of the shot rang out, they paused abruptly, the dirty white rag trembling hesitantly aloof. A shrill sing-song of alarm had broken out from the huddled groups watching from the creek.

George Rogers turned on Hoang, who had swiftly and as silently as ever trailed us to the parlor.

"Tell them to stop right where they are," he snapped. "Damn it, I want to find some solid ground here!"

THERE was a tense moment while the Oriental stared defiantly back at the new master who had so unerringly grasped the helm. Rebellion glinted between his narrowed lids, but something in the white man's face finally induced him to turn sullenly, fling back one shutter and bark out a string of Cantonese.

The effect of this was to hold the action outside the window suspended. Then George Rogers turned grimly on his aunt.

"What do they want?" he demanded.

"Something here in the house that they aren't going to get!" she replied harshly and with something like her old authority. "That Which Cannot Be Hid! Huh!" her laugh grated. "There'll be none to hide it from after today. The one who wrote the notes knew—whoever *they* are. Why are we wasting time!" she suddenly burst out passionately. "Shoot 'em now, while we have the chance, the yellow swine! One for Tai Loy, and one for the blind beggar of Han T'sin! Vengeance is mine! It's come to that end finally and the mercy of the Lord will uphold us!"

He grasped her by the broad shoulders, did George Rogers, forcing the wild black eyes to look into his.

"We'll not help you, Ann or I, until you've enlightened us. They're asking for a truce. Have Hoang call to them that we'll deal with them in an hour—when the shadow of the house reaches the base of the great dune. In the meantime, you tell us what we're supposed to fight for."

For a few brief moments they held the tableau. I sensed the almost physical conflict of one tremendous will battling with

the other. In the end it was the defiant black eyes which fluttered from the steady stare of the hazel ones. Miss Haldayne moved toward the window, but Hoang was not impressed as interpreter. Instead she sent a sing-song shout ringing to the motionless two entrenched behind the improvised flag of truce. One felt the hiss of hate through the cadence of it, understood the rigidly uncompromising attitude of those figures out there in the sand. Instinctively my eyes sought the profile of Hoang peering between the shutters.

The placid docility had rolled up from it as a curtain rolls. With an instinctive recoil I saw that despite the difference that cleanliness lent, despite the close-cropped hair and the immaculate linen coat, Hoang's face was one with those savages grouped on the beach. His eyes were half shut to a glittering ferocity; his broad nostrils quivered; his upper lip was curled back in a soft snarl as he waited for the reply of the two below the window.

Miss Haldayne turned on us with a short, harsh laugh.

"You want an explanation. You'll get it. Hoang, stay here and guard the house. Shoot anyone who puts a foot this side of the creek. —Come on," she flung over her shoulder at us.

In silence we followed her from the room and down the hall. I saw with a suddenly pounding heart that we were headed for the secret room under the stairs.

GEORGE ROGERS reached back and took my cold hand in a reassuring clasp as she unlocked the door and abruptly flung it open. It was well he did so, for my sudden backward lunge bade fair to upset us both. From the dark interior of the room a figure seemed to leap to sudden life at the inlet of light; a bloated, shining face leered at us; two gleaming eyes, red as blood, burned through the dark; thin lips twisted in angry frenzy from tight-clenched white teeth.

Even George Rogers gave an instinctive backward step; then his grip tightened comfortingly. "Brace up, Ann," he whispered as he half lifted me over the threshold. "It isn't alive."

Miss Haldayne found her way unerringly through the gloom and unfastened a shutter, flinging it back against the wall with a defiant slam. The white shaft of daylight which darted in fell broadly across the thing in the center of the room, and it immediately crackled into a thousand rainbow-shooting prisms of light—an idol, indescribably ugly, indescribably bejeweled. A short, squat body with crouching, deformed legs and a horrible, flat, life-sized face, shining ebony and ivory, sea-green jade and jade of priceless white, literally incrusted with gems that flashed and scintilated wickedly in that honest shaft of daylight.

Perhaps four feet high, it was, seeming to tower above the plain black walnut table on which it had been incongruously placed. There was nothing else in the room, nothing about the cell-like white plaster walls to distract the eye from its hideous splendor. The imagination was stunned before the glare of cunning ferocity carved on the ebony face. One's gaze clung, helplessly entangled in the dazzle of light. There was none of the usual cheap gilt and lacquer of the average Chinese idol about this. The jade of its towering headdress was pierced and fretted into an unbelievable lacework of carving. Drapery, wrought of gold leaf and thousands of softly gleaming seed-pearls hung about the deformed limbs, the folds traced by the delicate embroidery of gold inlay. Twin fortunes gleamed from either inflated nostril, where two regal Oriental emeralds were set, flashing like the depths of sunlit seawater. Two more fortunes gleamed from beneath the beetling brows, where a king's ransom in Burmah rubies was embedded.

They compelled the attention, those deep red eyes. In the carved hollow sockets they smoldered with uncanny life. I felt my gaze drawn to them, to linger helplessly, fascinated by the steady glare. I was aware of a fretful desire to look away, to turn my eyes anywhere—anywhere save into those twin red beams. Deep within me was born an imprisoned panic when I found I could not obey my will.

FROM far away, from very far away indeed, I heard a voice curiously like—and unlike—Miss Haldayne's, hard, mocking. It seemed to be shouting with stupendous effort to reaching my swooning consciousness; yet it was no more than a stirring whisper in the midst of that singing roar.

"There you see it—the ruby god of Han T'sin! Lord of the Shadows and the Death. That Which Cannot Be Hid! The Dragon Shrine is empty; the gray dust of the Gobi alone clothes it, and the spawn of

the Yellow Wolf have come to do death for their Devil-god!"

A far ball of light had dawned in the heart of the red glow, a mere pinprick of light at first, but growing with impossible speed, rushing toward me, golden-red and dazzling, spinning on its axis, hurtling forward madly. Blazing tissues of infinite depth opened and closed on its amazing surface, as though by insufferable heat. My eyeballs were scorched, dried of grateful moisture; I tried to close the lids, tried frantically; the roaring deepened in my ears; it became the sound of gigantic waterfalls. They fell on the frantically spinning sphere, fell with a hissing that caused the nerves to shrink terrified. There was a blinding flash that stabbed my brain with pain; the world reeled madly in palpitating waves of red that shook into blackness more terrifying than the burning glow had been; then a thick gray cloud that rose curtain-like in intolerable stillness.

CHAPTER XV

Tai Loy

THERE is nothing to indicate where the grim, blazing clay-wastes end and the grim blazing sky begins. On all sides the desert stretches to a seeming cloudland of eternity, hard yellow-gray layers and benches and flattened ridges, undercut and abraided by the wind.

The eyeballs ache with its vastness; it is a veritable planet of desolation. Over it straggle gaunt hills, wasted relics of sliding shingle innocent of one blade of grass. For hundreds of miles the dreary abrasions of saline clay swell to the horizon without a break in their monotony. It is a land which once lived but that is now dead and forsaken.

The faint, indelible marks of that life which still remain are more dreary than stark sterility would be. There are salt-stained depressions, traces of ancient shorelines, remains of shells embedded in the clay; there are belts of dead poplars, patches of dead tamarisk, extensive beds of withered reeds rattling eerily when the wind passes over them; there are ripple-marks on the leeward side of clay terraces and in wind-sheltered coigns, all telling of the former existence of fresh-water lakes long since gone.

Only a few miserable oases now remain—straggling groups of scrubby poplars struggling hard not to die, tamarisks, their roots elevated on little mounds of earth which their fibers have jealously held from the wind which scoops the ground from about them. Here live a few wild camels, drab lizards, a few hares and dismal croaking crows.

Spring, which means rejuvenation to more favored countries, brings terrific winds to this outcast land. They sweep the stretch clear of sand, charging the air so thickly with dust that a yellow pall of desolation hangs over the gasping face of the desert, and its few miserable dwellers cover their heads from the dreaded *burbans*. The sand eventually piles in gigantic dunes that choke the eastern edge of the desert—great dunes, shaped like horseshoes and towering from thirty to three hundred feet in height. This is the Desert of Lop, the dread heart of the mysterious Gobi.

Here, two thousand years ago, lived the Shanshani who founded the state of Loulau and left the crumbled ruin of their principal town to tell their story. Here dwelt the dread Hun-yu, the seed from which was to spring the spawn of Attila. From here came the Uighur tribes and the rulers of the Tangut kingdom, and here too, in the sixth century, the Turks gathered strength for their descent on Christendom. Six hundred years later, as though by divine retribution, Jenghiz Khan drew away the peoples of the region. The wells dried up; trees drooped and withered; life gasped and died; and the pall of silence fell on the face of the land. It became desert.

Now only nomad tribes breast the fierce roar of the wind and brave the brazen glare of the sun. In the dismal oases they build miserable settlements and eke out a meager existence by raising a few crops along the seeping water-holes, and by riding in robber bands to prey on the caravans which skirt the edge of their grim country.

NO one—no one, that is, who by God's grace had ever known a happier land—could conceive of a human willingly clinging to such a place. Yet a white woman stood in the blaze of late afternoon before the dirty village of Han T'sin, staring at the whirling dustcloud in the distance—and her fingers vindictively crushed into a paper ball the letter which to another would spell freedom.

She was like the country, this woman. Like it she was grim and gray. Like it

the winds of life appeared to have swept her clean, blowing away all but one grim, deep-embedded purpose. It had furrowed her face, scarred her soul as the vertical faces of the clay ridges were furrowed and scarred. Bleak, uncompromising, sterile, capable of fits of passionate wrath as the desert was capable of the dread dust-storms, an iron-visaged woman.

Her stormy black eyes were finally withdrawn from the moving dust-cloud which had blown itself to a thin ghost, and she smoothed out the paper in her palm, continuing to read at the point where her anger had crumpled it.

> And so, my dear Miss Haldayne, though we appreciate your zeal in thus choosing the heart of the desert to carry the Good Word to these benighted natives, it seemed for the best that you go to other fields.
>
> The Mission funds will not permit of the continued expense of a worker where the population does not seem to warrant it. We are sending a bearer with money and camels from Nankin. Please report at headquarters when you reach here, in order to ascertain your future work. It will probably be necessary to send you to America on business. . . . .

At this point the paper was angrily crushed again, and the woman's eyes sought the now settling dust-cloud.

Her mind groped back over the years since she had come to Han T'sin, crouching beneath its dreary dying poplars. Squalid, monotonous years they had been, yet somehow filled with a strange peace. Here her restless spirit had been soothed to something like quiet; here the gnawing envy which had tortured her had grown dormant. Personal danger, a never-sleeping watchfulness, the stupendous effort of swaying these children of superstition and ignorance to Christianity, in entering into spiritual grapple with their pagan priests for their souls, in retaining a stern, almost masculine grip on affairs and patiently, with a cunning almost equal to their own, hoisting herself to power in the village—all of this had left little time to brood.

And now Fate was to hurl her back among her own kind, back among men whom she hated, and women she despised.

A FIGURE slipped from the door of one of the huts of sun-baked brick, and silent as a shadow, approached the motionless woman. A hand touched her sleeve with timid reverence.

Eliza Haldayne wheeled; the scowl of her black brows smoothed; her iron features softened a trifle as she looked down into the soft almond eyes shining up at her.

Slim, small boned and graceful—even by Western standards this little Chinese maiden would have been attractive. She was not one with this wild Lo-Lo tribe; she was a Manchu, the reigning race of the Flowery Kingdom, stolen from a south-bound caravan as a baby fourteen years before. This showed in the skin of creamy gold which overlaid the dusky pink of her cheeks, in the blue-black hair drawn back in two satin "wings" from the smooth forehead, in the small pomegranate mouth and the tapering fingers whose daintiness daily labor could not entirely destroy, in the high-arched little feet encased in ugly skin shoes. Contrasted to the Lo-Lo women, with their dusty, unkempt hair, their flat feet and faces withered and drawn even in youth, she was like a pearl in the dust.

Into the grim, barren life of the white woman the affection of this alien girl had stolen like a sweet, insinuating perfume. No hint of the jealous hatred she felt for women of her own race marred the serenity of the strange friendship; there was too little ground for comparison. She had seen her grow from a child to maidenhood; to the older woman's mind, the little Chinese maid was a bejeweled plaything, a perfect lily-bloom, the one thing of beauty she allowed herself.

The play of affection on her face now made the astute features almost gentle. "What is it, Tai Loy?" she asked in Cantonese.

A ripple of anxiety passed over the girl's face.

"The Teacher is troubled," she replied in the same medium. "I watched from the hut and I saw her bend her brows, *so*." Her own pretty arches drew together. "Tai Loy wishes she could help. Is it that the Yellow Wolf is troubling again?"

The white woman's gaze turned away and sought the far horizon of the desert.

"No, it's not Yellow Wolf this time," she finally admitted. "I'll have to go away from here, Tai Loy."

"Away from Han T'sin!" There was stunned unbelief in the girl's voice. "For always, my teacher?"

"Yes, always," came the grim reply. "It costs too much to keep me here, Tai Loy. You know I've told you of the Mission funds before."

Little Tai Loy seemed unable to grasp

it. Her words came in a shocked whisper. "There is no other way? There is no one else who could give money?"

"Yes, there's some money I should have, but I can't get it, because of a vain, lazy fool of a woman!" The words were ripped out, hot with passion. Tai Loy fixed her gentle eyes on her companion's face with surprised dread. She had never heard her mentor speak so before.

"A spoiled, worthless woman!"

ELIZA HALDAYNE'S face was black with anger. Her thoughts leaped down the years, seeing only the clearer for the time that had elapsed. Han T'sin faded away; little Tai Loy vanished into the limbo of things not yet born. She was back in her American home, a strange, tense child constantly being thrust aside for the whim of an indulged younger sister. She watched herself grow to a strange girlhood, unliked and unwanted, a bitter green bud beside a too flamboyant flower, her plainness accentuated by the other's beauty. She watched herself bloom into lonely womanhood, too caustic, too severe, still dominated by the beautiful tyrant of the family. Parental affection was denied her, showered upon the spoilt beauty; friendship passed her by, to be offered as incense to the careless sister.

She saw dawn in white-hot flame the one love of her life, a love for which she would have bowed her stubborn body to the ground, and she knew the hot resentment, the bitter pain of having that love, like everything else of her life, showered on the woman she had come to hate.

As on the never-forgotten day when she had learned this, body and soul writhed in an agony of jealousy. Oh, it had been a glorious revenge she had taken! If she had not won his love, the hated Drusilla had not kept it. The match had been broken—that had been the supreme effort of her life; a short time later she had known the satisfaction and pain of seeing him married to another.

There was a grim smile in the black eyes at the memory of Drusilla's hysterical rage. Each shrieked reproach her sister had hurled upon her had been balm to the ache in her heart.

Then the scene had shifted quickly. Her banked-up emotions found an outlet in religion. She flung herself into missionary work with a zeal which was almost fanaticism, outstripping gentler workers with her intense concentration. It carried her far, that abnormal ability for work, away from the land where she had put in the lonely years, away from the aging, irascible father, from the sister, not so beautiful now, settling to a whining, aimless existence and feverishly spending what was left of the family fortune in a vain attempt to fill her empty life. Han T'sin came over the horizon—the dying poplar trees, the gray Gobi, and Tai Loy.

Eliza Haldayne wheeled around to find the little maid's eyes fastened to her with fascinated dread. Again her features softened. She patted the tapering hand which still rested on her sleeve. Emboldened, Tai Loy pressed closer, and the dusky pink deepened beneath the gold of her cheeks.

"What shall become of me, when you go? My Teacher, I am afraid in Han T'sin. The Yellow Wolf has deigned to do me the honor to notice my miserable face."

Poor little Tai Loy looked not so much honored as frightened by this attention, and Miss Haldayne's black brows met at the words.

Yellow Wolf, the brutal chief of a bandit crew, a bloodthirsty savage, fit descendant of the Hun-yu, could bode no good for delicate little Tai Loy. Yellow Wolf and his band were the bane of the squalid little village in which they made their headquarters. On their inbred superstition, on their blind idolatry, on the hideous cruelty and corruption of their practices, Christianity had made never a mark. Yellow Wolf was her personal enemy; Eliza Haldayne realized that. Her spirit raged within her at the knowledge that her departure would fling the little village of lukewarm Christians to the mercy of this barbarian. But Tai Loy he should not have! She settled it with characteristic decision.

"You shall come with me, Tai Loy—you and Yeun Low, the blind beggar. You two are the only sincere ones in this whole village of hypocrites." She added, more to herself than to the girl: "The bearer will be here any day now with the money and camels. You shall come to my country with me, Tai Loy."

LEFT alone, the little maid stood motionless for a moment, her eyes on the back of the foreign woman who had shown her such unwonted affection; then silently she turned and slipped between the dry and rattling tamarisk which fringed the village.

The earth was giving up its heat in dry

gasps, but the tyrannical heat of the sun overhead was lessening as it slipped down the sky in a haze of its own making. The sacred clay ridges cast long shadows in the smoky red light; the far distances seemed to throw off their lethargy and stretch themselves; the bitter, iron land was reaching out for the invigorating cold of night.

To Tai Loy, stealing through the brush, came the sound of preparing the evening meal; the grinding of nut-meats, the treble sing-song of children, women crying nasally to each other. But it came faintly; here in the tamarisk was silence brooding. Here the shallow seepage from the spring spread out in a pool large enough to reflect a triangle of sky. Tai Loy suddenly paused in the brush, tense with caution.

Crouched above the mirroring water was a man's figure, wrapped in a blue-gray robe many sizes too large for his shrunken frame, and exceedingly dirty and ragged. Apparently he was studying his own reflection in the pool with deepest interest, but as a dry twig snapped under the girl's foot, the withered face was raised sharply and held tense, listening. Then one saw that he had no eyes, only scarred sockets where they had once been.

The girl spoke:

"It is only Tai Loy, Father." She came forward and crouched beside his still figure on the margin.

The old man gazed up in the direction of her voice, with the pitiful over-attention of the blind.

Tai Loy continued. "The Teacher is to leave Han T'sin when the bearer comes with the camels. She has been called back to the Western Land, and when she leaves will go I; and with her will go you, Yeun Low."

There was a short silence; then the old man shook his head slowly from side to side, slowly and sadly.

"I have felt too many suns rise on the Gobi to leave it now. I knew the youth of Han T'sin; that was before ever your father's father was born, little Loy. Here where my lost sight remains shall this withered body join it."

The girl did not dispute this. She leaned forward, and her tapering fingers brushed the ragged blue-gray of his robe.

"What do you see for me, O Ancient One?" she half whispered. She crouched on her heels there beside him. "Tell me what will be!"

There was a long silence; then out of the rustling of the dry tamarisk the reedy old voice rose cryptically:

"The ripe pomegranate hangs low on the branch, and the reach of the Yellow Wolf is swift!"

Beneath the smooth gold of the girl's cheeks the mellow rose receded slowly. Tai Loy spoke more low.

"Is that all you can see, Father?"

The sightless eyes stared down into the seeping pool fringed by its scanty growth. The girl waited patiently, one slender hand stealing to the fluttering breast of the leaf-green robe.

The voice quivered once more from the shriveled throat:

"Dust, gray dust, hangs low over the plain, and the dawn is not for you."

A shadow crept into the soft almond eyes, and Tai Loy's voice was troubled. "I am stupid beyond my years, O Wise One," she said gently. "And what is light to you is my darkness. Tell me clearly of the future, Father."

Again the wind rattled the tamarisk. The smoky red light had deepened perceptibly before the blind beggar's voice sounded monotonously.

"Gray dust over the plain, Tai Loy and the dawn is not for you!"

A sudden chill swept the little maid crouched there on her heels. The shallow water before her flushed red with the angry sky. The tamarisk rustled warningly across the pool; twigs snapped beneath a foot. One of the village women was coming to fill her water-bowl at the spring. Like a startled hare Tai Loy sprang to her feet and fled amid the thickening shadows.

ON the edge of the straggling settlement, beneath a towering poplar, stood the one stone structure of the village. Imposing, this place, after the squalid clay huts clustered at its foot. Perched on a rise of ground, built of unhewn stones, their joints affording dreary foothold for a species of dry gray lichen, it had a dignity through contrast and association which cause the most professed Christian of Han T'sin to regard it with superstitious awe. For this was the Temple of the Dragon Shrine, the abode of that dread red one, the Ruby God of Han T'sin, Lord of the Shadows and the Death, the idol before whom even Yellow Wolf the Fearless bent the knee, and whose favor had so long kept this robber band from the death they dealt others.

Away from the shadows of the tamarisk the night seemed not so imminent. The sun was a smoky-red jewel seemingly resting on the horizon; the shadow of Tai Loy went bobbing before her, ever growing longer. A crow cawed in surprised derision as she slipped between two loose stones in the temple wall. What was little Christian Tai Loy doing here in the Temple of the Dragon Shrine!

Just the other side of the aperture through which she had squeezed, the girl paused and cast one frightened look over her shoulders. Apparently she had not been observed from the village, but her eyes were caught and held by something invisible from the lower ground, a dark cloud against the red horizon, a pillar of dust moving steadily against the sunset, though the winds had died with dramatic suddenness when evening fell.

Tai Loy's lips moved, and although no sound came, she was repeating the blind beggar's words: "Dust—gray dust hangs low over the plain—" She shivered.

A gong sounded within the temple to mark the passing of the sun, and a slim slate-gray figure slipped into the fading light of the outer court. His gaze leaped to the broken stone in the temple wall, and he came straight as a homing dove for the girl who lingered in the shadows.

A young priest he was, the shaven head and severe slate-gray robe imparting a dignity incompatible with his years. His eyes were burning with a soft glow never called forth by the Ruby God he served; his voice was low and vibrant as he called her name.

Now the rose-pink flamed over Tai Loy's face, pale since the cryptic prophecy of the blind beggar. The green robe over her little breast was like an aspen trembling in the wind. Even to the black satin of her hair the pink tide mounted, while he made prisoner the fluttering hands.

"Tai Loy, for two days you have not come! Two days, my little pomegranate maid, and they were as bitter herbs in my mouth. This morning I begged boon from the Red One; and behold—you come!"

Now again the shadow came into Tai Loy's eyes. "It was not the Red One, Hoang." She twisted her hands away firmly. "Though he sits in the Dragon Shrine, he is nothing, he is less than nothing—he is dust, a palmful of ashes. I am very stupid in many things, but this I know: there is a God who is not seen, and he is the true God. O my dearly beloved, if you would only believe this and forsake the Dragon Shrine! Truly the Red One fills me with fearful dislike!"

"Hush, little pomegranate!" The young priest cast a fearful glance over his shoulder toward the blurring outline of the temple. "The Red One is swift to avenge and strike! Even I cannot avert his vengeance; it is more swift and sure than the Yellow Wolf's. Forsake the Dragon Shrine? Tai Loy, even for you I dare not! The Ruby God is a strong god; he is very ancient, Tai Loy, perhaps of the time of the great Yu. Long before the day dawned for Han T'sin, he was brought from out the land to the west, from out of Burma. Ever so long ago that was, even beyond the memory of the old blind beggar. He is a god, for I have seen men stand before him and look into his deep eyes, and then their spirit flags and is dragged from their body and goes elsewhere. I know, for I too have felt that—"

Tai Loy shook the head she held close against his breast.

"I too felt that once, but never since the Teacher came. Now I think of the white Christ when I stand before the Dragon Shrine, and the Ruby One's eyes are as mere crumbs of red glass." Her tone suddenly grew impatient. "Ah, beloved, why do we fling away our little time, our stolen time? My spirit is faint within me tonight; my heart is tearing asunder. The Teacher is to leave Han T'sin, and I am to go with her when the camels arrive."

The low cry of surprised pain which broke from the young priest brought an answering moan from the little maid, and for a silent moment they clung to each other in the deepening dusk.

It was the man who spoke. "You will go and leave Han T'sin forever—and me!"

Tai Loy struggled with her tears for a moment in silence, then her head was bravely lifted, and her eyes sought his glowing down upon her in the half-light.

"I am afraid of Yellow Wolf; yet I would stay if you told me to."

THE young priest's forehead creased in puzzled pain, and he repeated after her almost stupidly: "You are afraid of Yellow Wolf—of Yellow Wolf?" Into the black eyes alarm suddenly smoldered to flame. The little maid was crushed so close in his arms that a small cry broke from her lips.

The man spoke slowly, as one who wishes to convince himself. "The Yellow Wolf has been gone since the feast in the Seventh Month. This is the Feast of the Tombs. Perhaps disaster has overtaken him; perhaps the Red God has withdrawn his protection. It may be that the warring tribes to the north have dealt the slow death he has so often forced upon them."

The shadow in Tai Loy's eyes did not lighten. Her voice trembled. "Moons have risen and waned on the absence of the Yellow Wolf before, and yet he always sweeps down upon Han T'sin as the pestilence sweeps. He is very cruel, the Yellow Wolf. He knows where the eyes of the ancient one have gone. It was he who took little Yat Low four seasons ago, and Yat Low never returned to the village. Hoang, I am afraid! Let us go when the Teacher goes. This is my wish, beloved, my earnest wish, that mounted on the same camel we will flee together far from Han T'sin."

The torture of the young priest's soul showed in his eyes. All of his life had been spent in homage to his god. The fibers of his spirit were straining.

"Tai Loy!" His voice was sharp with pain. "I cannot tell you now. I shall sacrifice to the Red One and ask his favor. There is no need for me here; there are three priests now—Chanchau that old one, Kublai my honored older brother, and myself. Surely—surely I who have tended the Dragon Shrine so faithfully will be released to my beloved! Yet—" his voice sunk suddenly to the plane of lost hope—"such a thing has never been."

He groaned in anguish and crushed the slim figure against him. "Tai Loy, I do not know, but—Tai Loy, I love you—I love you, my little pomegranate maid!"

A gong vibrated from the temple, its tones eddying outward like circles from a stone flung in a pond. The two clinging figures reluctantly separated. The young priest spoke low and hurriedly. *"Tien huni!* The time for the evening sacrifice. The Red One guard you, Tai Loy!"

"The Blessings of the white Christ be with you, my beloved!" whispered the little maid.

Silently as a shadow she glided between the broken stones in the temple wall. The sky was murky red now. The outlines of the dying poplars and the rustling tamarisk was blurred. The desert sloped away on all sides, vague and vast like a great saucer to the horizon. Over the ridges of the clay, split into dry, perpendicular clefts, Tai Loy made her way carefully, her eyes on the uneven ground to guide her slender feet.

Only when a dark bulk loomed across the way, did she glance up. The breath left her chest in a little startled gasp; the almond eyes dilated with fright; the rose seeped from the smooth gold skin.

Yeun Low had foreseen. The gray dust cloud had reached Han T'sin. The Yellow Wolf towered before her.

CHAPTER XVI

The Yellow Wolf

IN the yellow flicker of candlelight the crouching shadow of the blind beggar leaped up the clay walls like a hump-backed giant. Eliza Haldayne paused in the act of tying together her few belongings. The candlelight gleamed on her watchful black eyes as a burst of shouting came from the village before the hut. It sank again to a hectic chant and she gave the baggage her attention once more.

The blind beggar resumed his interrupted drone.

"The pack of the Yellow Wolf are in full cry tonight. Han T'sin rocks beneath the thunder of their tread. Like a shadow I moved about the village, and this I have heard the women tell: three villages in the Khingan hills lie smoking at their backs; there are new-made widows in the Sayan this moon. They spoke of silver taken recently from a bearer from the east. White Teacher, when did the carrier leave Nankin with the money sent you?"

Eliza Haldayne straightened as though a sword had suddenly menaced her. Her black eyes leaped to sudden comprehension. "You mean—he has held up my carrier! The man sent with the money and the camels?"

The old man attended, his head painfully on one side. He moved his hand with the patient gesture of the blind. "There are three new camels in the train of the Yellow Wolf. I have heard the tinkle of new-got silver."

The white woman's eyes flashed with wrath. "The beastly robber! The high-binder!" She made a swift movement as though to swoop out the door. The old man flung his body forward in the direction of the faint sound, and his fingers caught her skirt.

"Wait! Wait!" the old voice was shrill with alarm. "Reflect—the pack of the Yellow Wolf is full and—they have no love for foreign devils!"

Her impetuous rush had half dragged him to his knees, but the wisdom of his words halted her. It was true. What could she and her few lukewarm Christians avail against the evil power of the Yellow Wolf's band. She stood for a long moment, her black brows knit, lips pursed reflectively over her large square teeth. At her feet the old beggar crouched, the uncertain shadows playing over his face and blotting the eyeless sockets as the candle blew in the draught.

That shrill warning had carried another fear to the white woman's mind. "Tai Loy!" she cried with sudden anxiety. "Where is the child? This is no night for her to be abroad in Han T'sin with the Yellow Wolf at large."

"Before the sunset gong I spoke with her in the tamarisks by the pool of Odontala," the old voice quavered. "Shall I seek her?"

"Yes. I'll stay here out of Yellow Wolf's way. It's bound to come to a showdown between us if we meet," she said grimly. "This way—" she tugged a large chest from the wall at the back of the one room and showed a hole caused by prying out some of the sunbaked clay bricks. It opened into a slight depression in the ground, its telltale entrance hidden by close-growing tamarisk shrubs. "Come back the same way. No need of running into trouble or of taking all Han T'sin into our confidence. Nobody knows about that now but you. Get Tai Loy and bring her here. I'll hide her until the band moves on."

SHE helped the blind man through the opening and heard him moving through the familiar dark with more certainty than those who depended on the light. Then turning back to the chest, she lifted the lid and laid a revolver and some cartridges on the rude table. "Might come to that," she said, speaking out loud in the habit of one much alone.

From the entrance of the hut she could look upon the village a short distance away. Fires leaped beneath the dying poplars; dark figures moved before them, blotting the red glare from sight temporarily. Faint faces stood out in instant relief as a log burst asunder with a shower of sparks. The nasal chant rose and fell on the cold air brooding over the desert.

A faint rustling in the tamarisk at one side of the hut caused the woman's hand to drop to the revolver. A dark figure separated itself from the black background and glided into the radius of the candlelight. It was Tai Loy. Over her little breast the leaf-green robe fluttered in fright; her face was like ivory between the blue-black wings of her hair.

"Yeun Low found you, then—" burst from the white woman in relief. She slammed the door behind the girl. Tai Loy tried to control the quivering of her mouth, that she might speak.

"I did not see the old one. I fled here from the Yellow Wolf. On the little hill below the temple he rose before me. Honeyed words dripped from his lips, and he tried to sheaf the daggers of his eyes, but I feared him, and I ran. I heard him laugh. As the hyenas laugh, so did he—and I ran, my Teacher. He stumbled after, but I am fleet of foot, and in the tamarisk patch he lost me. What shall I do, O my Teacher? I am afraid! There was little Yat Low. He looked upon her, even so—and she never returned. I am afraid, my Teacher!"

The forehead of the older woman creased with sudden lines. She stood silent in desperate thought, smoothing the satin hair of the frightened little creature before her. It was a terrific problem put up to Eliza Haldayne for solution. If the Yellow Wolf had made up his mind to have Tai Loy, he would search Han T'sin from end to end. Nor would the fear of the Foreign Devil's country, which up to now had protected her, be sufficient to save her hut from the search.

A scratching sounded behind the chest, and both ran to help the old blind beggar through the opening.

The breath was nearly gone from the shriveled lungs; his body shook with his heart-beats. Between gasps his voice quavered.

"The Yellow Wolf comes to search this hut. He has sworn by the Ruby God to have Tai Loy. Quickly, come quickly—there is but one safe place. In the back of the Dragon Shrine—behind the god itself. Never would he look for her there."

"Yes, yes—the Old One is right!" Poor little Tai Loy was nearly incoherent with fright. "Hoang can hide me, even if the other two priests are there, he can hide me

somehow." She was gathering her leaf-green robe about her and frantically crawling backward through the opening.

Miss Haldayne peered into the darkness after her. "Circle the village," she advised rapidly. "Look out for sentries posted outside. "I'll let them think you're here; that'll give you time to reach the temple."

THE faint, frightened little face vanished; the dry tamarisk crackled for a moment, then died into silence; Tai Loy and the old blind man were swallowed up in the darkness. The white woman shoved the heavy chest back to place, then hastily crossed the room to the door as a fresh burst of sing-song shouting—nearer now—split the cold air.

Yellow Wolf flung open the door, to find himself staring into a revolver pointed by the grim-mouthed woman he hated. For the moment the yellow glare of the candle, after the black night outside, caused him to halt and blink. The uncertain shadows playing over his face with the rush of air rendered him more fiercely repulsive than ever. A giant compared to the stunted people he ruled, his face, burned nearly black, was deeply lined from squinting into the sun-glare of the Gobi. His hair was a black thatch, bristling in a mat from his scalp and falling halfway down his naked back. Clothed in skins and patches of filthy rags, a murderous-edged hatchet and a stolen gun thrust into his belt—this was the Scourge of the Gobi, the Yellow Pestilence of the Desert.

His small fierce eyes leaped about the room striving to pierce beyond the golden mesh of the candle's flare. The corners were thick with shadows, and the menacing revolver kept him from advancing farther.

He turned fiercely on the unafraid white woman. "Where is she? Where have you hidden Tai Loy?"

Black hatred gleamed scornfully from the eyes that confronted him. "Why should I hide Tai Loy?" she jeered. "Is the Yellow Wolf so hated that women hide from him?"

The taunt told. The lips twisted away from the man's teeth. Only the revolver-barrel pointed unwaveringly kept the Wolf at bay. A stir ran through those of his followers who had trailed him there and were clustered at his back, half seen through the darkness.

The bandit spat out an oath and fingered the edge of his hatchet meaningfully. "The white devil will do well to bring out the maid," he warned. "She was seen to run in here."

Miss Haldayne met this with a maddening laugh. Her black eyes were fanatical. "You're very brave, Yellow Wolf, aren't you, to make war on women! Do you think I would give Tai Loy up to you? She is not for such desert spawn as you!" She eyed him insolently, moving squarely before the door as his eyes plunged too far into the room with its shifting shadows. Tai Loy should be well clear of the tamarisk patch by now.

The face of the savage contracted with sudden rage. The enmity which had ever smoldered between him and the white woman fanned to new life.

"Bring out the maid!" he threatened with another oath, "or by the Red God of my fathers, you shall go to join the devils from whom you sprung. Quick! I have wasted too much time on you now."

The woman before him sneered. The fierce light of battle had leaped to her black eyes, and they glowed fanatically. "Yellow Wolf of Han T'sin, murderer of men, spoiler of women, hear me now!" The words were melodramatic, but her delivery was slow and scornful.

"Scourge of the desert, curse of the Hills of T'ang, bastard offspring of the hyenas! Before I would deliver Tai Loy into your profane hands, I would kill her with my own! The Mark of the Beast is set on your forehead; the wrath of God is red above you! Upon you shall fall the judgment meted out to Cain. You shall be one with Abaddon and Babylon in the Day to Come. Leave me in peace. Whoever sets first foot over this threshold, you or your rascally crew, I shall send him to his fathers with a bullet through his filthy hide!"

Like all other savages, the Lo-Los reveled in the dramatic. Superstition mingled with their very blood and ran in every vein. The curse hovered in the air as an almost tangible cloud before their dreading eyes; instinctively they shrunk from the vehemence of the white woman. A slight movement traversed the half-circle of barbarians, more felt than seen, as an unseen breeze stirs through a rice-field at night. Yellow Wolf fell back a step; then his head turned sharply.

An outburst of shouts burst out on the night. Unintelligible cries rent the air out there in the village. The chief wheeled, his lips twisting in hate from his blackened

teeth. He told off two men, half-naked savages and barked his orders at them.

"Guard the entrance of this hut. Let the White Devil try to escape if she dare! I am the Yellow Wolf of the Gobi; who shall attempt to balk my desire?" With this braggadocio he disappeared in the darkness, his feet pounding the clay as he raced to the scene of the outbreak.

ELIZA HALDAYNE bolted fast the heavy door, then brushed the beads of sweat from her forehead with the back of her free hand. Tai Loy must have nearly reached the temple by now. There, if she could evade the other two priests, Hoang could hide her until the restless pack of the wolf had left.

The long night moved on, punctuated by frightful outbursts of shrill shouts. Han T'sin cowered beneath the heel of the swaggering bandits; its natives crouched in their squalid huts or hastened to do the bidding of their tyrant. All that night Eliza Haldayne sat on the chest, back to the wall, revolver pointing at the closed square of doorway opposite. Twice only did she stir—to light a fresh candle when the old one burned down to the saucer. Without the hut she could hear the two guards grumbling at their inactivity; yet such was their fear of the Yellow Wolf that their vigilance never relaxed.

When the little slit of window high up on the wall showed a pallid square of dawn, fresh voices drifted to her ears. Yellow Wolf's suddenly sounded close at hand in ferocious good humor, but he made no further demand for the girl.

The sun began to beat down with its accustomed fury. Only the little window-slit brought any air to the dim interior.

There was a sudden hubbub outside, the rising of shrill voices, a stir of excitement. She heard the scraping of wood, of something heavy being dragged over the hard ground. The white woman's fingers gripped the handle of the revolver tensely. Once she lifted it and placed the cold rim against her temple half tentatively. It fell again to her lap, its muzzle pointed to the door, as a sudden mocking voice, the voice of Yellow Wolf, broke the heated silence which had fallen.

"White Devil, behold your disciple! The Christian of Han T'sin! Thus will we deal with all foreign devils—to all who cross the path of the Yellow Wolf!"

Eliza Haldayne crossed the room to the narrow slit of window. A taunting shout rose from the barbarians ranged outside as her face appeared, a white patch against the shadowy interior, but she hardly heard it.

In the blinding glare of the sun, driving down now with cruel force before the hut, rose a wooden framework a little over six feet in height. It tapered up as a pyramid, its apex only large enough to clip a man about the neck. It was the prison of the old Chinese beggar Yuen Low. In it he was forced to stand painfully on tiptoe to keep from being slowly strangled. His foothold was bricks precariously piled on one another; his sightless face was strained painfully upright with his efforts to the full blaze of the sun. Flies and gnats hung over him in buzzing clouds. A typical Chinese torture!

Again came the savage mockery of the bandit chief.

"Behold the half-chewed meat of the Yellow Wolf! This time I shall finish my meal. Tonight a brick shall be removed from beneath his feet—if that is necessary. There will be no need for another one tomorrow!"

SICKENED, Eliza Haldayne staggered away from the slit of window back to the close interior of the hut. The hard crust of austerity was broken for once. She was a palpitating, horror-stricken woman, the revolver lying forgotten in her lap, black eyes glazed and staring, only the muscles of her throat moving convulsively now and then throughout the hot, torturing hours.

Red sky above the tamarisks, a smoky red light hovering over the desert. Shadows grew long, thickened and met. Yellow Wolf held strangely aloof. Night descended on the dusty face of the Gobi. Then the exhausted woman stirred herself wearily to some show of alacrity. Fearfully glancing over her shoulder at the narrow slit of window barely perceptible in the darkness, she tugged aside the heavy square chest and lowered herself into the outer blackness.

After the confining heat of the one room, the night air was gratefully cold and fresh. She stood for one reeling moment in the shrubs, bracing herself by long breaths. Then cautiously, that those guarding the hut might not hear the crackling twigs, she made her way through the brush out to the open desert beyond the oasis.

Up and down, scrambling, falling on the uneven clay ridges, now forced to circumvent one too steep to scale, now crawling painfully down a steep declivity, she made her way until the black mass of the temple bulked large before her.

Through the gap in the outer wall, the gap that little Tai Loy knew so well, she made her way. A dark figure disintegrated itself from the black background and leaped toward her while she swayed back in weak terror.

"Tai Loy!" The cry was low agony.

"Hoang! Thank God!" Eliza Haldayne stumbled and would have fallen but for the steadying grip of the young priest.

"Tai Loy—where is she?" came the agonized whisper again.

That cleared the white woman's clouding brain. A cold hand seemed to grip her heart. "She isn't here with you? I sent her—last night! Yellow Wolf thought she was in my hut. I let him think so that she might have time to escape. I thought she was here—"

The young priest wrung his hands together in anguish, but no words came.

VOICES suddenly raised themselves, perilously close. The two priests walking through the temple. Hoang forced himself to alertness. "The others!" He whispered brokenly. "Come, there is only one place where you will be safe. No one will suspect. Come."

Silently as a shadow, he glided through the gloom before her, through an entrance of crumbling masonry, holding aside curtains that she could not see in the dark, guiding her along a tortuous passage. A mesh of golden light dawned through a curtain drawn before some lighted space. Hoang stopped.

"Silence!" he cautioned. "Do not move while there is a footstep out there! I go to find out what I can."

He glided away, and Eliza Haldayne, a burning mass of apprehension, was left hiding at the back of the heathen shrine, at the back of the Ruby God of Han T'sin.

Tai Loy was not here! The meaning of that kept pounding upon her tired brain until in sheer self-defense she forced herself to take note of outward things to hide the panic it brought. Things took gradual shape before the weave of the curtain. She saw the flare of candles in their red candlesticks. One of the dragon supports of the shrine gleamed in richest gold inlay and lacquer, red and black, a treasure looted from some rich city in the south. Directly before her, so near that her outstretched arm could touch its back, was the idol. Fire opal and sea-green jade, wine topaz and golden beryl, black jasper, apple-green chryoprase and rubies from Kyat Pyen blazed steadily in the candles' glow. An incongruous object in that squalid Lo-Lo village, a marvel of intricate workmanship still telling in its exquisite inlay of the Burmese temple from which it had been stolen centuries before.

The curtains swayed behind her, and her strained nerves jumped. It was Hoang, his face shell-white, his eyes black, lusterless blots of fearful apprehension.

"I have a camel waiting on the desert to the north. You must flee at once."

"Tai Loy!" gasped the woman.

The young priest winced. "I shall search for her until I find her; then she too shall ride to safety."

Silently they stole along the dark passage. Beneath the woman's hand the cold, rough stones gave way. The air grew suddenly fresh. They had reached the outer court. Through the gap in the crumbling wall Hoang glided before her; silently they made their way down the hill.

There was danger now in being seen for a moon rode the heavens. They lowered themselves cautiously in the deep shadows cast by the scars of clay. Below them, Han T'sin cowered beneath the dying poplars. The moonlight picked out the white patch of water where the blind beggar had talked to Tai Loy the night before. Two fires leaped beneath the trees; the ragged bandit crew gathered about them, their figures dark against the rosy flame. Fitfully the wind blew snatches of their sing-song chants to the ear. The moon sailed higher, burst into white flame in the sky. Its radiance picked out the jagged edges of the ridges and benches of clay; it picked out the black pitfalls in their path, showing their depths as velvet black. It picked out something else, lying there in a shallow clay depression, something leaf-green.

A sudden recklessness of danger straightened the woman and the young priest and sent them flying over the rugged ground.

Beneath the white moon the tender green on the robe seemed a spring leaf fluttered to the earth—a crumpled leaf. The little face between the outspread blue-black hair was upturned to the sky, a bit of exqui-

sitely carved ivory, and as cold and still.

The Old One had been right. The dawn was not for Tai Loy.

CHAPTER XVII

HOANG

THERE was a long moment while the eyes of the two met in mute anguish above that little green figure. The young priest's face had gone blank as white paper. Crouched on his heels, his slate-gray robe melting into the gray light, his shaven head gleaming ivory-white in the unpitying light of the moon, the dead Tai Loy was not more motionless.

Then he slowly swayed forward until his forehead rested for a brief moment on that little still bosom. When he lifted his face again to the moonlight, it was overspread with a sort of hopeless serenity. His voice came hushed to the ears of the listening white woman.

"For many years, long and faithfully, have I tended the Dragon Shrine, have I served the Ruby God of Han T'sin—that worthless thing of wood and metal! To it I sacrificed the flower of my youth, the fragrance of my love. Yet it could not save my little pomegranate maid from the claws of the beast. It is worthless wood, senseless stone—as you said—as you said, Tai Loy!" His voice dropped to a lower note, much like a croon, as though that still green form could hear and be comforted. "Little pomegranate maid, the God you revered shall be my God! The Teacher you loved I shall serve for the rest of my days. Thus do I answer your prayers, little Loy—your prayers, little Loy—too late!"

His voice broke, and his bowed head was hidden for the moment in his hands.

The white woman had slowly straightened and towered above the kneeling man and the prostrate figure. Her black brows met in one unbroken line; her mouth was grim; her eyes gleamed fanatically. She seemed to gain stature in the moonlight. As an avenging Miriam, she looked toward dark Han T'sin and the leaping fires beneath the dying poplars. Her nostrils twitched with the heat of her passion.

"Han T'sin! Cradle of the Yellow Beast, breeder of desert spawn; may Almighty God smite you in His righteous wrath! For every drop of this innocent blood, may a strong man wither and die! May the pool of Odontala become a dry crust, may your name be an abomination throughout the desert, may your red idol—"

She checked herself abruptly, struck by sudden thought, her black eyes flaming. On the motionless figure of the crouching man she wheeled.

"Han T'sin has robbed us of this—our dearest love. It has robbed me of my little worldly goods; it would as lightly rob us of our lives. We shall rob it of the only thing of value it possesses! Hoang, we shall take the red idol with us on the camels!"

A DEEP red light burned in the black eyes. Her words rang crisply with grim triumph. "A worthy revenge! Han T'sin will remember this crime as it watches the dust settle on the empty Dragon Shrine. The idol's jewels shall be sold in America, and the money shall spread the teachings of Christ throughout this benighted desert! Little Tai Loy shall not have been murdered in vain!"

The young priest gently drew a corner of the green robe over the still ivory face. Then he straightened solemnly. Only the deep pain glowing in the stoical eyes told of the anguish he suffered.

"We shall take the red idol," he said simply.

Once again, with heavy hearts, they ascended the slight hill. The other two priests had gone to the village below. The place was empty. They felt their way along the dark passage which led to the back of the Dragon Shrine.

The yellow candles in their red holders glowed as serenely as though no still little figure lay cold in the moonlight. In their gold haze the Ruby God of Han T'sin weltered in his own dazzle, and his deep red eyes glowed. An acid triumph surmounted the cold ache in Eliza Haldayne's heart at the grim justice she was meting out. With the strength of a man she helped the young priest to lift the heavy idol from the Dragon Shrine where it had stood for years. A curtain, looted tapestry, was stretched on the floor and received the fallen god. In the flicker of the candles the red eyes appeared to glow with malicious helplessness; the ebony lips twisted from the ivory teeth in futile rage.

About the four pillars which supported the Dragon Shrine the red and black lacquered dragons were watching in as-

tonishment. In the uncertain light they appeared to crawl to a vantage-point, to twist closer to their poles, to puff noiseless smoke from their amazed nostrils and knit their startled brows.

The ends of the tapestry were gathered, one by the woman, one by the priest, and in this rude hammock the Red One was dragged toward the rear passage.

BEFORE they had quite gained it, they stopped in sudden alarm. A footfall sounded on the stone step without; a figure appeared in the entrance arch, a figure that stood blinking, dazzled by the change from the night to the blaze of the many candles. The yellow radiance fell on the skin-clad body, on the blackened face and bristling thatch of the Yellow Wolf.

It was only a moment that he stood dazed, his unbelieving eyes squinted toward the gaping space of the empty Dragon Shrine, but it was one of those moments which tell in the scales of fate. From the tense young priest came a queer sound, a sort of snarl, such a sound as a great cat-creature would make in its hatred. Through the golden haze darted a lithe, avenging figure, more swift even than a great cat would be, and as sure. The light glanced for a brief second on the blade of an upraised dagger, flashed again on its downward plunge; then with deadly accuracy it was sheathed in the Yellow Wolf's writhing body.

A bellow of rage rang to the stone corners of the temple; the bandit broke through that costly stupefaction and blundered toward the young priest, fumbling fingers reaching for the murderous edged hatchet in his belt. Again the flashing dagger was withdrawn viciously, flashed and again descended; the point bit into the flesh—bit deep, this time, for his unguarded movement had betrayed the Wolf's left breast, and the needle point of the weapon found the heart.

There was a moment, eons long, while the echoes of that closed-in shout still rang in their ears, that the stricken giant rocked stupidly on wide-planted, failing legs and tried to see his assailant through the mist of death that mingled with the yellow haze and formed a fog before his eyes. Through the roar of approaching death in his ears came the ringing voice of the young priest:

"This for the murder of Tai Loy, thou yellow beast!"

IT was a simple matter to lead away two camels from the herd tethered at the end of the village. No one had been left to guard them. Han T'sin lay cowering in its huts; the clan of the Yellow Wolf were gathered about the leaping fires under the poplars.

On one the fallen god was placed, ignominiously twisted in its tapestry curtain. On this, too, the white woman mounted, her eyes gleaming with strange red lights in the cold light of the moon. But when they were ready to start, the young priest said simply, "Wait!" and disappeared among the shadows of the scarred hill.

The night grew in long moments before he came to view again, stumbling and climbing over the clay ridges, and in his arms was a still green figure.

"She was not of Han T'sin." The mournful cadence of his voice was like a requiem. "She shall not be placed in the gray clay where hyenas prowl and snarl over the dead. To the north there is a tiny oasis of sweet water where three willows bend and where I have seen white butterflies flutter. There we will take her."

The camels rose and swung into their loping gait at the command. Keeping to the black declivities which marred the face of the desert, they were as shadows fleeing among shadows, as swift and sure as the passing of the night wind.

The white woman looked back once as her camel took the lead. The fires of Han T'sin were twin red stars set in the desert, ever growing smaller. The temple where the dead Wolf lay outsprawled in the incensed golden silence was a black blot against the sky. The dying village crouched beneath the dying trees.

On the swaying back of the second animal the young priest's figure was rigid. His face was marmoreal in the moon's white glare, the little dead Tai Loy cradled in his arms.

Tai Loy had her wish. Mounted on the same camel, they were fleeing far from Han T'sin.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Curtain Ascends

OUT of the darkness dawned a star, a gleam of light faintly, steadily breaking. A gray vapor seemed to uproll curtainwise in oppressive silence.

Shape and color were born, seen dimly at first, growing in density on my aching eyes. The red glow before me shrunk and separated and became the twin ruby eyes of the idol.

"We brought it into this country, Hoang and I. No need telling how—Hoang planned it. Hoang's clever."

It was Miss Haldayne's voice, thin and far away, beating upon my ears, and I dimly knew that I had been hearing that thin voice for centuries of time, ever since I had first met the red stare of the Ruby God. And even as I realized this, I became aware of a prickling and tingling starting up my limbs; the sluggish blood stirred through chilled veins.

"We hid it for a while, planning to remove the stones and sell them one at a time so that it wouldn't create too much sensation. We were going to turn the money over to the missionaries. Then the devil in the thing began to work. Oh, you needn't look at me like that, George Rogers—there's a very real devil in it. What do you know of Chinese sorcery, you who have never seen the heart of the Gobi? Hoang told me its history. It has another, a Chinese name which means 'That Which Cannot Be Hid.' Time after time the warring tribes to the north sought to steal it from the temple of Han T'sin. It has been hidden in the Khingan Hills. A chief from the Sayan made off with it and hid it in his wild country. Always it was somehow returned to the Dragon Shrine. I laughed at that once like you. Now I know better. It has been a millstone about our necks. We began to hate the thing. We even feared to pry out the gems and sell them. The Lord didn't seem to want the evil wealth it would bring.

"Once, in San Francisco's Chinatown, I felt the eyes of a man upon me one day and turned. It was one of Yellow Wolf's band—here in America! I saw recognition leap in his face; then the crowd swept between us, and I got away. That settled it. I knew that the call of the idol had been heard in Han T'sin, and that Hoang and I were to be hunted down. That very day we came down here to Dune House. Drusilla was with me then—the whining, flabby thing you see—and my dead sister Florence's two children. This place seemed the safest haven. It was an old house built by my father when he expected this part of the coast to boom.

"How can I tell you of the curse the thing has been? We tried to hide it, Hoang and I, lest its call go out from here. We buried it deep in the sand back there in the dunes. The winds blew until the sand was blown away and the head stuck up above it, the wicked red eyes staring toward the house as if it was watching us. We flung it into the water but we flung it too close in. Each low tide the ugly head protruded until I couldn't stand it and we dragged it out one day and put it in this room.

"Here Kublai the priest, the brother of Hoang followed. Ann saw him hiding up the gully that day. In the night he came stealing into the house as we knew he would, not guessing that we were prepared. He came with drawn dagger, and to save my life Hoang killed him. Killed his brother! Ann was right about the death-howl. Time swung back for Hoang when he saw his dead brother at his feet. He had loved Kublai, and he mourned for him in the old fashion of Han T'sin. We buried him in the sand back there in the dunes, by the light of lanterns."

"After that I knew it was hopeless, that we could only wait. The call of the Red God has gone out. It has called the yellow vermin here from the heart of the Gobi. Chan-chau, the ancient priest, the last one now, waits outside for his Ruby God, and he shall receive—death!"

THE black eyes were set in a fierce stare. Though she spoke in English, the woman's voice had fallen to the sing-song of the Chinese, and unconsciously she had adopted their extravagant style.

George Rogers' voice was gratefully cool and steady on my ears when he replied. "Just a minute, Aunt Eliza. This thing has more than one angle. We're four against twenty-odd. There are forty fortunes studded in that idol there—but I don't want them!" He spoke as with uncontrollable repulsion. "There's been too much death over this thing now. I'm not going to subject Ann to such danger for a heathen idol."

His arm went boldly about my rigid body, and in the warmth of that embrace my strained muscles relaxed so suddenly that he was half supporting me by his strength.

His calm voice swept steadily on. "Not all the red idols in the world will help poor little Tai Loy now, and my Ann isn't

going to join her. Aunt Eliza, you are going to call to that Chinese priest that he can have his heathen god."

There was a long moment while I watched the black eyes and the calm hazel ones in silent grapple. Deep red lights were kindled in the strange woman's gaze, then suddenly burned out as live coals turn black and dead. Her whole body appeared to shrink; the mighty frame sagged; her stubborn head was drooped. She made a beaten gesture.

"I did it for the best—" Even through the strange lethargy gripping me, I raised my head, startled; that plaintive voice was so unlike the usually vigorous Eliza Haldayne.

The man spoke gently and low. "I know you did, Aunt Eliza, but believe me, I am acting for the best now."

There was no word spoken as we turned our backs on the gleaming idol and returned to the front of the house.

As we entered the front parlor, Hoang turned, and now that my stupid prejudice was laid to rest, I could see the deep sadness which I had wilfully mistaken for taciturnity in those unsmiling black eyes, could read the grief forever gnawing at the heart faithful to the little dead Tai Loy.

Moving as one in a dream, as she had moved on the stairs last night, Miss Haldayne flung aside the red curtain which muffled the bay window.

Before the house, stoically waiting in the sunshine, were the two we had left. The chief of the ragged clan was crouching on his heels in the sand, Chinese fashion, but the very old priest stood with folded arms, head bowed as though in silent prayer.

AT the sound of the woman's voice they galvanized to attention, and even beyond the creek, where the ragged crew had withdrawn and were waiting with Oriental patience, a tremor ran like a strong wind blowing.

Miss Haldayne turned back with a sort of grim meekness. "I told them they could have the idol, that they could come and get it in safety," she translated. "Only these two are to enter. I said that we'd shoot the first man to put his foot across the creek."

George Rogers narrowed his eyes reflectively. "They'll suspect a trap," he demurred.

The gaunt form of the woman held a curious dignity as she answered this. "I have never lied to them. All Han T'sin knows that I will keep my word."

And indeed, with no further assurance than that shouted command, the figure of the squatting chief had straightened and followed the measured step of the old priest along the sandy path.

A dramatic silence had fallen on the jabbering crew across the shallow stream. Only the surge of the water could be heard as the two still figures mounted the steps and entered the house of their enemies.

A dramatic silence had fallen upon us as well. Hoang might have been an ivory statue save for the fire in his intense eyes. The gaunt frame of Miss Haldayne sagged as though only the will of an indominable spirit bore her up. The hazel eyes of George Rogers held a warm glow of understanding in their depths. He dominated the scene so absolutely that there was no hesitation in the old priest's manner. He addressed him as the leader; his words came in perfect English, yet slowly as though he weighed and translated them first in his own mind.

"Now for many years has the pool of Odontala fled into the sands. It has become as a dry crust on the face of the desert. Under the poplars Han T'sin is no more. Her children have become wanderers in the sands. The dust of the Gobi has gathered upon the empty Dragon Shrine; the Ruby One has fled from our midst. Because of the crimes of the Yellow Wolf, because of the murder of Tai Loy, did the Great One turn his face from us. The Yellow Wolf is dead. Han T'sin rose in its wrath and killed his followers. My people are weary of bloodshed and death. They ask only to raise their little ones in peace. We have been harried by the tribes of the north and the tribes of the south have taken the full measure of revenge upon us for the crimes of the Yellow Wolf. Give us our god, that we may take him to the little people that are left and build us a place of rest in the desert. Before I go to join my fathers, let me restore the Ruby One to his children; then may they live in peace and industry while the Gobi endures, that he may no more become angered and turn his face from them. This is the prayer of Han T'sin, the Han T'sin that is no more."

I found a dry sob tearing strangely at my throat. I caught George Rogers' hand. "Oh, give it to them!" I choked. "It means God to them!"

The priest's aged eyes turned on me in slow kindliness, but he did not speak.

George Rogers moved toward the door. "Come," he said gently.

With him went the old priest and the ragged stalking chief. With him went I, tense-nerved and silent. In the deserted parlor the beaten woman stared blankly across at the white plaster wall, her black eyes glassy. Hoang sat with folded arms, his head bowed on his breast.

There was not a word spoken as its strange followers were led to the room of the Ruby God. The old priest's head was inclined once, reverently; then, with a strength one would never suspect in those shrunken arms, he laid hold of the front supports of the idol and raised them to his shoulders as the Lo-Lo chief grasped the rear ones.

Our eyes followed them without words as they bore it to the sloping beach. From the front veranda we watched them load it clumsily upon the ancient junk riding the green water out there; the great oar swung awkwardly around; the rising tide floated the strange craft, its rag of a sail bellied out with the salt wind; the Ruby God was going back to Han T'sin.

ON the upper ocean-gazing veranda, where the sun fell warmly upon us, George Rogers and I spoke together with voices curiously hushed.

One thing remained in my mind, unsatisfied. "Those threatening notes—that I don't understand. Who wrote them?"

His answer came promptly and without doubt. "Aunt Eliza herself." Then, at my unexpressed disbelief he continued: "She's a strange woman, a woman of mighty passions mightily repressed. Her self-control is marvelous, but there's a limit to self-control, Ann. Underneath, that woman is a mass of palpitating nerves. How she's held her reason as well as she has is a tribute to the hard-headed stock from which she's sprung. In the daytime she was completely mistress of the situation, but at night, when the conscious will was submerged, then all of the emotions held in leash, all of the impressions, the 'second nature' or the 'subconscious will' —call it what you like—came to its own. You needn't look so skeptical. The poor woman's very fears united to torment her as our fears materialize in dreams and torture us."

"But she wrote them! She actually wrote them! And she roamed the house —you saw that!" My tone was dazed.

"Tell me, my dear little skeptic, don't you know that people walk in their sleep? What is that but a subconscious urge controling the physical body while the conscious will is submerged? Sanity developed a thin, brittle edge there, Ann. It's my stanch belief, that another month more of the strain would have broken it off. She'll be a mental wreck for a time, but when she pulls out of this crisis, there's the making of a fine strong woman in Eliza Haldayne."

THERE was a long silence during which his hand strayed to my hair and stroked it gently. I felt it with a lazy content. Ours was a strange betrothal, almost without words.

My voice sounded again, dreamy to my own ears.

"You told me that I heard her telling the story of little Tai Loy, that my nerves betrayed me into imagining that I had visualized the scene. Why is that more strange than Miss Haldayne writing notes to herself? Why, then, did I see it happening before my own eyes? That I did not *hear*—that I *saw* it all when I looked into the idol's eyes?"

"You were all wrought up, Ann. You practically hypnotized yourself. You only saw the things that Aunt Eliza herself saw. You got it all through the medium of her."

I turned and looked steadily up into the hazel eyes.

"How about the prophecy of the blind beggar to Tai Loy at the pool among the tamarisks? This Miss Haldayne did not know, yet—*I know!*"

In the depths of the eyes above me I saw that I had scored. . . . . The roar of the sea came from very far away. Our senses were cognizant of the musty stirrings of long hidden and forbidden things; unwholesome mysteries older than the world itself.

A gust of salt wind blew fresh and clean into our faces. My hand was covered by a firm, warm clasp. George Rogers' voice sounded with a pleasantly authoritative note in it.

"Sweetheart, let's not seek to know the depths. Let's stay up here with the sunshine, little Ann."

THE END

A curious episode in the career of a postal inspector.

The Decoy

By LEONARD D. HOLLISTER

A DRIPPING figure in the cold autumn drizzle, Inspector Tom Smith of the Post-office Department waved a friendly hand toward the guard at the outer gates of the Leavenworth Federal Prison, and then, huddled again in his raincoat, turned toward the warden's office. He carried a package, small, but apparently of value—ever-present care was his that the wrapping might not become rain-soaked; and he handled it with the gingerly tenderness which bespoke fragility as he removed his raincoat and took a chair on the opposite side of the desk where sat the warden. The keeper of the big penitentiary looked up from his work with a smile.

"What's doing, Tom?"

The inspector, in the slow, careful manner engendered by years of methodical work in the postal service, eyed the package which lay before him, and fingered its wrappings.

"I don't just know, Ben. Fact is, it's just a hunch on my part. Came in this morning from Arizona for a couple of days at home and thought I'd run up here and see if you could give me any information. I've got a funny case out there."

"Of what sort?"

"Stage robberies—in which nothing's taken. They've still got that old line running between Huerfano and Tejon, you know. About three weeks ago a masked man held it up between Navajo Butte and Rocky Run, lined up all the passengers, but didn't make a move for money or jewels. Instead, he grabbed the mail sack and beat it. I went out there and looked around, but I couldn't get any track of him. I hadn't any more than started in to Denver to look up a little fraud case when there was another robbery. And this time the features were just the same. Then came a third one, so I thought I'd better get out there and stick on the job."

"After the registered mail, huh?"

"Not a bit of it. I took the trail and was able to follow it this time, stalling along with a packhorse and a pick and a pan like I was a desert rat. I didn't get sight of him, but I did come on a place where he had opened the mail sack. Letters were scattered around everywhere.

One package, which showed very plainly that it contained valuables, had been thrown to one side as though it had been discarded without even an examination. And not a letter had been opened, nor a package disturbed."

"What was he after?"

"That's what got me! I kept on the trail. A day later I found another place where he evidently had cooked a meal and at the same time opened a mail sack. And the same thing applied here. Letters laying around everywhere, packages thrown about, but not even an envelope unsealed, or a knot untied on a bundle. What's more, I found a third sack, and the same circumstances. Every letter is now on its way to its destination. And, as far as I can find out, not a single thing is missing."

"But what's the racket?" The warden leaned forward with interest. Tom Smith once more fingered the wrappings of his precious, fragile package, then gently began to reveal it.

"Just what I've come to you to find out. The third spot where he had made an examination of the mail was near a little spring. I snooped around and saw where he had knelt to drink, placing his hands for support in the soft clay on either side. And on the right side of the spring, I found this."

THE paper was gently drawn from the object which lay on the desk, to reveal a semi-circular bit of clay, bearing an indentation. It was of the stump of a hand, the four fingers and the thumb severed close to the palm, jutting forth in five regular dents in the mud. Plainly, too, there showed the lines of the palm, a perfect delineation, preserved in the clay of an Arizona spring. Tom Smith regarded it.

"It seemed to me like I could see the living man himself when I ran across that," came at last. "If that isn't Lafe Pulliam —then I'm crazy."

"And he's crazy, too," laughed the warden. "At least, he was the day he broke out of here. Tom, I feel a bit sorry for that poor old fellow."

"How long has he been gone?"

"About six weeks. We had him out in the yard where we're building the new wing, running that old switch engine, bringing up materials for the men who were working on the main wall. Then, all of a sudden, he threw the throttle wide open and headed the engine for the big gates. They crashed through and Pulliam jumped just as the engine left the track and turned turtle on the other side of the wall. Two guards shot at him, but missed. And the next thing we knew, he had disappeared."

Tom Smith nodded.

"Not a bad get-away at that."

"No—and I almost hated to chase him, Tom. I've always felt sorry for poor old Pulliam. He hasn't been right for the last fifteen years."

"I don't think he ever was right. He never seemed to me like a wilful murderer."

"Pulliam? You can't tell. I always thought myself that his plea that he shot Bowman thinking that he was a robber was the truth. You handled that case, didn't you, Tom?"

"Yes. Bowman went out to Salina to make an inspection of the office and got there late at night. He saw a light in the post-office window and went there. Just as he was going through the door, Pulliam, who was inside, working on his books, shot him. The whole question of the trial was this: We found that Pulliam was short in his accounts. He had made two or three speculations on government money and they had turned out against him. When Bowman stepped in the door, Pulliam was trying to juggle his books in such a way as to cover up, so he said, until he could sell off a little property he owned and make restitution. The whole thing hinged upon the question of whether Pulliam shot Bowman to keep him from making an inspection of the office, or whether he thought he was a post-office robber. The jury believed that he shot because he was afraid that Bowman would find him out and send him to the pen for that shortage."

"Yet, on the other hand, Tom, he might have known that he would have been sent up for murder."

"Naturally. But his actions since have shown that he wasn't quite straight mentally, you say."

"Exactly. Everything went all right as long as his wife and little kid were alive. I don't know that I've ever had a better prisoner in this penitentiary than Pulliam was. Of course, his hand being disfigured, kept him from being able to do every kind of work. But he could handle a pen very well with his left hand, and for a long time I used him as a sort of clerk and librarian and handy man in cellhouse Number 3. And he was a good, dependable, quiet, or-

derly workman until that Paola wreck. His wife and kid were in it, you know, and they were both killed. I took him the news myself, and I never felt sorrier for a man than I did for him. It simply seemed to knock him flat—and he never came out of it. The next day I noticed that he walked around like a man in a daze, mumbling to himself. He didn't do his work, didn't appear to have the mental comprehension to understand what was being said to him, and least of all did he seem to realize what had happened. I had him put into the hospital for a few days, thinking maybe the shock had caused him to lose so much sleep that he was temporarily deranged. But it didn't work. There must have been a weak spot in the man's brain—he never came out of it."

"Crazy?"

"In that one respect, Tom. In all other ways, he's perfectly sane. But he stopped living the day that his little girl was killed. I think that he's forgotten entirely the fact that he ever had a wife. All he can talk about is his little girl, and every minute that he was here, he was expecting her to come and see him. I put him out into the open at manual labor, thinking that maybe good hard work would take the fool notion out of him; and besides, it sort of hurt me to see the years passing, to watch this poor old lifer growing gray, coming nearer the time when death would end his sentence, just standing still, talking and dreaming about a little girl who lay in her grave."

"She'd be grown now, if she'd lived."

"Of course, but not to Pulliam. His existence just seemed to have been cut by a sharp knife on that day when she was killed. And to him she's still living, still a little seven-year-old girl whom he can't even describe. Often I've tried to find out just how his mind was working, and I've asked him questions about her. But he couldn't give me any description. All he could say was that she'd be there to see him soon, and that she was a little girl about seven years old. Tom," and the warden leaned closer, "I wish we could catch him. I hate to think of him running loose around the country with that screw loose in his brain. And I'm hoping that when he is caught, that it will be in a way that wont cause him to resist. Someway, or other, I've got a soft spot in my heart for poor old Pulliam."

"So have I—even if I was the prosecuting witness against him. By the way,"—and Tom Smith fingered the bit of clay which bore the imprint of a man's scarred hand,—"it wouldn't be a bad idea if we'd take a flyer in the finger-print room and see if this fellow really is Pulliam."

TOGETHER they went to the penitentiary proper, there to go through the various technical details which would spell the fate of a stagecoach robber. One by one the expert in charge of the division examined the prints in the clay. Carefully he went over the lines as delineated by the pressure of the palm. Then he turned to the two men.

"It's Pulliam. The details tally exactly."

And with that, they turned once more to the warden's office. For a long time the custodian sat in thought, finally to lean toward the post-office inspector.

"Tom, I believe the obsession about that kid is what made Pulliam escape. Fact; I'm sure of it. It's been getting stronger and stronger with him right along—the desire to see that little girl that he can't even remember. And I know he wouldn't have taken those chances just for the sake of freedom. I really believe that if there ever could have been such a thing as a man perfectly contented with prison life, it was Pulliam. I'd bet that he didn't escape just to be escaping. There was something else, something stronger."

Tom Smith's eyes suddenly narrowed. For a long time he sat silent.

"Anything to indicate that?" he said at last.

"Only from what I've learned from trusties. You can't get much from the other prisoners—they'll lie their heads off. But from the information that the trusties have given me, other convicts who worked with him encouraged him in his belief and told him that the prison authorities were keeping the kid from coming to see him. And by putting two and two together, I believe the trusties told me the truth. About the time that, according to their story, the other convicts began putting this idea into Pulliam's brain, a change seemed to come over him. He became morose and lost his usually cheery expression. He seemed to be constantly turning something over in his mind, some sort of a problem with which he appeared to be struggling. I can see what it was now—he was figuring that if we wouldn't let the girl come here,

he'd go to her. And he went, via one of the most spectacular escapes we've ever had in this prison."

"And now he's out in Arizona, crazy as a humming bird, I guess, making spectacular raids on stagecoaches."

"My only hope is that he doesn't get killed, or maimed before he can be captured again and brought back here."

Again was Smith silent a long time. At last he rose, and stared for a moment out the window at the darkness of fading day—a day dying in the grasp of autumn and its cheerless rain.

"There's one consolation about it," came finally. "He don't have to put up with weather like this out there. He gets a chance to see the sun, anyhow. And—" the inspector reached for his raincoat—"I'm hoping that I wont have to shoot."

"That—what?"

The inspector smiled.

"That's about all I can say," he answered, "because that's about all that I know—for certain. So long."

OUT the door and past the guard, to the car-line and into town, Tom Smith of the Post-office Department hurried down a side-street and to that place which, at intervals, he called his home. The job of an inspector is not one where the family fireside can be frequently enjoyed. The calls of the road, for the field man, are many and varied. They lead him into every part of the country and for stays that are indefinite. And it was with the joy of a man to whom home means even more than the name usually conveys, that Tom Smith threw open the front door, called cheerily, and then, suddenly kneeling, lifted a little girl high in his arms to hold her there a moment before lowering her that she might kiss him and cuddle against his shoulder. From the kitchen came the fragrance of freshly browned biscuits, and the cheery voice of a woman who was glad that her husband was home.

"Come back here, Tom! The meat'll burn if I leave it."

"Coming!" shouted Tom Smith. Then with a laugh he turned to the cuddling figure in his arms. "Both of us—aren't we, Honey?"

Back to the kitchen and to the ecstasy—for a travel-wearied man—of watching a home-cooked meal in the final stages of preparation. His wife looked toward him with interest.

"Did you find out anything at the prison?"

"Yes. He was the man I thought."

Her face clouded.

"Then you'll have to go right back on the road?"

"I'm afraid so. Guess I'll have to leave in the morning."

Then there was silence which lasted far into the meal; silence, broken at last by a wondering wife:

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"With me?" He looked up with that queer expression which comes into the face of a person attempting to conceal melancholy. "Why—why nothing. I—I was just thinking about something."

And silence again—until in the living-room, in front of the spluttering grate fire, a little girl climbed into her father's lap and put her arms around his neck. He looked down at her and smiled.

"What? Through with the dishes already?"

"Yes. But—" and she laughed and snuggled closer to him—"I begged off on the blackies. Mamma's doing them." She toyed with his lips, drawing them down at the corners to see how he would look when sad, turning them straight up in an expression of clownish joy, then into a straight line to see just how he looked, when he—to her the most wonderful criminal catcher in all the world—said "hands up" to some violator of the postal laws. At last: "Papa—"

"Yes, Honey."

"Tell me a story."

"About what?"

"Oh, you know—about the man you're after and—and everything."

Tom Smith looked into the flames of the grate, watching them as they danced upward toward the bleak dreariness of the night without. Slowly his grasp tightened about the child; his cheek touched hers. And then, in a whisper:

"If I do something better than tell you a story—if I let you live one—will you promise me something?"

"What?"

"That you wont tell Mamma. That is, until after it's over?"

"Um—humph!" It was a promise easily extracted. Tom Smith smiled gravely.

"Then, when she comes into the room, you ask me if you can go to Denver with me. Understand? Just ask me that, and don't say anything more."

The seven-year-old girl laughed happily. With a bob of her head she promised. And the next morning a woman stood in the doorway of her home, watching her husband start down the street toward the depot, taking with him a seven-year-old girl, bound on her first trip into the land of mountains and wonderful sunsets.

"And do be careful with her, Tom!"

"Of course, Harriet."

"And if you have to go out of town, you'll see that one of the inspectors' wives looks after her, wont you?"

"Somebody'll be looking out for her every minute, Harriet. And when I'm with her, I'll not take my eyes off of her. How's that?"

"See that you don't!"

Then they turned the corner—a father and the being that he loved best in the world, bound for a thing which Tom Smith had not possessed the courage to confess to the woman whom he had left behind.

A RUSHING day, a clattering, hurrying night. Then, in their room in a hotel in Denver, Tom Smith once more clasped his arms about his best beloved.

"Now, Honey, listen," he began, "I want you to show me how much you've learned in school. Come over here to the desk and write something for me."

"What for?"

"It's a letter—I'll tell you all about it afterward. But we've got to do this first. It's part of our game, Honey. We may have to write a lot of them—one every day for a week or two. But you don't care, do you?"

"It'll be fun, wont it? Who'll I write to?"

"I'll tell you the name when we address the envelope." They were at the writing-desk now and the child had dipped the pen in the ink. "Are you ready? All right. Now write this just like you were writing it to me: 'Dearest Papa.' "

"And then, what?" Tongue between her teeth, head cramped far at one side, the child had struggled through the salutation. Smith went on:

"I have been so lonesome for you."

"How do you spell lonesome?"

"L-o-n-e-s-o-m-e." A long wait. "Got that, have you? Now write this: 'I thought you would come to see me. But you didn't come. So I am coming to see you. Watch for me by the spring on the Tejon road.' You spell that—" he added, leaning closer—"capital T-e-j-o-n. Now, sign it—'lots of love and kisses, Your little girl.' "

It was a long process, interrupted by blots, by mistakes, by misunderstandings. At last it was finished, only to be copied, and the first draft carefully preserved for future reference. Tom Smith brought forth an envelope.

"Now Honey," he directed, "address this: *Mr. Laje Pulliam,—*" and he slowly spelled out the words for her,—"State of Arizona. That'll reach him all right."

"And then what do we do?"

The writing of the envelope finished at last, Helen Smith watched with childish eyes the sealing and stamping. Her father smiled down at her.

"And then—well, then we may have to write a lot more just like this. Maybe not. You never can tell. But in the meanwhile, we'll have plenty of fun. I know where they grow all the candy and the ice cream in the world. To say nothing of shows and movies and everything. And we're living a story-book life now, Honey."

For three days the program was of the ice-cream and honey-coated variety, broken only by an interval each day when the child copied a letter and watched her father seal it as it started on its journey "somewhere into Arizona" and took a lesson in "play-acting" as her father called it—for use in the future. Another day passed on the railroad turn again, while they moved south into the quaint, sun-swept city of Phoenix, with its palms, with its warm soft air, with its low-hanging skies and brilliant stars o' nights.

ANOTHER day, another letter, then the jangling of the telephone. Smith turned from it, suddenly pale. The stagecoach had been held up again, and another mail sack stolen. That meant—

He was face to face with the trial now. An innocent child, his child, was before him, waiting, wondering why he acted so strangely. Out in the desert, somewhere, a love-crazed man was pawing through a mass of letters, throwing one after another away, searching, searching until he found the one which his thwarted brain had told him must, sooner or later, come. To his knees went Tom Smith of the post-office department; his arms outstretched, he drew to his breast a child suddenly whimpering from a fear she did not understand.

"Don't do that, Honey," he begged.

"Please—please don't. You're Daddy's girl—and you're going to help me. We're trying to help somebody else, Honey, trying to save somebody. I can't tell you why—you wouldn't understand. But some day—maybe a long time after I'm gone—you'll be proud of it and glad that you and I were brave enough. And now—listen."

Then, his arms tight about her, he talked for a long time, talked and listened while she repeated the set words of the little rote which day after day he had outlined for her. Until late in the night it continued. Then together they left the big, rambling hotel, to step into a waiting automobile, and started forth into the night.

THERE was a long journey in which Tom Smith clasped close the little human burden beside him. To her, he knew, there was the thrill of an adventure, and the assurance of no less a personage than her father that there could be no harm attached. It would be fun, and it would be a real story, instead of just a make-believe one. And when she got home again she could tell it over and over again, at school, to her mother, and to her playmates, listening wide-eyed and wide-mouthed.

But to him— That was different. It had been his idea, it is true. But ideas are hazy things as compared to the realities. Out in the sandy stretches of the desert now, the cactuses began to assume the threatening aspect of shadowy monsters. The dark hollows seemed to contain lurking terrors—terrors placed there by himself, to steal from him the thing that he loved most of all in the world. His heart beat with a peculiar clattering, jerky gait. Suddenly he realized that his throat was dry—that when he tried to speak the words would not come. Hours went by—Phoenix was left farther and farther behind. Then the automobile stopped.

"Don't guess we'd better go any farther, had we Tom?" The Phoenix inspector leaned back from the driver's seat. "It's only a quarter of a mile to the spring from here. If he's waiting there—"

It was the moment of decision. The hands of Tom Smith went rigid, his lips worked convulsively. Then, suddenly grim, he stepped from the machine as it came to a skidding stop on the sandy road.

"Better turn back here," came hoarsely. "I'll signal you, somehow—maybe by lighting a fire if it happens tonight. If not—you can see us walking along the road. Good night."

Then he lifted his daughter down beside him. A moment more and the automobile had turned, to glide down the road and past the turn and there—to wait.

How long, and for what, even Tom Smith did not know. And he tried not to think. A blotchy shadow in the darkness before him were the few trees which surrounded the spring. And perhaps in those shadows—

The inspector bent low and kissed the child who cuddled for a moment against his shoulder. Then:

"Don't be afraid, Honey. Remember, I'll be just behind you—you wont see me, but I'll be there. And I've got a big gun, in case any bears or elephants or anything like that try to carry you off." He forced a laugh. "So don't you worry. Just think about how proud you'll be when we get back home and tell everybody about it. Tell Daddy you wont be afraid."

"I wont be afraid, Daddy." Her voice had a slight tremble in it. "But you wont run away and leave me, will you?"

"Not your Daddy—never! Now trot along."

She started. Fifty feet she went, a hundred, while Tom Smith watched, and while every nerve in his body jangled. Two hundred. Hurriedly he reached for the automatic which he had strapped about his waist at the last moment, in spite of the departmental orders against it, then dropped flat in the sand to begin a wriggling progress forward.

Foot by foot as the girl progressed through the semi-darkness, he followed her. The sand bit through his clothing and scarred his flesh. He did not feel it. The thorns of the cactus drove like stilettos into his breast, but he did not know it. A rattlesnake, disturbed from its resting place, coiled, whirred its triple warning, then struck, just a second too late. Smith crawled on without hearing, without knowing, his eyes, his whole being centered on the little figure ahead. Then suddenly his flesh crawled in quivering waves. A shout had come from the trees—a man was rushing forward.

VAGUELY he heard a cry, he could not tell whether it was of make-believe joy, or of fear. Of only one thing could he be sure—it was the cry of his daughter, and the hand which held the revolver

straightened before him into a steady aim in the direction of that bent, hurrying shadow which came forth from the trees. The safety clicked as he threw it off. A tense finger was pressing against the trigger. And still the man came on.

Twenty-five feet divided them now. Twenty-five feet between that crazed fugitive, between Tom Smith's daughter and—what? A low groan came from the throat of the inspector. If he should seize her and run! If he should—

They had met. A glad sob had come from the larger shadow as Pulliam suddenly went to his knees and threw wide his arms. A long, long moment of waiting agony, then dull sounds came to Smith, sounds he could not interpret, vapid ramblings of a man whose brain was seared with the fiery pain of consuming happiness, childish prattlings which he could not hear, and which only added to his torture. What was she saying? Had she remembered the things which he had so carefully taught her—the words that she had repeated to him time and again? Had she remembered—or had she forgotten? And was she now telling this half-crazed, torture-racked fugitive the truth instead of the long-rehearsed lessons which meant everything? The seconds dragged by like hours. The trigger finger of the man who waited in the sand ached with the intensity of its position. The blood began to flow from his lips where teeth were clenched hard upon soft flesh. His head began to ache, to pound with the power of a triphammer. Red flashes shot before his eyes. The world began to spin, the shadows to sway before him. Gaunt horror clutched him. If it should happen now—he could not save her! His aim was gone—he had lost control—he could no longer protect!

He rose. He started forward—and dropped again from dizzy weakness which seemed to whirl him about and toss him aside like the chaff from the exhaust of a thresher. Dazedly he raised himself. They were still there. Pulliam had not seen. Vaguely again he heard the voice of a child, talking in even sentences.

"Oh, Mr. Smith!"

She had not forgotten! Gasping, reeling from the relief of it all, he staggered to his feet and went forward, dully remembering to hide the revolver as he went. Before him, Pulliam, his arm about the child, waited without a semblance of fear or of enmity. Smith came closer, put out a hand to feel it grasped in the stubby paw of the fugitive. A queer, strained voice came to his ears:

"My little baby tells me you've been good to her."

"Yes." Smith stammered the words.

"And that if I'll go back home, she'll come to see me every week."

"I give you my word of honor."

A hesitant second. Then with a great sweep of his arms, Pulliam, murderer, fugitive and stagecoach robber, raised a little girl high in his arms and laughed.

"All right. Let's go back. I've found my baby—my little girl. She'll always be near me now. And I'll be content."

IT was the next morning that Larry Balfour, United States Marshal at Phoenix, walking down the hall of the Federal Building, stopped short and stuck forth a hand.

"What's all this bunk that Jamison's handing me," he asked, "about you catching that mail robber? He says you've got a new assistant, that kid of yours. What was the big idea?"

Tom Smith smiled slightly.

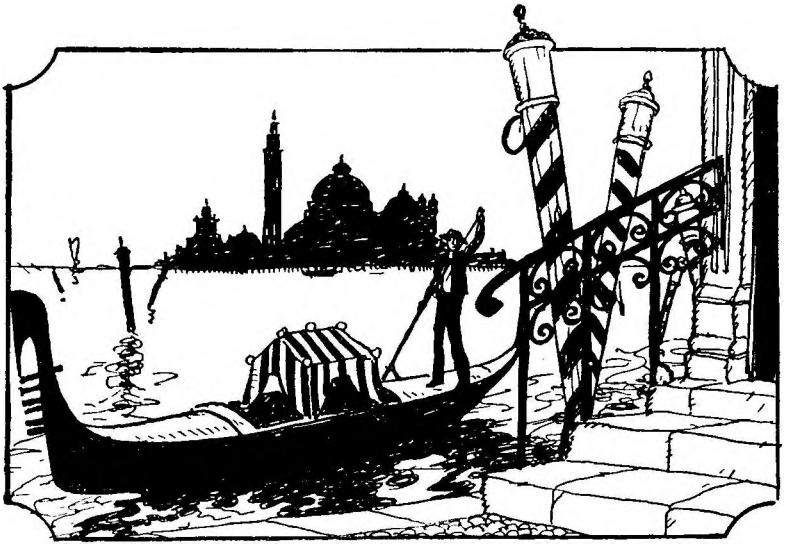
"Maybe it wasn't so big after all," came at last. "I knew why he left prison. And I thought I knew why he was searching mail bags. So—well, I tried to send him the thing he was looking for."

"Thought it was his own daughter, eh? They say he's a bit batty. And you got him without a struggle?"

Tom Smith did not answer for a moment. There had arisen before him a picture of the desert, of a reeling man whose lips flowed blood, who gasped at the realization that his aim no longer held true, whose flesh crawled with the horror of what his own act, his own scheme to save the life of a brain-fuddled, sorrow-crazed man might bring to him and the thing that he loved best. A trembling hand brushed across his eyes.

"That depends on the viewpoint, Marshal," he said quietly.

Another of these interesting episodes in the work of a Post-office inspector will be described by Mr. Hollister in entertaining fashion in our next issue.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

"In a Venetian Palace" vividly describes a dark tragedy of the international intrigue now since the war more subtle and deadly than ever.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

PROBABLY nine out of every ten Americans who have been in Venice afterward think of it as a sort of opera-bouffe Coney Island —a place where people go to ride around in gondolas, feed pigeons in the Piazza San Marco and bathe at the Lido, with a pretty fair shore-dinner topping off the day. The idea that thousands of people live there all the time, carry on profitable businesses, are born there, buried there, marry there and wouldn't dream of living anywhere else—this seems to escape the average tourist altogether. Everything about the place is different. One doesn't play ball in Venice—unless along the sands of the Malamocco. Excepting barrows, there are no wheeled vehicles in the city—the roads do not permit of motoring.

You can go streaking down the Lagoon to Chioggia at thirty knots an hour in a power launch, in these progressively degenerate days—but it's a crime. Some day the Venetians will make it a punishable offense. There are apartment-houses —but no elevated or subway. And there are old palaces which have been homes of the same families for six or eight centuries, until loss of fortune or business reverses forced some of their owners to sell them.

This narrative of current events deals with one of these. Within its walls during the past month, there have been dinner-parties, afternoon teas, suppers after the opera and even breakfasts at which various discussions have occurred that have a direct bearing upon the welfare of the United States today—and the possibilities of another war in the future.

Supposing that you're at the Danieli or some other hotel along the Riva, your gondolier would scull you past the Doge's Palace, up the Grand Canal past the Accademia and would then slip down a narrow opening on the left which you hadn't seen at all—the little Rio Malpaga. Down this, under a bridge, he would presently turn again to the left, where there is apparently no passage for a boat. You think of the Ocklawaha. Then you are alongside a narrow terrace in a little canal not over twelve feet wide. Four rotting piles are at the ends of the terrace—in case one comes in his own boat and wants something he can moor to. Along the opposite side of the canal is a high brick

wall upon which are perched a boy and a girl in outdoor knockabout suits. You infer that the garden whose trees and shrubbery you see above the wall must be at a considerably higher level than your landing-steps. The pair seem to be holding converse with the angels, for their faces are slightly raised, and they are talking into the air. But following the voice which replies to them, you locate a boy in black velvet on a balcony twenty feet above your head. Behind him is a large Venetian window, partly open. Translated—freely—into Americanese, what you hear is approximately this:

"Aw, come on, Paul! Benedetto hauled the little gondola outa the water, an' I helped him run hot pitch into her where the water used to come through. She don't leak a drop, now! An' even if she did, we got a bailer. She's in the *piccolo bacino* at the end of our garden; all I gotta do is pole her out across the canal an' down into the side *bacino* of your *palazzo*. Caterina'll make sandwiches an' fetch 'em, along with the bathing-suits. Then we can go out the Zattere an' across to that bully place on the Lagoon side of the Giudecca. Water there aint nowhere over your head, 'less you wade out into the channel—it's pretty cold, but my father says that toughens you. Your mother knows you can swim good as me an' Caterina, now! Go ask her!"

THE figure in velvet disappears through the tall window, walks across a spacious dining-room overlooking the canal and the opposite gardens, then up a magnificent stairway at the end of the broad hall and into a cinque-cento boudoir over the dining-room. Here a handsome woman of thirty-five is reading upon a divan by one of the windows.

"Madama la Contessa, will you permit that I go with Giorgio and Caterina in their gondola, which is now quite dry and safe? They wish to go bathing over the other side of Giudecca—and afterward eat a luncheon which Caterina will prepare. We can build a little fire on the beach and make tea for ourselves if Brigida will but let us have the tin pot. Please, Madam! I really swim very well, you know—and I will stay in the water but a few minutes!"

"It is sometimes the good swimmer who gets the cramp—and drowns, my Paolo! But thou art to be a man some day—it is perhaps time that I hold my fears in check and let you go a little. As to Giorgio and Caterina, I should also withdraw my objections, in their case. The Signor their father has been a distinguished *avvocato* for some time, and recently a *Deputato* in the *Camera*—but the family were of the *garamoncino*. I did not care to have you seen with the *figlioli* outside of their own garden. Now, however, there is a difference. His Majesty has recently made the Signor a Cavaliere Commendatore—which is not really of the nobility, but is received among us just the same. *Si*—you may go with Giorgio and Caterina if you will be very careful, and Brigida must prepare your share of the luncheon to be taken in the gondola. But return and be dressed by four. Our cousin Ippolyto di Travastere is to stay the night."

"I am very sorry, *madama mia madre!* I do not like Cousin Ippolyto. He is boche! He lives in Berlin! He permitted his sons, our cousins, to fight with the *Tedeschi* in their armies!"

"I also do not like him, my Paolo; but consider? He married a woman of Berlin when he was attaché at the Italian embassy, and by request of that government has remained there ever since. His sons are half German at least—and naturally see matters as their companions do in Berlin. But Ippolyto comes from an old distinguished Italian family. When we broke from the Triple Alliance, he should have come home and fetched his sons with him—or, knowing which side Italy would take, as he did months before, he should have returned when the *Tedeschi* entered Belgium. Il Conte, your father, considers him a traitor both to his country and to his family—but the war is over. It is well to forget as much as possible, especially in the case of one's family or near relatives. So Il Conte will receive Ippolyto as in the old days, because his mother was our aunt on the Gisani side. Go now, *figlio mio*—and when you return, do not forget that we are *grandezza*."

AFTER her boy left, the Contessa was strangely restless. Some whim seized her to wander through one loftly chamber after another on the second floor—the *sala* which had been a council-chamber of the Gisani since the days of Mocenigo, the *sala piccolo*, adjoining, which had been always a gathering-place for the ladies, and more recently the rendezvous for aft-

ernoon-tea; the Conte's private suite at the end of the long hall, with secret passages in the thickness of its walls leading to a panel in the council-chamber, to the state apartments where royal or distinguished guests were lodged, and to another panel in the narrow passage at the back of the *primo piano* which ended in a small steel door opening upon a little side basin for the family gondolas, just off the canal. There was another passage in the walls to this little postern—leading down from a closet adjoining the council-chamber—for the use of those unknown personages whom the Gisani brought into the *palazzo* and took out of it unobserved.

There are perhaps twenty men still living who have been taken through that passage, coming and going. But save the Conte, his wife and son, there are but two who know the mechanism of its secret panels or could locate them in either wainscoting—Baron Ippolyto di Travastere, and His Eminence the Cardinal, who is also a cousin on the Loscari side, both having been shown the secret springs when boys. As for the passages from Il Conte's bedchamber, they are known only to himself, la Contessa and their eldest son Paolo —the boy of fourteen. Their secret has been handed down through many centuries as something upon which their lives may depend.

Before the Renaissance there were doges among the Gisani—princes, cardinals—and one pope, on the distaff side. Independent rulers in the earlier period, in the famous Council of Ten more than once—always Italians to the core. Autocrats in all the generations, some of them oppressors, in a lordly contemptuous way, but with no grain of yellow in their make-up. Open-handed to the point of impoverishment at times, generous, cultivated—and since the consolidation of the kingdom, loyal supporters of the government and of foreign alliances which furthered its best interests.

The bedfellows which Bismarck forced upon them were never to the Gisani taste; their memories of the Austrian occupation and Berlin domination were too keen for that. So when Italy threw in her fate with the Entente, Il Conte di Gisani—for ten years a Senatore—was one of the strongest influences in the government to bring this about. In the months succeeding the Armistice it was Gisani who—with knowledge of the American people gained through his six years in Washington—steadfastly advised the closest possible relations between Italy, France, England and the United States, regardless of temporary misunderstandings and diplomatic blundering that were doing so much to alienate the Italians and throw them into less safe associations for the future. Consequently he was an uncompromising obstacle to the faction who favored closer affiliation with the central nations.

Disjointed bits of all this were in the mind of Contessa Elena as she wandered through the old *palazzo*. The radical uprisings, the seizure of industrial plants by their employees, the uncertainty among the railway personnel, all had given her much sober thought—but no lasting apprehension, because she was too thorough a student of history to believe that the working of economic law and force can be abolished through any theoretic government by ignorant masses. She knew that in the long run the efficient worker must just as certainly prevail over the incompetent loafer as the sun rises each morning. But politically, the future looked none too bright. With a brain which Conte Adriano recognized as the equal of his own, the Contessa visualized the wheels within wheels of international politics. Their neighbor across the little canal, Commendatore Gaetano Carminio, was a stanch supporter of their own party, had been knighted for his profound knowledge of Italian law and use of that knowledge among his confrères of the *Camera dei Deputati*. The man was in the prime of life, a fighter, a man of much influence, with a numerous following. It gave her a comforting feeling to know that such aid might be easily available in case political affairs should assume a more serious aspect.

IN the old gondola—clumsily navigated by Giorgio Carminio—the children floated and bumped their way through the smaller canals until they emerged upon the wider expanse of the Giudecca. At the opposite side of this they glided through the little Rio di S. Eufemia and came out among the sandy shallows of the Lagoon. After putting on their bathing-suits in the curtained cockpit of the gondola,—Caterina first, and then the boys,—they sculled it out to a comfortable swimming depth of four feet.

As they passed under the bridge of the Zattere, another gondola behind them—coming down a canal from San Trovaso, the artists' quarter of Venice—had followed across the Giudecca and on through to the Lagoon side. In the cockpit, with its curtains drawn partly aside, a man in a magnificent sable-lined overcoat lounged back upon the cushions,—a small canvas braced before him on an easel, a tin box full of color-tubes and brushes at his feet. By his movements and the fresh appearance of his face, he might have been judged to be in the fifties, though the drooping white mustache, the smooth yellow-brown skull and projecting Roman nose gave him the appearance of a venerable eagle. Actually he was well up in the eighties—and though the January day was mild as Indian summer, he took no chances with the insinuating coolness which lay along the surface of the water. Owing to the shallowness of the Lagoon, its waters are, upon very mild days, ten or twelve degrees warmer than the Adriatic outside the Lido and Malamocco. But even at that, it requires hot young blood to swim in them comfortably during the winter months. Some such thought as this was in the mind of the old artist as he watched the youngsters jump off their craft—dive, swim and splash about like so many young porpoises. He motioned his gondolier to scull nearer so that he could watch them. Presently they noticed him.

"Oh-h-h-h—signore! Paint us in your picture, will you? *Piacere!*"

"But—*ccco,* it is impossible! You do not keep still for a second; you cannot—you would get pneumonia if you did. Already thy teeth are beginning to rattle like the castanets. A moment!" He produced an American camera, opened the focussing-hood and trained the lens on them. "Now then! One time! . . . . . Two times. . . . . Three times! *Ecco!* I have you now! You shall go back in this to my studio—and some day, when the light is good, I shall paint you as you were. Then you shall come see the ol' man—and there will be tea and cakes."

"But how will you know where to send for us, signor?"

"Well—let us consider that—after you have rubbed yourselves warm and put on clothes again. Do so at once! Then lay thy gondola alongside, and we will make some hot tea upon my electric heater. *Si? Accelerare!* That thou take no harm from the cold water!"

IN less than ten minutes they were dressed—with the two gondolas alongside. "*Ecco!* We have the sandwich—the *pasticceri*—the good hot tea! Let us then consider how I may send for thee when the picture is ready? Thou, *figlio mio,* with the eyes so big, the soft black hair—like thy mother's, I'll wager? Eh? Thou shouldst be of the Gisani! *Si!* There is in thy face the expression of thy great-grandfather Bartolomeo—whose portrait I painted many years ago when I was young. And there is also the sweet Moldini mouth—therefore thou art the child of La Contessa Elena, who was Moldini before marriage. As for thy friends—that is something else again; the strains appear to be more of a mixture. There are traces of Contarini, Giustiani, Mocenigo and some of the foreign stocks, but—turn the side of thy head, little Caterina! Thou hast the eyes an' mouth of—h'm! Thou art Carminio—and Giorgio is thy brother! The eye of the artist cannot be deceived for long."

"Thou must be a very wise man, I think, signor! And thou? May we not know thy name also?"

The gondolier, squatting upon his haunches near the prow, grinned brightly and muttered something about *illustrissimo*—which Paolo caught. He looked at his venerable friend more closely—the polished dome, the aquiline beak and drooping white mustache. "Signor, thou art a painter of San Trovaso. Otherwise I would think thee Il Cavaliére Scarpia, who is said to be one of the most famous men in all the world! But thou art a painter and much younger than the *Illustrissimo,* who would not have given us so much of his time—"

"And why not, *figlio?* For—*ecco!* We are friends! Is it not so? And in my leisure moments I shall paint a picture of thee as thou wert in the water. I loved thy father, Paolo, as a boy—an' thy mother sat upon the ol' man's knee when she was *bambina.* I have not happened to see either for many years. As for thou, Caterina—hast thou a kiss for the old Scarpia? For I think thou art beautiful—with thy brown eyes and the color in thy cheeks. And Giorgio—my young friend? Perhaps some day I shall take thee to visit one of the great yachts

of the *Inglesi,* off San Marco—just to make the little holiday, so thou also will not forget me. Time? *Si!* It is after three. You must go? A promise to Madama? Then I will not keep you out here longer. A dinner-party? Guests, I suppose—"

"Our Cousin Ippolyto di Travastere and His Eminence the Cardinal—for the night—"

"So? I've not seen thy cousins since 'Fourteen. Do you know, I think I shall present myself to Madama la Contessa when I've taken these canvases back to San Trovaso. Doubtless there will be a chair for me at her table if the occasion is not too formal—it will be a simple matter to retire if I am *troppo.*"

HUMAN society, the world over, has certain fundamental traits which are always the same—but in each nation there are ways of thinking and acting, inherited through centuries, which are peculiar to itself. To say that one nation is more given over to intrigue than another would merely start a purposeless discussion. But from the Middle Ages—the days of the warring republics and the Free Companies—Italians have been masters of the game. With a population largely illiterate, it has been easier for the educated class to retain the power; yet within that same educated class the struggle for supremacy has been constant, and at one time or another its influence has been strongly felt in other countries.

The dinner-party in the old Palazzo Gisani that evening was to at least two of the guests a peculiar mixture—a gathering of those who might be secret and deadly enemies under a guise of friendliness and hospitality. There were probably few dinner-tables in any of the Entente countries at which the Cavalière Scarpia would not have been a welcome guest whenever he chose to present himself—whether he had been specifically invited or not. The man was known for his master ability to keep a vast, abnormal knowledge of international affairs to himself in eight or ten languages, with never a slip—when by revealing what was stored in that polished skull of his he might possibly have overturned thrones and governments. Not only did he know exactly what the Baron di Travastere's political career had been and the interests which had made him, soul and body, a Berliner, but he made a shrewd guess that the Baron had in some way managed to have the rising young Deputato Francisco Cioforza among the Contessa's guests that evening. For Cioforza—a stanch supporter of the Entente affiliation—was thought to be approaching a crisis in his business affairs. And—well, such conditions are often used as leverage to change a man's opinions. He had never met Baron Ippolyto—would naturally assume him to be as upright and patriotic as his cousins their hosts—and would be influenced by his opinions as an older, more experienced politician.

In addition to these, a well-known senator with his wife, and a general, were at the table. Last, yet very far from least, there was His Eminence the Cardinal—a rather silent, saturnine ecclesiastic who had a caustic wit when he did speak, and a sense of humor which he used for purposes of his own—at psychological moments. He was the only other person at the table who, like Scarpia, fully understood the atmosphere of cross-purposes which enveloped even the casual dinner-talk. But though he rarely discussed politics and moved his pawns in such a way that the guiding hand was never seen, he believed that evening that the weight of influence then accumulating would be too strong for his kinsman Conte Adriano to resist.

In which opinion the more astute Scarpia differed materially. Through the whole of that evening nobody could have been certain from anything said by either of these men as to what his political convictions actually were. Scarpia talked entertainingly, as always, upon many subjects—upon politics, with the utmost apparent freedom. Yet when some of them afterward came to think over his remarks, it appeared that he hadn't once expressed a personal belief in any side or faction. The Cardinal had talked more than he usually did—with the same baffling avoidance of what he might really think.

The room itself had an atmosphere of intrigue—having seen much in its day. The lofty ceiling was molded in cinquecento bas-relief; the walls were hung in dark stamped leather with a high wainscoting of black oak below—the floor and furniture of the same wood. On the gleaming white of the damask tablecloth were much old silver and Venetian glass. The only lights in the room came from

large silver candelabra—one at each end of the table—which revealed the faces of the guests distinctly but left all the rest of the room in shadow. Although some of the larger rooms in the *palazzo* had a number of black-iron sconces on their walls for extra illumination on festive occasions, the usual lighting in each of them was from similar candelabra. Each one of them a study in Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro.

From his place at his mother's left the young Visconte's face against the background of shadows reminded one of a Murillo portrait—the boy was even then a handsome lad, with the soft dark eyes of the Moldini and the strong but regular features of the Gisani. As for the Contessa herself, she had won the love of many—turning most of it, with difficulty, into lifelong friendships. Both the Contessa and her son, with a subtle interchange of sympathy, had a feeling of apprehension that night which they had never experienced before. It was as if some threatening shadow had invaded the old *palazzo* and was slowly enveloping them.

Up to six years ago, we have frequently said, of this or that unthinkable occurrence: "Oh, that might have happened in the Dark Ages, hundreds of years ago, when people weren't civilized! But it couldn't happen today—in the twentieth century! People aren't brutes or savages now!" One doesn't hear this quite so frequently in 1921; we are somewhat less sure of what can or cannot occur. With the Contessa Elena and her son there was a belief that Italy was approaching a crisis in her history, a point from which she would slowly but steadily progress to becoming one of the world's great nations or, if her politicians were short-sighted—looking only to immediate benefits and temporary advantage—would slip over on the long descent toward "decline and fall," like the Roman Empire from which it had descended. But on this particular night there was the feeling of something more immediately menacing.

It was Scarpia who, commenting upon the superb voice of a new baritone, reminded them that the famous opera company from La Scala was singing "Gioconda" at Teatro la Fenice. He didn't suggest opera to fill out the evening, but thought a diversion of that sort might shuffle the cards a little more favorably for Conte Adriano if the idea took—it being understood that Ippolyto was leaving for Rome next day with the Cardinal. Cioforza, with something of a cat's instinct for danger, had felt a vague uneasiness whenever he exchanged a few remarks with the Baron or the General—and with a feeling of relief caught at the opera suggestion. The Senator and his wife—puzzled by an undercurrent which they felt but couldn't understand—seconded the idea, with the proviso that it include the entire party. So the gondolas were called, and they entered the Gisani *palchetto* shortly after the beginning of the first act.

AT the end of the performance the Contessa asked the entire party to return with them for a late supper and impromptu dance. But a casual remark dropped in the General's ear by Scarpia made him think it advisable to hunt up a brother officer at once and confer with him upon certain matters. The Senator and his wife were nearly used up from the many calls upon their time, pleaded that as excuse for going home. Cioforza had no idea of going back to answer dangerously innocent questions from the Baron Ippolyto if he could avoid it, and gracefully excused himself. But Scarpia returned—and fancied he saw an expression of relief in the beautiful Elena's face as he did so.

Back in the *palazzo* they settled down in the little salon for light refreshments and tobacco. After discussing the opera for a while, the Contessa left them—and Baron Ippolyto switched the talk to business affairs, asking his cousin how matters were going at his factory. Conte Adriano knew this to be merely a prelude to a subtle probing of his political standing and influence, the extent of which he had no intention of revealing; so he answered casually, as if the subject were trivial:

"We had the prevalent attempt to seize our works at Moranzano, but we've always treated our employees well. A little plain talk stopped the thing—they're quite well aware that none of them have the technical knowledge to manufacture our goods at the present standard. Our books were open to them; they saw we were paying 'em all the business would stand under the present conditions. Fortunately, we employ none but the more intelligent class of workers."

"How about coal? Isn't it costing you too much—considering the British embargo?"

"More than it should. But that will right itself before long. I think we'll be able to buy American or even Japanese coal at a lower rate than what we now pay—probably inside of a year."

"Isn't the cutting down of profits cramping you a good deal for operating capital, Adriano? Are you not having trouble in getting the iron you need?"

"We should have more capital, of course—in times like these. And iron is scarce, as everyone knows."

"H-m-m—we should be able to do a mutually profitable business, I think. Nothing I know of to prevent. I can sell you coal thirty per cent less than you're now paying—any quantity of iron, at a lower price than anyone in France, England or America. And I can obtain all the extra capital you wish at five per cent on long time notes."

"Doubtless, Ippolyto—doubtless! But for what consideration? Mere kind assistance to a relative—eh? It does you credit, Cousin—I scarcely thought you would go to such lengths for us."

"Oh, business matters should be kept outside of relationship; one cannot go so far as one might wish in that direction. Of course, I should have to obtain such accommodation for you from other people—members of the German *Reichswirtschaftsrat,* the new Federal Chamber of Industry which now controls the whole country up yonder. The money, for example, would come from one of the Stinnes banks. You see? Very well. The Federal Chamber is now seeking new trade affiliations all over the world, and naturally feels that they would be secured best by something in the nature of a political understanding—eventually, with certain nations, an offensive and defensive alliance, mutually beneficial. In your case, those who supply you with coal, iron and money, on such advantageous terms, would naturally feel that you should be in sympathy with their aims—using your influence to further them when it is possible. And frankly, I can't see that you have any reasonable grounds for objecting to this. It is vastly to Italy's advantage, at a time when her former allies are refusing her just political claims and show no disposition to help her economically. It is obviously to your advantage!"

"We'll not discuss that, Ippolyto. I appreciate your kind offer none the less because my necessities are not such that I am pressed to accept it. As for alliances between the Italian government and other countries, I have nothing whatever to say. Such matters are almost entirely outside of my political duties—excepting only my vote in the Senate."

"Oh, come, Adriano! I fear you still retain too much of the war prejudice! The war is over these two years; there must be readjustment of all international relations if peace and industry are to return at all! Admit that we had our grievance against Austria—that has been settled. Practically, Austria no longer exists. But we had no serious one against the *Tedeschi.* It is my desire to serve you! My proposition should appeal to any fair-minded man. You'd not have me return to Berlin and say to my good friends that my family in Italy are so narrow-minded, so unreasonably unforgiving, that they are actually enemies of the *Tedeschi* for all time!"

"I have said I did not care to discuss politics with you, cousin. You are in my house—a welcome guest, as you know. But even one's host should not be pressed where courtesy prevents a candid expression of opinion. Come, let's have a game of billiards before we retire!"

AS they were strolling along the great shadowy hall to the smoking- and billiard-room—once the library of a Gisani doge—Scarpia overheard a few muttered questions between Ippolyto and the Cardinal.

"Did I not understand Your Eminence to say that he was seriously embarrassed in his business affairs?"

The Cardinal's saturnine features twitched a little in the suggestion of a sardonic smile. He had taken no side in the discussion; nor had he given any indication as to what he thought of the Baron's proposition.

"That is quite true, cousin. He is on the verge of ruin. Do you think that a ruined man retains much of his political influence—afterward? Particularly if his reverses happen to have a somewhat questionable appearance?"

"Meaning that as an enemy of my party he will completely eliminate himself without effort upon our part?"

"Nay—I but asked questions. Would

it be well, think you, to earn the stigma of forcing the house of Gisani over into a political faction which they traditionally abhor?"

"Faith—the stigma you imply troubles me less than the very widespread influence I believe the man to possess. Even if ruined financially, I doubt if it could be put in such a light that his friends and adherents would lose faith in him! The man has magnetism—the gift of making and keeping lifelong friends. And for that, I've always hated him! *Ecco!* I have the more learning! In everything I undertake I follow the German method of thoroughness, which is the only method! I am the more scientific politician—again the German application. Yet people do not trust me as they do him! I have friends—yes, many! But with this Adriano, it is sheer hypnotism. He could lead a forlorn hope! Faugh! Sentiment nauseates me! I *hate* him!"

Scarpia walked with as little noise as a cat, in spite of his age. His months in the Sahara with the Arabs each year seemed to have the effect of miraculously preserving his vigor and recharging his battery of vitality. Neither of the pair was aware that he was behind them or could have overheard what they said. From his known capacity for keeping what he heard to himself, they would have thought it of little consequence if he had. But when, pleading fatigue after one game, he was offered the Conte's gondola as far as his San Trovaso apartment, Gisani caught a slight twitching of the facial muscles which prompted him to accompany his venerable guest down to the landing-steps where the gondola lay waiting for him. And in the vestibule of the *palazzo* he caught a few words in so low a tone that they couldn't have been overheard six feet away.

"Whatever coal, iron or money you need will come within a few days from my agents or friends of the Entente. And there will be no obligation whatever. Your political beliefs or influence are no concern of ours. Tomorrow you shall tell me of your needs. Money will be available within an hour—the rest, when it can be shipped from the nearest port. Do not forget this, Adriano—sleep soundly this night. Get word to Cioforza that his difficulties will disappear in the same manner—see him as early as possible in the morning. And now—good night, my son."

WHEN the gondolier left him on the steps of San Trovaso,—but a short distance through the smaller canals from Palazzo Gisani,—he pulled a cord just inside the doorway of his lodging-house to waken the *donna di casa,* and when she opened her little hall window, he reached through for a branch telephone which he had caused to be installed there as a convenience, supplementing the one in his own apartment, and had a connection made with a yacht lying off San Giorgio. In less than ten minutes a fast but silent electric launch came down the canal and took him aboard—returning to the big deep-sea yacht, which looked much smaller, by reason of beautiful lines, than her actual tonnage. In the darkness nothing but her riding-lights would have indicated her position from the Piazzetta. At the top of the accommodation-ladder her sailing-master stood with lifted cap to escort the old diplomat below, where the owner sat waiting for him alone in the after saloon—having thrown a gorgeous kimono over his pajamas when the telephone message had been received.

"Gad, old friend, this is worth getting up for—what? After Abdool had been with you in Rome, he seemed to think the situation here a most serious one an' ran up to Geneva for a talk with me. Beastly mess, that meeting of the League Council, an' the unholy mob of secret political agents it drew there! Nan's in Delhi or some other Indian town, as he told you. He thought I'd best drop around here on the *Ranee,* anchor off the Grand Canal, have a telephone cable laid on an' stick around amusin' myself until I heard from you. You'd recognize the *Ranee,* of course, far as you could see her. I figured I'd hear from you when it seemed advisable. We're generally known to be friends; the news-sheets have commented upon your cruisin' with us occasionally, but I didn't know whether your presence here had been noticed until I saw you in the Gisani box at the Fenice, tonight. Now, it's near two in the morning; your old room is all ready—everything just as you left it. Hadn't you better turn in, and leave the talk until breakfast?"

"I would do better, perhaps, to sleep all of tomorrow afternoon. Is Sir Abdool aboard?"

"No. He's pokin' into the slums of all the bigger cities—tryin' to ferret out the men who are affiliated with the Berlin

faction here, an' the amount of followin' they actually have. He was in Bologna yesterday—may turn up any time."

"*Corpo di Bacco!* He could not be doing my poor country a better service! Me, I 'ave been much in ze slum—but ze wors' trouble, he ees more in ze *palazzo*. Ze people of Italy, ze mass', 'e do not love *ze Tedeschi*—no! 'E shout for D'Annunzio! 'E remember too clear' ze Piave, ze Trentino. 'E do not distinguish between Austrian an' *Tedesco*. In such ignorance, perhaps 'e ees more wise than those who are educate'. But many of ze great family, ze great house' of Italy, they are split in faction'. Presently many will keel each othaire, for ze Italian nature, 'e ees mos' determine' to 'ave ees own way, no matter if eet ees wise or bad for Italy. Again, there are ze currsed intermarriage—ze relationsheep so mix' weeth northern country'. Ze tentacle of those intermarriage', they reach into ze very heart of Italy, into ze greatest house' an' family'.

"All that ees mos' difficult to oppose, but eet ees far more so when ze Alli' of ze Entente give Italy cause to be dissatisfy—after all, her mos' great sacrifice in ze war. You know, Scarpia know', that such meesunderstanding an' unfair treatment weel come all right when ze Alli' 'ave time to consider ze claim of Italy thoroughly. We know who are ze safe frien'—an' who ze dangerous frien' of Italy. But many of ze people, many of ze governing class, 'e cannot be made to see so far. *Ecco!* Hees min' ees warp' by ze propaganda until eet ees mos' critical time for ze nation!"

IT was always so evident a pleasure for Scarpia to practice his English that Earl Trevor was equally pleased to humor him, though His Lordship's Italian was flawless..

"Depends a lot upon how many millions are bein' spent here in outright bribery of one form or another," observed His Lordship, "how many of your influential class are bein' reached by it. Under present conditions throughout the world, an' here in particular, a Dual Alliance could be made to look dev'lish attractive, if one had no eye to the future an' were badly pressed for money or economic necessities. Doubtless you know of many who are bein' approached along those lines? Eh?"

Scarpia ran over the events of the afternoon and evening—what had occurred in the Palazzo Gisani, the leverage which might be used upon the deputy Cioforza, and others—and his assurance to Conte Adriano that their necessities would be met without obligation.

"H-m-m—altogether, that may let you in for about how much, old friend?"

"That ees mos' difficult to say jus' now. Possiblee a million lire—possiblee more."

"All of which you'd personally advance if necess'ry, of course. I know you! But why be selfish about it? Am I not entitled to a share in such necessary work? It's for England's interest also, you know! I say! Of course, I've no idea what you may be worth, Scarpia—though I'd wager you could lay hands upon a million, sterling, without pauperizin' yourself. But I happen to control, one way or another, so vastly much more that it seems to me we cannot afford to risk half-measures, an' should pool the immediate expense. I'll place to your credit before noon, in the Banca Commerciale Italiana, a hundred thousand pounds. That's roughly ten and a half million lire, at current exchange. You'll know where to place it, whom to strengthen, where their position is insecure. When that is gone, you may call upon me for ten times the amount. There are plenty of others at home who'll contribute to anything of this sort like a shot—but if I lost the entire amount, I'd chance it."

WHILE he was speaking, they heard steps in the gangway. A buzzer sounded; and when the door opened the swarthy but genial face of Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan appeared. He was dressed like an Italian workman on a holiday, and—with the ends of his black mustache wonderfully curled with pomade—would have passed anywhere as such.

"By Jove, Abdool! I was tellin' Scarpia that you were somewhere in the north an' might turn up almost any day—but I scarcely expected you as soon as this. Must have found matters rather comin' to a focus, I fancy! What?"

"Aye, it began to look that way, O friend of my father's son. And I thought that if you were already in touch with Scarpia, here, we'd come very close to a fair understanding of the probable moves on the board. I was in Bologna yesterday—saw the yacht reported here in the Lagoon. From what I've picked up, all through the kingdom, Berlin has been

playing this through the socialist disturbances first—as a club to get certain party leaders into a proper frame of mind. The pro-*Tedesco* faction includes possibly thirty deputies in the *Camera,* seven of the leading senators, a dozen army officers. Aside from the army men, most of these are prominent in various leading industries, with commercial affiliations abroad. To the best of my belief, the men at the head of the faction are Franguenotti, a senator from one of the Sicilian departments, Di Saltivino the banker, and Baron Ippolyto di Travastere—Berlin Embassy."

"The devil! We know something of Ippolyto, but not that he stands as high in the faction as all that! Do they seem to be makin' much headway, Abdool—from what you've learned?"

"In one direction they've accomplished a good deal more than they should have done. They've managed to have Marquis Imperiali recalled from the London Embassy, and Romano from Washington. Their successors are practically certain to be men of strong pro-German sympathies—which also applies to the Berlin and Constantinople embassies. On the other hand, there appears to be very strong opposition from a faction which I believe to be numerically larger and more popular with the masses. In this there are two leaders—the Duca D'Ortova and Il Conte Adriano di Gisani, both of whom trace their descent back to the early Roman Empire. Both are popular idols, in a way—and would hold a following even under great reverses, representing as they do the Italian race itself. Until within a day or two, I fancy the other faction had no idea Gisani was really a leader, though they knew him to be strongly anti-*Tedesco* from the loss of very near relatives in the fighting north of the Piave.

"Di Saltivino got a message from Baron Ippolyto that his cousin Gisani was one of their most dangerous opponents, and that he was in Venice with the object of winning him over. If he failed to do so, it would be certain that Count Adriano was one of those in supreme command, and immediate action of some kind would have to be considered. Now, if either of you knows what sort of a bird Ippolyto is, that means affairs may take a dev'lish serious turn for Gisani and his associates within the next forty-eight hours. We know what a lovely place Scarpia's country is for that sort of thing, once it gets fairly started. Ippolyto is said to be staying with Gisani tonight—going down to Rome on the morning train, but within the hour I've heard that he may stop here another night and arrange a meeting between a dozen or more of his faction in one of the old *palazzos.*"

THE Earl of Dyvnaint had been following Sir Abdool's report very closely, but with a sub-conscious figuring-over of certain possibilities. After lighting a fresh cigar, he spoke to Scarpia—decisively:

"I say, old chap! Would it be possible, d'ye think, to get those five leaders an' a dozen prominent men who belong neither to one faction nor the other in a conference here tonight? With possibly a few of their following?"

"With what objec'—my frien'?"

"So that as a non-official representative of at least three Entente nations, I might give them a bit of plain talk as to the almost inevitable international relations ten years hence, an' the general balance of power!"

"H-m-m—not so bad, that idea! An' thou hast magnetism, my frien'. But Di Saltivino an' the Senatore Franguenotti—they are in Roma jus' now! From Roma to Venezia one travels in ze *wagonlit*—all of ze night, part of ze day. I could pull ze wire in thees *direccione,* that *direccione,* an' make them come—mos' probal'. Il Duca ees in Padova. Othaire prominent men 'appen to be weethin twelve hour' by rail, an' I could mos' easy' persuade—*si!* But those two? How get them here? Eh?"

"You've influence enough with the War Department to get an order, merely by requesting it. There are plenty of army 'planes in the immediate vicinity of Rome! Any of the milt'ry aviators would make the distance, by air, in three or four hours—with those two men as passengers! For that matter, get me any sort of a decent 'plane here in Venice, an' I'll go get 'em myself! The whole point is bringin' such a conference off tonight—here in Venice, before Ippolyto has a chance to get nasty an' do something that's too damned serious!"

NOW, when men with the natural initiative and resource possessed by the Free Lances start upon an enterprise which they consider of vital importance, the thing is quite likely to be put through with the

precision of well-oiled mechanism. But—taking the Italian telegraph system for what it is—only an influence as widespread as Scarpia's could not have been successfully used in getting together twenty-five of the most prominent men at such brief notice.

Conte Adriano and Contessa Elena had been notified by Scarpia as to his intentions, if they could be carried out, shortly after sunrise. On his own account they would have done anything in reason for him—but after his miraculously saving offer of the night before, he had but to request what he pleased of them. They had met the Earl and Countess Nan of Dyvnaint some years before,—had been, in fact, dinner-guests upon the famous *Ranee Sylvia,*—and the idea of His Lordship's addressing a number of Italian statesmen, unofficially, as a civilian representative of the Entente, seemed to possess greater possibilities under the existing conditions than almost anything else which could have been proposed. That his statements or arguments could possibly win over any of the Berlin faction was not to be expected, their personal interests were too strongly concerned. But with those in the doubtful class, patriotic men who desired the welfare of their country before any personal consideration, frank discussion of future relations with the Entente, as the Earl saw them, might turn the scale of influence too strongly for any effective opposition.

Each man had been telegraphed in the name of Gisani and his Contessa, inviting him to an informal dinner at eight o'clock —and with the influence Scarpia brought to bear, had canceled other engagements to accept. The two from Rome, as it happened, had never taken a flight at two thousand meters or any other height above ground and were inwardly nervous over the ordeal, yet strongly intrigued by a desire to see how it felt—and they had a ride which they wouldn't have missed for a good deal of money. None of the Berlin faction would have stirred a foot to hear such a discussion as the one proposed, but it seemed an opportunity, which they couldn't afford to reject, for sizing up some of the men opposed to them. It might bring into the open certain men whose influence they had felt but couldn't definitely locate.

When the guests descended to the big dining-room of the old *palazzo,* in evening dress, they wore their various decorations or cordons of rank, though the occasion had been expressly stipulated as informal. The Earl was seated next to Conte Adriano, Scarpia at the Contessa's left, and Sir Abdool was placed inconspicuously among the others, where he heard a good deal in languages he was not supposed to understand. After the coffee His Lordship rose from his chair and faced them. Even in that assemblage of distinguished men, his personality stood out as something remarkable.

ADDRESSING them in flawless Italian, with a smile which did not hide either force, dignity or sincerity—he began by sketching world conditions since the Armistice, picturing the social disintegration and overwhelming problems with which each country had had to deal before it might even consider relations with other nations. Then he outlined in a general way the personnel of the various war-ministries and the almost superhuman efforts which had been demanded of them.

"Those ministers, Signori, were called into office to meet an overwhelming emergency, to deal with conditions which do not, could not, exist in time of peace and industrial prosperity. They accomplished miracles, most of them, and shortened their lives by many years in so doing. Through the readjustment period they have, many of them, remained in office—and dealt as best they could with problems of a vastly diff'rent sort than those which confronted them during the war. They have been shortsighted in some directions—possibly utopian in others. It was inevitable that they should be. Many just claims and adjustments remain unsettled; others, have been disposed of for the moment in unsatisfactory ways. Also inevitable—partly because most of these men are worn out from the strain of what they've been through.

"Those ministries are being replaced by others of a diff'rent sort—better fitted to handle the problems of peace, fresher men, of wider viewpoint. For the present the distribution of many commodities necessarily must be restricted, until the countries producing them get on their feet and have a year or two more to recover. But Signori—all this friction of readjustment, the apparent hardships of individual cases, are but temporary difficulties which must disappear with gradual recovery to

pre-war conditions! It requires patience, confidence, belief that seeming indifference upon the part of former friends is but a phase of this construction period that will soon disappear.

"During the war certain alliances, consolidations of national interest, became necessary. And for the first time in centuries these alliances brought together races of people whose national interests are interdependent—who for a number of reasons are better fitted to preserve a balance of peace-preserving power than any other combination the world has seen during the past five hundred years, because their racial interests do not conflict. In the East, Signori, there is slowly rising the greatest menace we have ever known. When it will reach its maximum, what combinations will be included, we cannot say at present. If, in the fullness of time, that menace finds Western Europe and the Americas split up into several inimical groups, our painfully wrought civilization will be annihilated for another cycle of Dark Ages! No man may estimate how long that cycle will be, but we've had a slight taste of what it would mean. Signori! I firmly believe in the interdependent interests—the combined civilizing force—of Italy, France, England, Belgium, the United States! I drink to the Entente, Signori! May it exist, intact, long beyond our time!"

TREVOR had carried his hearers with him until, as he raised his glass in the mellow candlelight, all but five of them sprang to their feet cheering wildly in an outburst of enthusiasm which lasted for several minutes. The dissenting five got out of their chairs, ungraciously—for there was actually nothing in the toast to which, as patriotic Italians, they could reasonably object. But they wouldn't drink—and when the outburst had subsided, the banker Di Saltivino made a few remarks with a half-smile which deceived nobody.

"Our guest from England has made an address which it has been a pleasure to hear. Doubtless he is sincere in what he says, even if he unintentionally juggles the facts. It was an expression of opinion from one of another race who obviously cannot understand all the intricacies of our local problems, which we must meet and decide for ourselves. There are many of us who do not believe that Italy's future interests are best served by remaining in bondage to other nations which refuse to recognize her just claims and exhibit a callous indifference to her vital necessities. In fact, speaking for myself and a few others here this evening,"—the mask was off, now—he glared malevolently around the table,—"we will not appear to countenance a moment longer by our presence a barefaced attempt to force us into a disgraceful and disastrous alliance! Doubtless we will be able to recall ourselves to you, presently, with something more effective than words! *Addio, Signori!*"

The eyes of the five were venomous with hate as they stalked from the *sala*—obtaining their coats from the dressing-room, while gondolas were being called for them. In the *stanza da mangiare,* there was a low hum of comment until they had left the building; then the party gradually broke up, each of the guests insisting upon shaking the hand and having a few words with Earl Trevor before he left. His address had been the means of unreservedly winning over the doubtful ones to a belief in the underlying good will of the Entente toward Italy and making him personally more popular than before. The Duca d'Ortova would have remained the night in the *palazzo* as a guest of the Gisani, but His Lordship and Scarpia urged him in a few muttered words not to do so.

"Come aboard the yacht with us, Your Grace! That crowd mean mischief! They might even go after you in a hotel!"

Two others prominent in the Gisani faction they urged to spend the night on the yacht—doing their best to have the Conte and Contessa accompany them. But Gisani laughingly declined.

"Six of our party are spending the night here, my good friend; there is not the slightest reason for alarm!"

The Free Lances went back to the yacht with their guests in the *Rance's* electric launch, and when the others had retired, sat down in the after-saloon for a final cigar. But subconsciously, each was thinking of the old Palazzo Gisani—of the generous and popular Adriano, his beautiful Contessa, the young Visconte Paolo, with his perfect courtesy and Murillo face—of the Rembrandtesque effects in the lofty chambers and the evil faces of the five conspirators. As the ship's clock struck two bells, Trevor got out of his chair, slipped an electric torch and a

couple of automatics into pockets of a loose overcoat and started for the deck.

"Can't seem to get it out of my head that there'll be hell to pay in that *palazzo* before morning! I'm kicking myself for not having stayed there! Hope I'm not too late! Coming along? I fancied you would!"

WHEN the launch reached the landing-steps, the doors were apparently bolted for the night. There were dim reflections of candlelight from some of the upper windows, but no sound from within. Whispering directions to the quartermaster at the wheel, Scarpia had him ease the launch along the wall, around the farther corner and into the narrow side-basin from which tradesmen delivered household supplies and where craft belonging to the family were usually kept. Here they found the little postern-door ajar and tiptoed in—locking it after them. As they stole along the narrow passage with the help of the Earl's torch, they came upon an open panel in the wainscoting, with a stair in the wall behind it leading upward. As they were starting up, there came a faint echo of shouts—the groans of men who were terribly hurt—several shots, crowded into the space of a second or two. The Free Lances tried to run up the stair, but it was stumbling work—and that which they were too late to prevent was over when they came through the panel into the big council-chamber and on into the smoking-room, where Gisani had been with his guests when the treacherous Ippolyto and his fellow-murderers found them.

Conte Adriano had been stabbed in the back before he could turn, and lay just inside the doorway. Beyond him lay two of his friends—stilettoed in the same way. Some of the remaining four had had time to draw weapons and account for two of the scoundrels before numbers overcame them. Across the still quivering body of his father stood the boy Paolo—erect, fearless, a smoking pistol in his hand. And upon the floor of the broad hallway outside lay the huddled bodies of Ippolyto and two more of his father's murderers—each of whom he had just killed with a single shot. Among the shadows hung strata of acrid smoke. Had Trevor not snatched up a ten-branched candelabra as he came along, the young Visconte might have fired again—but he recognized them at a glance as, gravely removing their caps, they bowed to him in respect.

"Signor Conte—accept our deepest sympathy—and regrets! The Entente salutes you!"

A cowboy romance which you will find delightful indeed.

Lovers and Loco

By PAUL EVERMAN

"YEP," says Bill Hathaway to me in our private corner of Happy Schmidt's Purple Elephant saloon. "Little Georgia Heathcote is to carry the flowers, Sam Heathcote is to throw the bride away, and Father Montani is to perform the ecclesiastical ablutions, while Esther Salazar plays Tschaikafootsky's weddin' march on the Heathcote organ."

"Tschaikafootsky's? You mean Tschaisakowsky's, don't you?" I interjects, from the other side of the nice slick bottle.

"I dunno," says Bill gloomily. "Mebbe."

My, he looked sober setting there. And it wasn't Bill's way—to be sober, I mean—him being a big handsome jolly cuss that had a basketful of curly red hair, and in his square chin a dimple.

"Cheer up!" I cries. "Here's a toast: To the bride-to-be; and may there be the sound of many pattering little feet at the Rancho Eldorado before many more snows has missed New Mexico."

Bill grunted and looked sour. These new-engaged fellows is kind of touchy, you know.

But pretty soon, after the Bourbon had begun to melt the rivets of his unsociability, he remembered that I was his pard and best puncher, and got real confidential.

"I wasted no time in preliminaries," he says. "I popped the question to Myrtle right abrupt, and she answers in the same way.

"'Bill,' says she, 'I thought you was never goin' to ast me. It's been you that I wanted all the time. I really didn't care nothin' for the other gents.'

"She cuddles up real close to me and gets right smart sentimental. I would've liked it better if she hadn't give in quite so easy. She begins makin' plans for the weddin'—I kind o' think she had 'em all made in advance—and she says that I must see her daddy. So I steps into the other room where Sam Heathcote was. I makes known my wishes at once, and Sam looks me over kind o' critical.

"'So you wants to make a mattermonial alliance with the house of Heathcote,' he says at last.

"'Them is my intentions,' I admits.

"He give in 'most as easy as Myrtle had. 'Take her, my boy, and welcome!' says he."

As Bill said this he looked yearningly about the room, no doubt, thinking that for him there wouldn't be no more wild old times with the boys. And I sympathized with him for I had seen men lay down their hearts on the sacrificial altar of martyrmony before.

Poco tiempo Bill leaned over, his forehead all red and hot and sticky under his flopping hat brim. "Sandy, him and her both give in too easy!" he growled moodily.

I didn't say nothing. The punchers was splashing merrily at the bar. The poker game was heavy and loud. Finally Bill reached up a freckled hand and desperately jerked his hat down still farther. "It's day after tomorrer," he mumbled—"the weddin'—six P. M.—only day after tomorrer."

To cheer him up I slapped him on the shoulder. "You're a lucky dog," I yells. (My, them poker players was making a lot of noise.) "A damn' lucky dog! Day after tomorrow you'll be a Saint Benny or a Saint Dick!"

He looked at me funny-like. "Umph!" he grunted. "I reckon it'll take more'n a woman to make a saint out o' me!"

I reckoned so too, but I wasn't entirely sure of it.

Bill tucked several more drinks behind his shirt. First thing I knowed his spirits begun to rise and feel better.

He reached over and smashed my hat down over my eyes.

"Sandy," I heard him shout, "Myrtle's a beautiful woman!"

"Amen," I responds.

"A beautiful woman!" he bawls. Grab, the thought tickled him. "She'd warm the cockroaches of any man's heart!"

I let him crunch my hand, and crunched his in return. Just like sticks of iron with molasses on 'em, his fingers was.

"Bill," I says, "I know from your judgin' ability in the cattle business that you wouldn't have picked her if she hadn't been perfect and free from all blemishes whatsoever."

"And gentle!" continues Bill. "W'y, Sandy, she's as gentle as that pet lamb that follers Hank 'round all the time."

Hank? Oh, Hank was Bill's brother and pardner. They owned the Rancho Eldorado, or what was left of it. Grab, that Hank was a fighter!

"A beautiful woman!—Gentle!—She's a angel, Myrtle is!" roars Bill, between gulps.

"Yeh, a angel with red hair and a forty-inch chest!" I says; but I didn't say it out loud, for Bill was kind of sensitive and weighed two hundred. What I did say was: "Uh-huh. Wonder if Juan is still waitin' for us."

Bill swayed to his feet. "Sandy," he says, "we'll go get Juan, and then we'll go home."

We left the Purple Elephant and climbed down Carita's main street, arm in arm.

My, the air felt good; so fresh and clean and fragrant. I heard Bill remark something about the stars. I looked up, and there they was, all bunched and white-red and winking like they had come to Carita in a gang that night.

Talk about the mild and bully West, Stranger! It's all gone now, since the Indians have begun to wear pants and the greasers pajamas. New Mexico wasn't a state, then; it was a country. But now—cows is novelties, and they come in cans. Think of me, as peart a puncher as ever roped a red-eyed steer, selling beads and pottery to tourists and the like!

WE tramped on down the street, walking pretty high and cocky. A hot smell told us that we was in the Mexican quarter of the town, where earlier in the evening we had left our horses with Juan, Bill's greaser puncher, who was courting a plump little señorita a little ways down the street. Grab, them greasers was saddle stealers, but Juan was a watchman for yuh.

Here we was in a dark alley fifty yards from where we had left Juan. All of a sudden we heard Poky Dot, Bill's spotted pony, squeal. Ever hear a scared horse squeal? It's awful. Me and Bill sped up and turned a corner. There in the sand laid Juan with a couple of tough little greasers playing mumblety-peg on his body.

White men could shoot in them days.

We kicked the punctured greasers aside and bent over Juan. But his breathing days were over. Bill begun to cuss.

Crack! went a gun. *Ping!* I heard a bullet hit the 'dobe wall just over my head. I raised up and saw a whole army of greasers tumbling down on us from a chile-joint about a hundred yards away.

"Ah-lah-lah, ah-lah-lah!" they yells in their monkey lingo. "Ah-lah-lah gringo!"

I grabbed Bill's arm. "Bill," I yells, "the Rancho Eldorado wants to see us!"

White men could ride in them days.

Five miles out of Carita, when we couldn't hear the greasers squawking and shooting behind us no longer, we eased up a bit and let our ponies crunch their way through the sand as they pleased. I could hear Bill mumbling:

"Pore Juan—White man with a nigger hide—Damn' shame—Pore Juan."

But that gang of winking stars wasn't out for nothing. A big fat moon slid over amongst 'em, and all together they swooped down on Bill and made him forget all about

Juan. He puffed out his cheeks in a terrible way, and his big voice boomed out across the hollow mesa. Myrtle was a lady! A angel and a dream and a beauty! What a woman was Myrtle!

I was curious. "Bill," I asks, "are you goin' to decorate the Rancho Eldorado with the bride?"

Bill dragged hisself away from the stars and explains: "It's like this: Me and Sam Heathcote has come to a agreement whereby me and Myrtle is to lodge at the Heathcote Ranch. I is to assume charge in place o' Sam who wants to retire. Hank and we will sell the Eldorado, and my share o' the proceeds ought to pay Hank what I owes him, which is consid'able. Then Hank can go into the store business at Carita, if he wants."

As we rode along I wondered how Hank would take the news. Hank was a sober cuss that acted like he had met up with some terrible misfortune that had penetrated to the very roots of his young life and turned existence into a boundless desert filled with ornery centipedes and unsympathetic fellow-men. But a fighter—my! Many's the time I'd seen him clean out a nest of greasers, or even maverick punchers, with his bare fists.

I remembered the time I'd first come up out of the Pecos and begged a job off of Bill. He had told me all about Hank.

"Hank's engaged in eddicational pursuits," he had declared, biting off a chew of tobacco. "Hank's eddicated, he is. He does his figgerin' by cube root, and knows how many decimals they is in a hunderd, and has read the dictionary backwards. Yep, he *is* kind o' solemn and thoughtful. He possesses some of the earmarks and brands of one of these locust-eaters you reads about; sort of indolescent and wrapped up in his own self. But Hank would risk his hide for me," he had added convincingly.

AND how did Hank take the news? Well, sir, just like he took everything else. The next morning at breakfast-time, when Bill begun to make poetry about Myrtle and her gentle ways and pretty eyes and how much more a married feller could save and how the store business in Carita offered marvelous opportunities for a eddicated man with a little capital and lots of brains, Hank quietly busted a egg into the skillet (he was cook and commissaryist of our outfit)—and didn't say nothing. He cussed some, after a tasteless fashion, when we told him about Juan; and Myrtle's fine points didn't appear to interest him. But my, what a breakfast he gave us that morning! And I knowed he was satisfied.

"Hank's a funny sort of a cuss," I remarks to Bill on our way out to the corral.

"Oh, Hank's got rather funny ways," answers Bill, "but he would do anything for me. They aint many brothers like Hank."

Bill went on over to Heathcote's to complete the wedding arrangements, and I rode out on my lonesome job to look after the big cows and the baby cows. My, that ranch was in a awful shape. What with Bill's good times and matrimonial pursuits and Hank's business ambitions, prosperity had been plumb scoundered out at the Eldorado. Oh, there was plenty of fat cattle scrambling about—more, in fact, than me and Juan had been able to take care of very good; and we had had to do it all, since Bill was hitting the bottle when he wasn't courting Myrtle, and since Hank was studying business methods when he wasn't polishing the cupboard furniture. Cattle enough, sure; but by rights they belonged to the slick bank fellow up in Carita who was so kind and pleasant about taking mortgages and the like.

When I got back that evening I found Bill sprawled on the sand in the shade of the ranch house. He didn't act right happy, and pretty soon he told me why.

It appeared that love wasn't always as bright as a new skillet, after all. Myrtle's actions hadn't suited him exactly. No; she was a-scouring and a-dusting and a-sewing and a-scraping, all bent on making this here wedding a sumptuous event. She had informed him rather coldly that this was no time for love chats. No, sir. He hadn't hung around very long, neither. And had I ever noticed the difference between the way a woman looks when she's dressed up and the way she looks when she's not.

I admitted that my experience with the *genus femo* was limited; for at that time I had never yet bit into the loco weed of love.

Well, this was the first time that he'd noticed that Myrtle had so many freckles. And all arrangements was made—six P. M. tomorrow.

I don't reckon the stars appealed to Bill that night like they had the night before. But I was surprised the next morning when

he announced his intention of riding out on the range with me. Grab, he wanted to get his mind off of Myrtle and martyrmony.

A BOOMING voice halted us as we was riding away from the corral. Here, out of a cloud of dust, comes Lon Bisher the sheriff, a big, rawboned gent with a mournful, bowlegged mustache. He pulled up and looked us over pretty sober for a minute. Pretty soon he asks: "Wasn't you gents in a little rucus over in greasertown t'other night?"

We told him about Juan's bad luck and our speedy administration of justice.

"Umh!" says Lon. "Had it figgered 'bout that way. But you two boys was recognized, and some *hombres* down at Carita has swore out warrants ag'in' ye, chargin' ye with not only the murder of Porfirio Sanchez and Antonio Sanchez but also that of Juan Gonzales, your puncher. Purty slick of the devils to accuse ye of killin' Juan."

We and Bill was pretty mad.

"Natchelly I refused to serve any sech damfool warrant," Lon goes on. "But three rangers from Dona Ana district is in Carita, and old Jedge Murchison has deputized them to take you gents. That's what I rode out to tell ye about. Now these rangers knows that Bill will go to the Heathcote Ranch to be married this afternoon, and they natchelly supposes that you, Sandy, will be with him. So they aims to nab ye both when you pass through Barancas. And if they don't get ye there, they're goin' out to Heathcotes' after ye."

"Do I know these rangers?" demands Bill.

"Don't think so," answers the sheriff; "but they have thorough descriptions of you—Bill's red hair and spotted pony bein' the main items. Must be goin'. *Adios.*"

I watched Lon float away in a cloud of dust. Then I heard Bill cussing. "No damn' rangers is goin' to keep me away from that weddin'!" he howls. Funny how a fellow wants a woman bad when he thinks somebody's going to keep him from gettin' her. "I aint got no objections to bein' arrested afterwards, but that weddin' has got to take place according to previous plans and specifications. How are we goin' to dodge them rangers, Sandy?"

"Ask me a easy one," I says politely.

He couldn't. So he hunched up in his saddle and settled hisself to work out this pernicious problem. After a long half-hour of brain exhaustion and heavy breathing, he begun to grin. Then he laughed. My, he had a laugh to wake the little froggies in their nests.

"Does me and Hank resemble each other to any great extent?" he asks.

I looked him over pretty critical.

"W-e-ll, yes," I decides. "You're the same build, and your features is something the same. If a earthquake'd crack a smile in that tombstone face of Hank's and if he'd smear some red paint in his hair, he'd be a dead ringer for you—even if you is a trifle the bowleggedest."

Then the light twinkled on me. "You're goin' to disguise Hank—" I begins excitedly.

"Sure," he grins. "We disguise Hank and send him on ahead. The rangers arrest him, takin' him for me, and by the time they discovers their mistake, me and Myrtle'll be man and woman. *Sabe?* Come on!"

We found Hank peeling potatoes.

"Hank," says Bill, "will you do me a favor?"

Hank nodded as usual. Bill throwed his hat on the floor and begun to skin off his pants and boots.

"Well," he says, speaking rapidly, "I want you to put on these yere clothes. They is a bottle of peroxide hydrogen 'round here som'eres. I want you to use some o' that for your hair. Then I want you to take my spotted pony, ride past Williamsons' and pick up Bud Williamson and then proceed to the Heathcote Ranch, where I want you and Bud to take mine and Sandy's places this afternoon. Better start as soon as you can get ready."

"Just what—" begun Hank.

"No time for explanations," yelps Bill, climbing into another pair of pants. "Jest do what I told you. All I want you to do is take my place this afternoon."

"But—" says Hank, kind of bewildered-like.

"Don't forget the peroxide and Bud Williamson," interrupts Bill. And he grabbed his hat and rushed out the door with me hot after him.

"It's kind of hard on Hank," I suggests as we rode away. "You ought to have explained matters more fully."

"I told him I wanted him to take my place," laughs the big redhead. "He'll take that to mean that I want him to assist Heathcote in makin' the wedding arrangements. Oh, them rangers wont hurt Hank

none, and by the time they find out who he is, me and Myrtle will be all tied up."

"What's Bud Williamson got to do with it?" I asks.

"He's to take your place," explains Bill. "Bud's resemblance to you is marvelous."

I offered nothing in denial, but to be classed in the same picture gallery with Bud Williamson was a insult.

We didn't no more'n take a look at the big cows and the baby cows that morning, and three hours later we galloped back to the ranch house.

"Aint that Poky Dot?" I asks, looking in the direction of the corral.

Sure enough there was Bill's spotted pony browsing around contentedly. Bill looked worried.

Poco tiempo we went into the house, and the first thing we noticed was Bill's clothes strung on the floor just like he had left 'em.

"Hell!" he snorts, with a kick at the pants on the floor. "Is Hank gone loco!"

He grabbed up a slip of paper lying on the table, read it and passed it on to me.

"Read it!" he bellows, pacing up and down like a wild man.

This, wrote in Hank's ladylike hand, was what I read:

"*Dear Will:* Much obliged for your offer to let me wear your clothes. But I will feel and look better in my own. I will ride my own pony, too, since me and Poky Dot never did get along. I am not exactly a marrying man, Will, but I wont refuse to do anything you ask me, and when you ask me to marry Myrtle and take your place at Heathcotes' this evening of course I will do it if I can get Myrtle to take me for a life pardner. HENRY.

"P. S. I reckon my hair will lay down good enough without that peroxide. I tried my best, but I couldn't drink the darned stuff. There is cold beans in the cupboard.

H. H."

I laid down the letter and listened to Bill's marvelous vocabulary.

"Shut up!" I says finally. "Quit cussin' Hank. You made a damfool out of yourself by not takin' him in your confidence and bein' more statistic in the first place. If you had been more statistic in your instructions he would have done exactly as you wished. As it is, things is mixed up beautiful."

"Hank aint treatin' me square," howls Bill. "He's robbin' me!"

"It's your own fault," I reminds him firmly. "You acts more loco than Hank. Yesterday you was sorry of your bargain and bemoanin' the fact that Myrtle had freckles.

"Now if we rides fast enough," I adds, "I reckon we can manage by fair means or foul, rangers or no rangers, to reach Heathcotes' afore Hank makes this awful mistake."

BILL rushed for the door *muy pronto* with me after him. We slammed the door open and popped outside—right into the arms of three husky strangers. It was them rangers!

Fight? Of course we did. But they had the surprise and the jump and the draw on us. I admit that it didn't take 'em long to put handcuffs on me. Pretty soon Bill's wrists was as intimate and neighborly as mine. There we was, both completely *hors de combat!*

"How could Hank do it!" groans Bill that night when bars had been put between us and freedom. "W'y, me and Hank was a heap more friendly than most brothers. Many's the time we've helped each other in times o' trouble. We always stood up for each other before."

"Aw, shut up," I says impatiently. "It's your own fault. Hank's not to blame. He thought he was doin' you a favor."

He throwed caution to the sparrows. "Favor!" he yells. "Favor! If he's married Myrtle I'll kill him!"

I don't reckon the stars appealed to Bill much that night, neither. The next morning in come our friend Lon Bisher, plumb stuffed with information. Yep, Myrtle was Missus Hank now. It had been a terrible scrumptious weddin', and Hank and Myrtle and the guests had danced till 'most mornin'. A happy pair, everybody said. And Hank was outside now, and would Bill see him.

Bill would, but I wouldn't let him. "You keep Hank away," I warns Lon. "Keep him away now!"

Bill rushed to the iron fence and stuck a big freckled fist between the bars.

"You tell Hank," he bawls after Lon, "that if he mistreats Myrtle I'll kill him!"

Grab, he was in a terrible way and dangerous. And he was still foaming at the mouth when he was took before old Judge Murchison in a little courtroom stuffed full of smelly greasers.

The old judge was a wiry little cuss

with a head full of brains, a heart full of justice and a mouth full of chewing-tobacco. Them greasers testified. Yep, we was the culprits that had slayed Juan and the deceased Sanchez boys. They had seen it all. We was the men.

"Umh!" says the old judge.

And then he listens to our side.

"Umh!" he says again.

Poco tiempo he jumps up and pounds on the table with his wooden sledge. My, them greasers was scared.

"According to the territorial statute," he says—Grab, his voice was like a gun—"the death penalty shall be afflicted on any man or woman who commits homicide. See Code III, Section L, under 14. But," says he, "no homicide has been proved, since *homo*, the Latin word from which it comes, means white man; therefore homicide means slaying of a white man.

"But," he goes on, "these defendants is undoubtedly guilty of *hombre*cide, which, with its Spanish prefix, means the slaying of a Spanish man. And under the cattleman's code of justice I sentence these defendants to the Santa Fe *calaboza* for a period of one month. Court is adjourned."

After the courtroom was emptied considerable he turned to me and Bill, and the gray winkers of his left eye met for a minute.

"Luck to ye," he says. "But you boys want to be careful and not get the seven-year itch in your trigger fingers. That's all."

I WAS in hopes that a month up at Santa Fe would take some of the red out of Bill's hair and cause him to forget his bloody ideas about Hank. And he had inducements enough—Grab, yes. Warden Spearman assayed *A1* and let us have the run of the place, with his private office as headquarters and his sideboard at our disposal.

But Bill—my, Stranger, it takes a redhead for staying qualities. He was going to hunt Hank Hathaway up. Yes, sir. Hank had robbed him. He'd show Hank; take it out o' his hide. And if Hank mistreated Myrtle, he'd kill him.

I tried to soothe him down, but it was just like pouring salve on a volcano. And the day our month was up he hopped onto Poky Dot and 'loped down to Carita with me trailing behind.

Bright and early the next morning I followed him into Lon Bisher's office.

"Where's Hank?" demands Bill, putting his hand on Lon's shoulder.

"You leave Hank alone," says the sheriff. "He—he—"

"Where is he?" persists Bill.

"He's runnin' a store here in Carita," replied Lon. "He sold the ranch and paid off all notes and mortgages. Him and Myrtle is livin' here now."

"Where?" Bill keeps after him.

Lon gave in. "I'll tell ye," he says, "but I hope he licks the taste out o' you."

We followed Lon's directions and soon come to Hank's house, a low, grayish-yellow 'dobe affair.

"Now Bill," I says earnestly, "before I let you go in there I want you to leave your gun with me and promise that this affair wont end with casualties."

Bill give me his gun. "I promise all ye ask, Sandy," he says. "All I want to do is to get my two hands on him." And he ducked around the corner like a Apache on the warpath.

I set there and waited. "If he licks Hank," I says to myself, "he's a good 'un."

Then all of a sudden here comes Bill wobbling back around the house, his face kind of whitish-yellow like a dead man's.

"What ails you?" I asks anxiously.

"It—aint—me!" he panted. "It—it's Hank! He—he—" Grab, he was all choked up. I reached for my flask. "If this here'll do any good—" I begins. Bill shook his head despairingly. "You—you—don't understand!" he gasped. "It—it's awful, Sandy! I—I'll show ye."

I run after him through the soft sand around the corner of the house and to a dinky little window.

"Look!" whispers Bill.

There we could see Hank, his arms dangling at his sides, apparently as helpless as a calf in a crate. And in front of him danced Missus Hank, a-cuffing and a-hammering and a-pounding him.

"But, dear—" Hank pleaded.

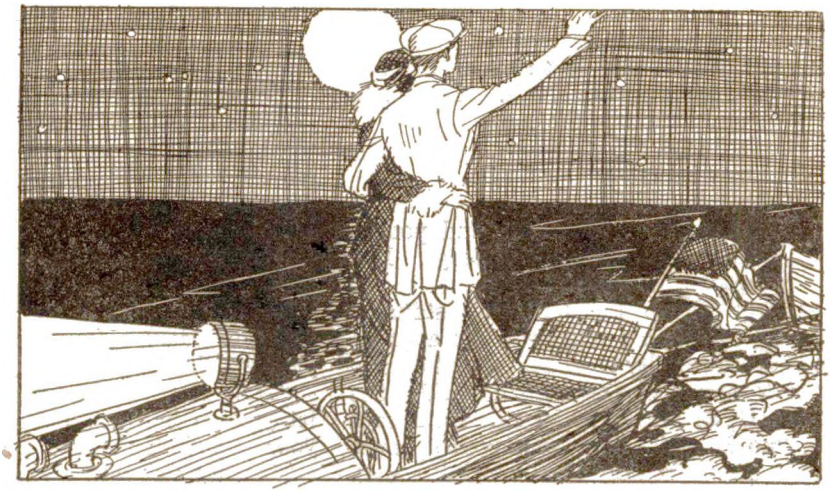
"Not a word!" she screamed.

Biff! She caught him a jolt under the eye. She had a left jab that was a dandy, and she treated him more like a sparring pardner than like a husband. And Hank, who could have broke her in two with one hand, didn't as much as lift his little finger against her.

Me and Bill faded away. Grab, we was sick.

"Pore Hank!" choked Bill. "Pore Hank!"

And I agreed with him.



Three Miles

By Frank Condon

MR. HOBART HUPP had been hearing vague reports about Mr. Arthur Simmons for weeks. Rumors concerning his old friend had come to Hobart from several sources, and Mrs. Henley-Harding of Newport and Long Island had said that Arthur, poor creature, was going about in a daze.

"In fact," said Mrs. Henley-Harding, twirling her lorgnon in her perfectly manicured fingers, "Arthur seems to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown."

"The darned chump," remarked Hobart, "I'll look him up."

This was a natural and friendly thing to do. Hobart Hupp, although but twenty-four, was a surgeon whose future fame was assured, first by the fact that his surgical education was complete, and second by the fact that he was a Hupp; and the Hupps of New York were always excellent surgeons.

The looking-up process occurred several days later, and young Dr. Hupp, after calling three times at the Cactus Club, discovered Arthur in a bay window, staring fixedly into Fifth Avenue as though that highway were a new and astounding spectacle. Dr. Hupp walked across the cavernous sitting-room and greeted his friend.

"Well," he began, "what's the matter?"

ARTHUR continued to gaze upon the passing crowds. His attitude remained stony and inhospitable, though a black bottle and glasses were on a table at his elbow.

"I inquired what is the matter with you?" Hobart continued, undiscouraged. "People are talking about you. It is generally believed that your mind is beginning to unravel."

"You go 'way," Arthur replied, looking at Hobart for the first time. "You go 'way and leave me be."

"I shall not go away," said the young bone-splitter, still peacefully. "I have called at this home of the unburied dead three times in the effort to find out what ails you, and I now propose to learn, if I have to knock the information out of you with the leg of a chair."

"You know well enough what's the matter with me," Arthur said sadly. "You stand there and dare to ask me what's the matter with me. If you had any sense of decency, you'd never speak to me—you—you home-wrecker."

"Home-wrecker?" Hobart repeated, a bit startled. "Home-wrecker! How do you make that out?"

"You wrecked my home." Arthur went

You will find this complete novelette one of the most joyous events of your life.

At Sea

Author of "Caviare and Corned Beef," "Hand o' God," and many other memorable stories.

on in the same dismal tone, pouring himself a libation from the black bottle and mildly diluting it. "You ought to feel ashamed."

"You never had a home," protested Hobart. "Unless you call this gilded refuge for the leisure classes a home, you never had a home."

"I *would* have had a home, only for you. I had the house picked out, and the wallpaper too—one of the nicest little homes in Mt. Vernon, with iron dogs on the lawn. Then you come along and steal Estrella."

"Oh," said Hobart. "That's what you're talking about."

HE dropped softly into a chair. Arthur resumed his bitter contemplation of the throngs in the avenue.

"So that's what you're talking about," Hobart repeated.

"You're going to marry Estrella on Tuesday night, aren't you?" Arthur demanded plaintively. "You admit that, don't you?"

"I'm going to marry her," said Hobart, "but I'm not stealing her from you, or anyone else. Be reasonable, Arthur."

"You *are* stealing her from me. She certainly would have married me, if you had kept out. I've loved Estrella since I was nine years old. You don't love her as I do. You assume to be my friend, and here you are marrying the only girl I ever cared for. A fine friend!"

"Well," Hobart argued, "I can't help it. It's arranged, and I've got to marry her, Arthur. It's really up to me."

"All right," Mr. Simmons said. "Go ahead and marry her, Hobart. Go right ahead, and when I'm dead and gone, you'll know you killed me. Get what satisfaction you can out of that."

"When you're dead!" Hobart exclaimed.

"I'm going away and drink myself to death," Arthur declared firmly. "I shall hide somewhere out of the world and drown myself in gin rickeys. When I am cold in death, you can stand before my grave and watch them lower me down, with the lumps of earth hitting the pine box, and feel that you personally brought it about."

Arthur poured himself another libation.

Dr. Hupp looked suspicious.

"Oh, no, Arthur," he protested. "There's many a nice girl left, besides Estrella. Brace up and be a sport. If you want to do the right thing, you'll stop this guzzling and stand up with me on Tuesday night. If you'd come along and be my best man, Arthur, it would please me tremendously."

Arthur laughed dismally and waved his hand.

"Go away," he said. "Go away and marry Estrella De Morgan. I shall finish myself as speedily as possible, giving trouble to no one."

"Listen to me," Mr. Hupp said earnestly; and for the following ten minutes he endeavored to show Arthur that life is a sweet and worthy state, and that a man should not fling himself away because some other man stepped in and married his young lady. At the end of the preachment Arthur was more depressed and melancholy than ever. He restated his position in louder tones. He was going, he said, to some isolated and gale-swept spot, where the wind howled dismally through the trees, and nature seemed cruel and harsh. There he would sit down quietly and drink himself into the next world. Hobart sighed in a discouraged way and rose.

"Suit yourself," he said. "It may be just as well. You probably would never be of any use, anyhow. Good night, Arthur."

THE marriage to which Arthur referred in such a mournful way was to be one of the gala events of a very smart social season in New York. Estrella De Morgan, daughter of the kerosene De Morgans of Wheeling, West Virginia, was to ally herself with Dr. Hobart Hupp, and the announcement had been discussed with interest. Estrella was a plump little person, and the De Morgan family was entirely respectable and worthy, in addition to owning kerosene shares in large numbers.

It was, of course, recognized that the De Morgans were not of the elect, in a social way of speaking. None of their ancestors had come to America in the steerage and opened fish-shops in what is now the lower part of New York. The true American aristocrat, as everyone knows, is a person whose progenitors had something to do with the early whisky-smuggling in New York and later on took up the cattle and hide industry. The De Morgans apparently sprang from the West, and New York knew them as persons who owned a fair-looking town house and seemed to have money.

On the other hand, Mr. Hobart Hupp belonged. The New York Hupps run all the way back to the days when milk was six cents a quart and one horse was enough for a street-car. In the old days of the Four Hundred there was always a Hupp; and in these times when the number has become Four Thousand, there is still a Hupp. In each generation of Hupps one has always been a surgeon. Therefore, Hobart was only following the family's tradition; and in the profession, it was agreed that young Hobart would make as good a surgeon as any of the Hupps before him.

It had occurred to the De Morgans that a matrimonial alliance with the Hupps was a thing to be desired. Hobart and Estrella had known each other only a year, and yet they had drifted upon the shoals of matrimony as surely as if some unseen hand had been guiding them. Hobart was a good-natured young man and afraid of women. He was particularly terrified by Mrs. Henry De Morgan, Estrella's mother, and avoided long conversations with her whenever possible. He thought Estrella a sensible and attractive young woman, and finally asked her to marry him. Estrella accepted him immediately. The day of the marriage was announced, and things moved on quietly until Mrs. Henley-Harding spoke to Hobart Hupp about Arthur Simmons.

The De Morgans consisted of Mrs. De Morgan; Estrella; Roderick, the only son, who was a colorless individual addicted to twelve-inch cigarette-holders and cream-colored spats; Henry De Morgan, the ostensible head of the family, and a younger daughter still in the finishing school. According to cynical reports, the entire De Morgan family was pleased with the marriage of Estrella to one of the long line of Hupps.

Hobart Hupp was almost too cheerful and good-natured ever to make a really high-class surgeon and physician. He belonged to the rosy-looking class of human being, and his normal state was smiling. People generally imposed upon him. He belonged to all the good clubs that he cared to—knew everybody worth knowing, and was more or less reckless with motor-cars.

After the conversation in the Cactus Club, Hobart heard nothing more of Arthur Simmons; nor did he learn further details of Arthur's progress down the trail to oblivion. He was busied with the solemn preliminaries to his nuptials. The wedding was planned for Tuesday night at the St. Agnes Hotel, and invitations had been accepted by so many prominent New

York persons that Mrs. Henry De Morgan spoke triumphantly to her husband.

It was to be one of those fashionable ceremonies mentioned under large headlines in the morning papers, with names running down to the bottom of the column and a detailed description of the gowns.

On Tuesday morning little remained to be done. The De Morgans feverishly awaited the important hour. Wedding gifts were laid out on tables in the St. Agnes, and reliable detectives were employed to watch them. The florists were cutting their choicest blooms; the bridesmaids had finished squabbling among themselves; and on Monday afternoon, Hobart had a telegram from Jim Faulkner's mother in New Haven, asking if Hobart could run up, owing to Jim's serious sickness. Considering that he and James had spent four friendly years at college, Hobart decided immediately. He hurried up, spent the afternoon and night at Jim's home, and as Jim was better in the morning, young Dr. Hupp stood on the railway platform at nine o'clock Tuesday, waiting impatiently for the arrival of the New York express.

At this point, though no one suspected it, the hand of Fate reached out and began clawing over the affairs of Mr. Hupp. The train arrived, and Hobart hunted about for a seat. He was forced to explore the day coaches—the chair-car seats had been sold out, a dismal-eyed agent informed him. In time he discovered room beside a stout lady and buried himself in the morning *Herald,* in which was a brisk account of his coming marriage. Presently he was aware of a conversation in the seat ahead. A husband and wife, rather elderly and respectable persons, were discussing him. Hobart looked at them and failed to recognize either one, but their plans for the day became speedily known. They contemplated a trip to New York. In the evening they expected to attend the Hupp-De Morgan ceremony at the St. Agnes. As they were unknown to him, Hobart concluded that they must be friends of the De Morgans.

"CERTAINLY," was what Hobart first heard. "No doubt about it. He has my sympathy. A loveless marriage is a terrible thing."

"It is," agreed the man.

There was a brief silence during which the lady wriggled in her seat and seemed to be thinking up her next remark.

"Of course," she affirmed, "the De Morgans simply had to break into society or die in the attempt, and Estrella was their only hope. They are that sort. They have the money and the motorcars, and now they are about to enter the charmed circle; but what a poor figure this new husband will cut."

Hobart, at this point, glanced over the top of his paper.

"Perhaps Estrella loves him," suggested the man.

"Ridiculous!" said his wife. "She loves the position she will presently adorn. Haven't I heard them talk? The family regards Dr. Hupp as a harmless young person, and nice enough in his way; but there is no illusion about its being a love match. I suppose that is true of a great many of these fashionable weddings."

"It will be interesting to watch," the husband stated.

The conversation continued, and the express lingered in the station, as express-trains have a jolly way of doing when a person wishes to hurry elsewhere. Mr. Hupp retired into the inky fastnesses of his newspaper and listened to fugitive remarks from the well-informed strangers in the seat ahead of him.

He stared out of the window, plunged into profound thought, and gradually his mouth tightened into a smile. He began to see something to which he had been more or less blind. Was it possible that he was being chivied into matrimony, an easy-going victim of a fond mamma and ambitious papa?

With somewhat of a shock Hobart perceived that it would be impossible for him to marry Estrella De Morgan. It would be impossible now, even if what he had just overheard was not true. A strong disinclination to marry into the De Morgan family assailed him. Upon inspection, he discovered a remarkable absence of affection for Estrella.

"I will go immediately to the house," he informed himself, "and tell them that the marriage is canceled. There will be no wedding tonight."

For a moment this seemed a sensible and natural course, but gradually Hobart changed his mind. Interviewing the De Morgan family, and telling them that there would be no wedding, presented unpleasant possibilities. It would be certain to bring on hysteria—assumed hysteria possibly, but nevertheless hysteria. Mrs. Henry De

Morgan would confront him, and Hobart shivered at the thought. He drew a picture of just what Estrella would do under the painful circumstances. She would probably have a copious fit over it. She would burst into tears, and perhaps shriek. Though he was pleasant of countenance and easy-mannered, Hobart nevertheless feared womankind in any except its pleasant moods. Women who burst into tears terrified him. Angry women threw him into a panic. The only sort of women with whom he got on excellently were pleasant, smiling, cheerful women, with soft voices, who didn't ask him too many questions.

Extremely low in his mind, and annoyed with himself for not seeing that the De Morgan family had almost married him, Hobart arose from the day-coach and wandered rearward in search of the chair-car conductor. He fervently desired to sit in some other car and hear no more about himself and his nuptials. The backs of the two wedding guests irritated him, so he departed.

There is, of course, always a chance of getting a seat in a chair-car after all the seats have been sold. If a person has plenty of patience and some small change, and can put up with the elegant hauteur of the conductor, there is always a slim chance. Hobart tipped two or three colored servitors and suggested the need of a chair seat. The gilded official with the seat-chart hunted him up after a bit, and informed him that he could have Number Twelve in Car Four. Hobart threw away his cigarette and sought the silence and solace of Number Twelve and within five minutes the before-mentioned hand of fate began fresh clawings.

Hobart dropped into his chair and wondered whether to buy from the news-butcher a monthly magazine or a weekly. The weekly was fatter than the monthly, and had more advertisements in colors; so he bought it. He started to read it, and as he swung about on his chair to rest his feet on the footstool, his eyes skidded over the top of the page and fell upon the traveling person in Number Thirteen across the aisle.

He beheld a young woman of nineteen or twenty, and the countenance at which he beamed, in pleased surprise, was one of those joyous, buoyant, rose-colored bits of perfection upon which a man is privileged to gaze only once or twice in a lifetime. Hobart remained as he was, staring fixedly, and after a moment the young woman slowly turned her chair and looked at him. He coughed and began reading the line at the top of his page. He continued to read this line over and over for several minutes as if fascinated, although all it said was: "Henry answered the telephone for the fifth time that morning."

THE lady across the aisle surveyed Hobart in a leisurely and curious manner and then twisted about and presented him with an uninterrupted view of her back. It was a nice enough back, and yet Hobart yearned, after several minutes, to have its owner swing about again. He had an excellent view of her hat, which was one of these little round fuzzy affairs, with veiling. Under the hat was an extraordinary mass of brown hair that was almost black. It glistened and gleamed when a passing flicker of sunshine struck it through the car window. It cascaded down about the young creature's ears and concealed them. It drifted down the nape of her perfect neck and cuddled itself up on the collar of her coat. Hobart decided that it was as marvelous a wealth of hair as he had ever seen. Presently the lady swung about a trifle, and Hobart gazed rapturously at her profile.

He could see the tip of a dainty nose, and he noticed the rosy flush and the smooth, velvety cheek. As a physician, he concluded that here was a specimen of health and youth. The little blue serge suit was plain but attractive. There was a bit of lace curled about her throat, and the general effect was entrancing.

As far as Hobart Hupp was concerned, the publishing company might just as well have omitted printing that particular number of the magazine. He continued to hold it in his hands, but solely as a subterfuge—a decoy behind which he concealed himself and peeked, as he thought, unobserved, over the top. He forgot his matrimonial troubles of the moment. The conversation of the wedding guests in the day-coach faded from his mind, and he wished with an intensity that surprised him to know who this self-possessed young stranger was.

As time went on, he found himself hoping that the train might be wrecked—not too wrecked, of course, but just nicely smashed up, with the seats torn from their fastenings and glass falling, and the roof threatening to come in and kill the passengers. Under such conditions, he imagined it would be permissible for him to address

the young lady and take steps to rescue her.

However, there is Some Power that guides the affairs of man. When we imagine things to be at their worst and most hopeless state, the sun bursts through, and all is lovely. There is not the slightest use trying to force this unseen Some Power, or to cajole it, or to order it about. It acts by and of itself, and it began acting for Dr. Hupp about nine minutes out of New Haven station, with New York only sixty-six miles away.

It was not the old, familiar jammed window, either. Nor was it the time-honored drink of water, which, according to traveling traditions, a young female is always unable to get for herself. In their own homes or in hotels or anywhere else, young ladies are invariably able to go and get glasses of water when necessary, but on trains it is seemingly an impossible feat. Why this is so, no one has ever been able to explain. The tall stranger with the kind brown eyes always must rise up and with a gallant bow, go and get the girl her glass of water, and from that moment, the observer can hear the distant tinkle of wedding bells.

IN the case of Hobart Hupp, it was not so. The Some Power previously referred to took a distinct brace and pulled a new one. The young merchant prince selling the chocolate bars, salted peanuts, chewing gum and latest magazines suddenly entered into negotiations with the traveling lady and apparently sold her a magazine and a small box of candy in silver foil. Of this transaction Hobart was keenly aware. He was watching it, not that the sale was interesting, but because the lady was forced almost to face him. The next thing he heard was her voice, and it was just the lovely sort of voice he had expected.

"Very well," she said, "I thought it was a five-dollar bill."

The news-and-candy butcher was obviously one of these sordid souls upon whom beauty leaves no impress.

"No ma'am," he said decidedly. "It was a one-dollar bill."

He handed her two or three pieces of silver, and without further discussion the lady dropped them into her purse. Hobart Hupp set down his magazine and went joyously into action. He arose and slapped the young man sharply on the arm.

"It was a five-dollar bill," he declared. "The lady gave you a five-dollar bill. The reason I know is because I saw the bill distinctly. You may be honest, but you are mistaken."

Hobart towered above the young train merchant and looked down at him. There was nothing encouraging in his manner. The candy salesman reflected for an instant and decided that this was not the man, the time nor the place for argument.

"My mistake, then," he said, with a laugh. "If you saw the bill, you must be right."

He produced four one-dollar bills and handed them hastily to his customer, after which he departed. Mr. Hupp sat down and smiled across the aisle, and the girl smiled back at him frankly and cheerfully.

"Thank you," she said. "I don't believe he meant to be dishonest."

"I do," Hobart replied. "He knew he was cheating you. Not that they are all that way; some of them are very upright."

And without even so much as a preliminary splash, the conversation slid gently down the ways and launched itself upon the sea of acquaintance. Ten miles later Hobart, who had been leaning eagerly into the aisle, dodging passengers, moved across to Fifteen and sat down. Fifteen was in the smoking-room, grossly engaged in smoking a large cigar, and Hobart hoped it was a slow-burning one. Sixteen miles out of New Haven, he learned that her name was Annabelle Louise Landis, that she was from Portland, Maine, and that she was visiting New York for a single day. From that point the situation moved forward with rapidity that almost defies human credulity.

Hobart Hupp was a pleasing, well-mannered and moderately handsome chap, which may have had something to do with it; and likewise, this traveling Annabelle Louise leaned to the romantic. About Bridgeport, Mr. Hupp sat back and ceased talking for a moment, so that he might think with clarity. He decided several important matters in as many seconds. First, this Annabelle was the most fascinating creature he had ever encountered; second, Hobart felt that he was falling in love with her; third, he meant to do something desperate, and do it very soon. One way to avoid marrying a woman one desires not to marry, is to marry another. The other now sat opposite him, smiling at his inconsequential chatter and studying him with frank and engaging interest.

"Annabelle," he said, after he had known her slightly less than one hour, "I am now going to tell you something that will cause you the utmost astonishment. It is going to astonish me as I say it. I am an unmarried man of reputable habits and respectable family, tolerably well off, and with a promising future. I have never met a girl like you, and I never expect to meet such another. I am already in love with you, and I earnestly desire that you marry me. If this shocks you, and if you refuse to listen to me, I may open a window and leap out. So take a moment or two before you reply."

ANNABELLE opened her eyes wide and took the moment. She looked fearlessly at Hobart. Then she sat up very straight in her seat.

"You are a most amazing man," she said finally, but she smiled. No matter what a girl says, if she smiles when she says it, things could be worse.

"I am twenty-four years old," continued Hobart, leaning forward and talking with great earnestness. "There exists no human or legal reason why you should not marry me, if you should so desire. I regard you as an adorable and delightful human being, and if you will marry me I will spend the next forty years trying to make you happy. I am very easy to get on with, and I have no relations to cause you the slightest anxiety."

"I have," said Annabelle with a twinkle.

"No matter," he continued. "You are old enough to marry without the consent of others."

"Twenty," she said.

"Fine," said he. "I do not expect you to like me as well as I like you, Annabelle, but as time goes on, I think you will grow moderately fond of me. At any rate, I shall spend all my time trying to make you."

"I have always felt that something miraculous would happen to me some day," she smiled, "and now it has happened. A tall, good-looking man rushes into the chair-car and asks me to marry him. Could anything more amazing happen?"

"Yes," he said, "to have you marry the man would be more amazing. Will you do it? Will you become Mrs. Hobart Hupp?"

"Are you Hobart Hupp of New York?" Annabelle inquired.

"I am," he said solemnly.

At this point the express passed into a tunnel, and for a moment or two there was complete darkness within the chair-car. Annabelle leaned back and stared at the darkness. Hobart reached forward timidly and touched her arm with his finger tips.

CHAPTER II

OF course, there are serious-minded and practical persons in this world who will deny with a sneer that a young man and a young woman can meet in New Haven and decide to be married before reaching New York. These are the same people who thought Marconi was a fraud and that the Wright brothers should have been put away in State-maintained institutions. Other and wiser folk know very well that such things often happen and will continue to happen as long as Romance can lift a finger. When the New York express pulled into the catacombs of Forty-second Street and slowed for its final crawl into its own particular lair, Hobart Hupp and Annabelle Louise had come to an understanding, with reservations.

"This is frightfully quick," Annabelle had said, and with justification. "Would it not be more dignified to wait until we know each other longer."

"It would be more dignified," he agreed, "but not half as much fun."

"At any rate," the lady announced, "we will have to return to Portland."

"I will go anywhere in the world with you, Annabelle," he said, and so fervently that she believed him.

He gathered up her luggage, which consisted of one suitcase, and led the way to the street. Annabelle's business in New York was quite definite, and they started about it at once. She had left Portland, Maine, the preceding night, expecting to run into the metropolis, do a hurried day's shopping and return on the night express. It now appeared that she would also return with an impending husband, which fact fitted not at all with the plans of her family at home.

That family requires a certain brief examination. It consisted of Judge Cupples and his son Norman. Judge Cupples was the half-brother of Annabelle's dead father, making him a sort of left-handed uncle. Norman was a scholarly and pale-faced youth, who wore woolen underwear the year round and expected to marry Annabelle if his father could bring it about.

When Annabelle's father passed on to a better State than Maine, he left his child and her property in the hands of Judge Cupples. The Judge became Annabelle's legal guardian and the executor of her estate. It was a large, pleasing estate, consisting of Portland realty, shares in New England railroads and money in the bank; and as time went on, the Judge found the administration of Annabelle's property one of the juiciest jobs he had ever held. He viewed with horror any thought of giving it over to another. He sometimes reflected that Annabelle might marry, and he spent his time arranging that Norman should become Annabelle's husband and thus keep things as they were.

Formerly the Judge had been a police magistrate, and many of his ideas smacked of the padded cell and the bull-pen. He was a rough, two-fisted individual, with hairy hands and a gruff voice. When talking, he liked to pound on a table and roar. Some of these facts Annabelle related to Hobart as they sped from shop to shop, filling their taxicab with bundles and sharing the excitement that only youth and irresponsibility can have.

"We shall have a terrible scene when we get to Portland in the morning," Annabelle explained. "My uncle is violent at times, and this will be one of the times."

"I would have a more terrible time if I didn't go to Portland with you," Hobart stated, thinking for the moment of Estrella and her family, and of the wedding that was fast approaching without a bridegroom.

On the night train for Portland they sat side by side and grew fonder of each other. Annabelle was pleasantly thrilled over the meeting between the Judge and Hobart.

"We will have trouble from the start," she said. "You see, Uncle has been certain that I would marry Norman."

"Who is Norman?" Hobart inquired.

"My cousin. He will be sure to hate you, and the Judge will be frantic. If I married Norman, Uncle would still manage our affairs."

"Never mind," said Hobart. "As a matter of decency, I shall approach this uncle-guardian of yours and inform him that we are about to be married. We shall then go and be married. After that, his official control of your affairs ends. Does he boss you?"

"At times," she admitted. "He can be very disagreeable."

"So can I," said Hobart, "and especially if I find an uncle trying to interfere with my wife's affairs."

"Now," said Annabelle, "tell me some more about yourself."

Hobart talked discursively, concealing nothing of importance. He told Annabelle as much about his family history as he could remember, and went back to the early days when New York was a fourth-class post office and it was considered *au fait* to keep a pig. He explained to the eager-eyed young bride-to-be that in each generation of Hupps there was one surgeon and physician, and that upon his shoulders had fallen the mantle of surgery and science, although to look at him, one might not take him to be a surgical sort of individual. He had studied in American and European universities and he was now at the moment plunging seriously into his life-work.

"That's another very good reason for being married immediately," he pointed out to her. "A surgeon in New York ought to have a comfortable home. Club life is a terrible affliction, as you would agree if you knew Arthur Simmons. The poor thing actually lives at his club, and his life is one endless monotony. The doctors in our family always married early and generally with success."

THUS they chatted on, growing swiftly acquainted all the while and liking each other better as time went by. Hobart told Annabelle about his busy years in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and of his pet theory. His pet theory was that criminals are mentally deformed persons, and that surgery and science can cure almost all of them. In other words, if a man turns out to be a bank-robber, it is because of a malformed brain.

If he waylays pedestrians with a length of gaspipe, it is because his skull does not fit his cerebellum. His theory, Hobart explained, was that no human being is abnormal without a scientific and discoverable cause, and that criminals are abnormal. In his college days Mr. Hupp spent a great deal of time with the police and in the hospitals, and the authorities had a deuce of a time keeping him from operating on every fresh prisoner and removing the cause of his viciousness. He firmly believed that all criminals can be cured and made over into decent and wholesome men through the miracles of

surgery. Annabelle listened to him with admiration and interest. She compared him with Norman Cupples and was glad that she went to New York to shop. At a very late hour they reluctantly parted.

When Hobart awakened the following morning, the train was rolling through the green pastures south of Portland, and there was barely time to hurry into the dining-car, snatch a hasty breakfast and disembark. It was eight o'clock when Hobart and Annabelle stepped off into the Boston and Maine station.

"Now," said Hobart firmly, "where do we find this uncle of yours?"

"At home," Annabelle replied. "I hope he is in a good humor, too."

"You mean that he actually lives at your house?"

"He does," said Annabelle, "and so does Norman."

She explained that when her father passed on, Judge Cupples moved immediately into the pleasant Landis home on Norris Street, bringing Norman along. He explained that he could probably administer her affairs better if he lived close to her. He and Norman had remained ever since, although Annabelle found no great joy in their presence.

"The sooner we get this over, the better," said Hobart.

A CAB hurried them into the residential district. It drew up before a pretty brick-and-stone house, lying behind a hedged lawn. Annabelle stepped out first, and Hobart, loaded with the fruit of the shopping expedition, followed her up the walk, feeling none too easy in his mind. Now that he was there, the job began to look difficult. Before either of the travelers reached the veranda, a door opened. A stern-faced individual, very tall and broad and wearing whiskers, came out—paused and regarded the arrivals in unbounded amazement.

"That's the Judge," Annabelle said.

"Good morning, Judge," Hobart answered under his breath.

Certainly there was no friendly welcome in the manner of Uncle Cupples. At first he apparently concluded that Hobart must be a delivery person helping Annabelle with her bundles. While he stood on the veranda, thinking, his son Norman appeared and the two of them stared at the little procession. Hobart realized that he was as welcome as red ants at a picnic.

"This is Mr. Hobart Hupp," Annabelle said bravely, walking up the steps and confronting her legal executors and assigns. "Dr. Hupp has been kind enough to help me shop, and—and—I believe he has something to say to you, Uncle Cupples."

"This is a very peculiar—er—situation," remarked the Judge, glowering at Hobart.

"It is," that young gentleman admitted, "and it is likewise going to get more peculiar every minute."

Annabelle thereupon led the way across the veranda and into the house. Her Uncle followed closely at her heels, with Norman tagging behind him. Norman was a chalky-faced specimen of humanity with long, wavering legs and an undecided manner. Hobart Hupp brought up the rear, and when he dropped his bundles in the Landis living-room, he found himself facing the entire household. A butler slightly less than seven feet high came to the door and stood at attention, very much like a person who presently expects an order to throw somebody out. Hobart glanced about and observed that it was a very nice living-room—except for the three male occupants. He decided that he would find little to love in any of them.

"Well," said the Judge immediately. "Explain. Who is this man?"

He asked the question of both Hobart and Annabelle.

"It's rather a long story," Hobart replied, "and you might not be interested in all the details, so I will cut it short. Annabelle and I are about to be married, and we thought it would be polite to inform you, seeing you have a hand in her affairs."

NORMAN started slightly. Judge Cupples stared at Hobart as though doubting that he had heard aright. After an instant's amazement he became violently indignant. His whiskers bristled, and his face turned a shade redder.

"Married!" he snorted. "Are you insane?"

"Not insane at all," Hobart said gently. "Annabelle says that you are her legal guardian, or rather, you are forcibly running her affairs for her. I thought that as a matter of courtesy I might as well tell you this news before we are married."

At this point Uncle Cupples began to laugh. It was a harsh, incredulous, sneering sort of laugh. Mr. Hupp regarded him soberly and politely.

"How long have you known Annabelle?" he finally asked. "Where did you meet her?"

"I have known her since yesterday," returned Hobart. "I met her on the train entering New York City."

"And you want to marry her?" croaked the Judge, breaking into the mirthless chuckling again. "You want to marry her!"

"I not only want to marry her. I am going to marry her. We have decided upon it, and I suppose it concerns us and no one else."

The Judge turned to the stony-faced butler, who still remained in the doorway.

"Throw this man out," said Uncle Cupples, and the butler started forward briskly, as though pleased with the task.

Hobart rose from his seat and held up a restraining hand. The butler paused. Annabelle began to cry, and Norman picked up a heavy cane and moved over to help the butler in case the engagement became general.

It was instantly obvious to young Mr. Hupp that he had a choice of two actions. He could remain and do battle with these three males, in which case the result of the encounter was known before the start. He could, on the other hand, walk peacefully out of the Landis residence and avoid having his features violently rearranged. Being a mathematical sort of person, Hobart chose the latter course.

"You don't need to throw me out," he said, smiling at the Judge. "I shall go quietly. If this butler of yours lays a finger on me, I shall kill him, or come near it."

Hobart started toward the doorway, followed by the serving man. He passed out into the morning sunshine, and Annabelle Louise Landis, his bride-to-be, turned and mounted the stairs.

"And you'll stay in your room for this," snorted Uncle Cupples. "I knew if you went to New York alone, you'd get into some kind of a jam."

The three legal executors and assigns formed a living wall between Hobart and Annabelle. They refused to let him say good-by to her. They confronted him in stony silence and pointed menacingly to the sidewalk. Hobart walked away, passed on down the graveled path, turned into the street and stopped out of sight of the house. He leaned against a stone wall and indulged in thought.

In the home wherein she should have reigned as mistress, little Annabelle went tearfully up the steps to her bedroom, followed by the butler and Uncle Cupples and all her bundles. The Judge made a brief speech at the door. He indicated that Annabelle had an immature mind and was not to be trusted in public. He then informed the lady that her meals would be sent to her during the period of her punishment, and that he hoped the incident would teach her a lesson.

AFTER leaning against the stone wall for five minutes, Hobart Hupp turned abruptly and retraced his steps. He crawled laboriously under a fence, got down on his hands and knees and peered around the corner of a hedge like a boy about to steal apples. His medical friends would have been surprised had they beheld Dr. Hupp at the moment. After a suitable wait and an inspection of the Landis home, Hobart stood erect and examined the upstairs windows. Instantly he was rewarded. His little bride-almost came to one of the windows, looked out tearfully and saw him. She waved at him and implored him, as he judged from her gestures, to rescue her.

Hobart had read about ardent young swains and step-ladders. It had always struck him as a most unhandy procedure, but nevertheless there was a stepladder lying on the lawn, and there was also Annabelle, wiping her eyes and begging him to do something.

Five minutes later, or maybe four, they caught him in the act. He was at the top of the ladder and was helping Annabelle open her window. Norman, the only son, came first around a corner of the building, followed by the butler and Judge Cupples. They shouted at him; Norman ran back to the house and got a revolver.

Dr. Hupp slid slowly down the ladder, leaving Annabelle Louise in the midst of a fresh outburst. The legal executors surrounded him, and Norman held the revolver where Hobart could see it. The former chief of police in Portland restrained himself from personal attack and addressed the young New Yorker.

"I don't know whether you're crazy or not," he said. "One thing is sure. We are going to take no further chances with you. You came from New York, and you're going back to New York. If you object or try to resist, I'll put you in the Portland city jail, and you'll stay there."

"You seem to have the best hand," smiled Hobart. "I suppose I had better do as you wish."

"Or get your block knocked off," put in the butler, who apparently was a bit peevish over the lack of brutality so far offered. "I'd like to take one crack at you—just one."

It appeared that the butler was likewise the chauffeur. He went hurriedly away, put on a purple jacket and a cap, found a limousine somewhere and returned in a twinkling. Judge Cupples pushed Hobart into the large car and followed him. Norman came along with his revolver, placing it ostentatiously in his coat pocket.

"If you move," he said, "I shall drill you."

"Where do we go?" Hobart asked the Judge, ignoring the anemic gun-toter.

"To the railway," said Uncle Cupples. "This is your last appearance in Portland, Maine. You're about the freshest New Yorker I ever met, and I've met a lot of fresh New Yorkers."

THERE was little conversation on the trip to the railway station. Hobart leaned back against the cushions and admitted that marrying Annabelle Louise was not as trifling a job as it first seemed. He was certain that this Judge Cupples, being a police person himself, could throw him into jail for disturbing the peace, and would so throw him if he objected to going back to New York.

There was, therefore, mighty little chance of an immediate marriage with the light of his soul, which light at the moment was weeping copiously behind a barred door. Hobart wondered how his other marriage had come out. He tried to imagine what the De Morgans were doing, and how Estrella had borne up under the shock.

The limousine, which, as Hobart bitterly reflected, was probably Annabelle's own property, slid noiselessly into the Boston & Maine station, and while Uncle Cupples sat beside Hobart and guarded him, Norman hurried in and bought the ticket. He returned presently with the news that the New York train was ready to leave. Uncle Cupples poked Hobart in the ribs and informed him in a harsh voice that he was about to start back to America's largest city.

"And no funny-work!" he said warningly. "You make just one false move, and I'll hand you over to the police. This may be an extralegal way of handling a situation, but you're apparently an extra lunatic."

"Just as you say," Hobart replied politely. He remained polite for several reasons. One of them was Norman and his gun. Hobart watched Norman nervously, because the elongated creature handled the revolver as though he had never held one before.

Young Dr. Hupp climbed obediently down from Annabelle's limousine, and under armed escort he walked through the waiting-room and out on the platform and into the Pullman car. Norman and Uncle Cupples went along. The ferocious butler stayed with the machine.

"Now," said the Judge, just before the engineer started, "if we ever lay eyes on you again—if we ever so much as see you in this town,—I, or my son, will feel justified in removing you as a pest and a nuisance, and the law of this State will bear us up. Whoever you are, stay away from Maine, because your life isn't worth a thin dime if you come back."

"Thank you," said Hobart cheerily. "I may have made a mistake."

"You did," said the Judge.

The train began to move, and Uncle Cupples took Norman by the arm and walked off. Hobart glanced out of the window and snickered slightly.

For just one city block he remained motionless in the Pullman seat. He then arose, moved swiftly to the end of the car and jumped off into a maze of tracks. He skittered through the railway yard, dodging switch-lamps and piano-cars, climbed a low stone fence, hurried down a streetful of freight trucks, found a fleeing taxicab and hired it by the hour.

"Do you know where the Landis residence is?" he inquired of the taxi-man, who was a jolly-looking soul with a red nose and watery eyes.

The latter said that he knew very well where it was.

"Get me there in two minutes," said Hobart, "and possibly one."

He made the seat in a bound, and the taxicab began climbing over the surface of the earth. In no time at all, Hobart Hupp was back where he had started. In other words, he was again hurrying up the long walk to Annabelle's front door, whilst the red-faced taxicabber waited for him, assuring him that he could have anything he wanted in Portland, as long as it was speed.

Hobart tried the front door and then rang a bell, and a diminutive and frightened-looking female made the mistake of opening it for him. She tried to close it again, but Hobart was inside in a flash.

"I have just about a minute," he said to the servant or housekeeper or whatever she was, "and I don't want any interference. You go away, or I'll bite your head off."

The door-opener apparently saw no good reason for arguing with such a person. She silently faded out of sight, and Hobart dashed up the stairs, calling Annabelle's name and realizing that if Uncle Cupples returned before he got away, there would probably be news for the vital statistics column in the morning paper. He discovered Annabelle's room, tried to open the door and finally broke the lock.

"I'm back again," he said cheerfully. "There isn't much time to waste. Your legal guardians will be here in a moment, and if you wish your future husband to go on living, you will hasten."

"Dearest Hobart," Annabelle said tearfully. "I thought—I thought you had gone."

"Not at all," he replied briskly. "For a moment or two, your uncle was showing me about. However, this is not the time for discussion. Pack your little bag and put on your little hat. If Uncle Cupples and that abysmal son get back, there will be confusion and I may have to wipe out your remaining relatives."

ANNABELLE thereupon hurried as fast as she could. Downstairs the frightened female was telephoning the police department, stating that Judge Cupples' house was being attacked by armed maniacs, who were even then seizing and gagging the daughter of the estate. According to the female, there were scores of desperadoes, binding up the young woman and carrying off the silver. The police lieutenant, knowing Judge Cupples very well, detailed eight or nine of his swiftest man hunters and sent them down to the Landis house.

Hobart and Annabelle came down the stairs, rushed out and entered their waiting taxicab. Hobart told the driver that they might be pursued, and that if they were pursued it was plainly the taxicab's duty to evade capture.

"Boss," said the jolly pirate, "this car once belonged to a drunken college boy. If I don't want to be caught, then nobody can catch me."

"Good," said Hobart, handing the man fifteen dollars in small bills.

They left the curb in front of Annabelle's home at the precise instant when Uncle Cupples' limousine rounded the corner. The butler-chauffeur saw Hobart and informed the Judge. Norman leaned out excitedly and drew his revolver. Uncle Cupples began cursing in the quaint Maine dialect; and then commenced one of the most interesting and devious auto chases in the recent history of Portland town.

The taxicab was, as the driver stated, a brisk machine. Its owner was a man of sporting instincts and quick perceptions, and he saw that by keeping ahead of Uncle Cupples he might make a profit. For the next ten minutes there was a wild scurrying around corners and a dashing down side-streets and across main thoroughfares, regardless of street-cars, pedestrians or the regular daily traffic.

Annabelle was frightened pink, and screamed each time the side of the car rose up and the thing went round an obstacle on two wheels, but Hobart enjoyed it. Presently the red-faced jehu turned and announced that as far as he could see, they had beaten everybody. The limousine was nowhere in sight.

"Now," said Hobart, "it seems to me that we ought to be married."

"Where?" asked Annabelle. "By whom?"

"I don't know," he answered. "There are a lot of married people in Portland. They must have found some one to marry them."

Their chauffeur entered into the spirit of the occasion and informed them that he knew a quiet and reliable minister, if that was all they needed.

"Ah," said Annabelle, "but what about the license?"

For the first time Mr. Hupp learned something of the law in the State of Maine. It seems that a young man about to marry a young woman must be a resident of the State for at least three days before he can obtain a license.

"That's all right," Hobart replied to this. "I was up in Maine last summer for a whole month. That ought to qualify me."

"We'll git this license," put in their driver, "and I'll slide you over to this preacher I know on Cinnamon Avenue.

He's a nice old bird and 'll be glad to git the business."

"And furthermore," remarked Hobart, "I don't care what the law is. Take us to the license department and keep your eye out for red limousines."

CHAPTER III

WITHIN forty minutes from the time they started, under the friendly guidance of their driver, Annabelle and Hobart had entered upon their married life. There was some trouble in the license department over the three-day clause, but Hobart overcame it, and they started for the home of the quiet preacher. He was a kind-faced old gentleman, and while his wife looked smilingly on and a couple of little girls watched from an adjacent door, he tied the knot firmly and thoroughly. Hobart took Annabelle by the hand and hurried to the waiting cab.

"Now," he said, "start up the coast, and I'll tell you where to drop us. You have earned a large fee."

"Yes," said Annabelle, when the cab started again; "but Hobart, you have been so hurried and excited over everything that—that—"

"That what?"

"You forgot something?"

"What did I forget?"

"You haven't—you haven't even kissed me yet."

"Good heavens!" said Hobart. He gathered Annabelle into his arms, and for the next little while he forgot that he was a flurried young husband trying to keep Uncle Cupples, and Norman, and the butler, and the police department, and probably the sheriff, from taking his young wife away from him and casting him into a solitary dungeon for a multitude of crimes.

Meanwhile, the eight or nine bloodhounds from police headquarters arrived at the Landis home, found that some stranger had stolen the only child, took a description of the fiend in human form from the half-witted female servant, and started out to run him down. This body of men worked independently of Uncle Cupples and Norman for the first hour or two; after that they joined forces and worked together.

Judge Cupples finally gave up the chase and drove to headquarters. There he demanded that the entire resources of the police be placed at his disposal. He stated that a scoundrel from New York had kidnaped his niece, and he wanted the ruffian captured at once. Later on in the day he offered a reward, but the terms were somewhat ambiguous. Thus it happened that Hobart and Annabelle were an hour or two ahead of the pursuit when they dismissed the faithful driver at the little town of Yarmouth. Yarmouth is so small and timid a spot that no one would ever think of looking there for anybody. The newly wedded pair paid off their loyal cabby and took the first train up the coast. For the time being they were safe. At that moment telegrams were flying about, and the police of several cities were hunting for them, but most of the activity was south of Portland, toward Boston and New York, whither a villain like Hobart naturally would be expected to flee.

In their stuffy day-coach, surrounded by Maine logging men and farmers coming home from Portland, Hobart and Annabelle held hands and enjoyed the temporary calm. At three in the afternoon Uncle Cupples discovered the sad-faced old preacher who had married the twain. He burst into fresh paroxysms and denied the legality of the ceremony. He swore that if such a marriage took place, it was not a legal marriage, and that this scoundrel was not the husband of Annabelle at all, but her abductor. He declared that he would tear the ruffian limb from limb. Norman merely stood by and gulped while his father raved. The butler regretted anew that he had not taken one crack at Hobart when he had the chance that morning.

IN hurrying up the Maine coast toward Rockland, Hobart knew exactly what he was doing, and whither he was going. He realized that Judge Cupples would win any legal battle that might follow the wedding; therefore he wanted no legal battles or any other kind. He resolved to get to Shelter Island as quickly as possible. Once on Shelter Island, and the world was his oyster. Pursuit would be defied. Nobody would ever think of hunting for a bride and groom on Shelter Island, for several reasons.

First, the month was November, and the Maine coast dies along toward the end of September and does not revive until the ensuing spring. Shelter Island lies three

miles off the coast, a clutter of rocks and trees and tiny harbors, and every square foot of the island was familiar to Hobart Hupp. During the previous summer, he had spent a pleasant month on Shelter Island, exploring its rocky caverns, prowling along the coast in motorboats, digging for clams at low tide, playing tennis on the asphalt courts and helping Estrella De Morgan with the flower-beds; for shelter Island was the property of the De Morgans, and as their guest Hobart had enjoyed himself for thirty days.

IT was the summer home to which the De Morgan family annually went, and it was a gorgeous spot, with all the conveniences that money can buy. There were boathouses and half a dozen power boats of varying sizes. In summer the place was a fairyland of flowers and ferns, and Hobart had grown romantic during that single month with Estrella. In fact, it was on a moonlight walk along the edge of the sea that he had asked Estrella to share his future.

He had boated and fished with Roderick De Morgan and talked politics with Henry, the father. He knew the big, rambling summer home from cellar to garret, and though it was now closed for the winter season, Hobart reflected that its cellars were stocked with fine foods, that there were wines and brandies piled in handsome rows. And there was now no one on Shelter Island—not even a watchman, for the Maine coast is the most notoriously honest spot on the globe.

Early in the preceding September the De Morgans had closed up Twelve Gables—its official name—and had returned to New York. For more than a month the Island had been deserted. There would be no one to bother a bride and groom. These things Hobart explained to Annabelle as their train clattered up the coast. At Point Lowe Station, which is a mile from Point Lowe, they left the day-coach and started on the lonely walk to the edge of the sea.

Hobart carried the suitcases, and Annabelle trudged along manfully at his side, and they reached Point Lowe at dusk. He meant to pry open one of the many boathouses and help himself to a rowboat. He left Annabelle on the sands, disappeared into the darkness, and a few minutes later she heard him returning.

"Our troubles are almost ended, dear heart," he called to her as he came up. "We'll start across to the Island, and when we get there, I shall cook you the finest meal you ever ate."

"And I'm starving, too," Annabelle said, rising.

It is an easy three miles across choppy water from Point Lowe to Shelter Island, and while Annabelle sat in the stern with the suitcases and chatted about the exciting adventure of getting married, Hobart pulled steadily into the gathering darkness. Ahead of them lay sweet serenity and the loveliest spot in the world for a honeymoon.

"My dear," Hobart said, his mood changing to the philosophic, "it is thus with everything in life. First we pass through the period of storm and stress. Then we enter the calmer waters, where all is peace and content. We have earned our reward by struggling to get married. I was determined, and so were you, and neither guardians nor butlers could halt us. Now we have our reward."

"True," said Annabelle, "and what a brave and resourceful husband you have been! Many a man would have given up."

Hobart pulled harder on the oars, and the little craft rode briskly along towards the dark hulk that gradually took shape as they approached. On the shore side of Shelter Island is the main lagoon, half the work of nature and half the artifice of man, and in it are the boathouses. It is a perfect little harbor, though a tiny one. Hobart pulled around the end of the breakwater, headed for one of the piers looming in the murk and bumped gently to a stop. He helped Annabelle from the boat, breathed a sigh of relief, and they started up the main walk from the lagoon, a broad, gravely path running close to the breakers. As they rounded the first turn, Hobart, who was a step ahead, gasped suddenly and dropped a suitcase.

"What—what is it?" Annabelle asked.

"Burglars!" Hobart replied.

"Heavens," said Annabelle.

"The house is being rifled," he said calmly.

IT was dusk, thick, mysterious, fragrant dusk, with the wind humming in from sea and the branches murmuring above their heads. Before them spread the great, rambling structure that was Twelve Gables, the comfortable and luxurious summer home of Henry De Morgan and his

brood. It should have been dim and ghostly in the gathering gloom, but it was not. It was brightly lighted. A broad radiance streamed out from the single immense window facing the sea veranda.

"Burglars!" Annabelle repeated in a hushed voice.

"Without a doubt," admitted her husband. "They probably knew the island was deserted at this time of year. Think of their sublime gall—every light on in the big room."

Annabelle stood still and shivered. The hour of peace and content to which Hobart had just referred, evidently was postponed. Their little bark was still in rough waters.

"Shall—shall we turn around and go back?" she inquired anxiously.

"Not at all," said Hobart with determination. "I have come to Twelve Gables for my honeymoon. Do you imagine that I shall let a lot of raffish burglars frighten me off?"

"But Hobart," said his bride fearfully, "you are not—you are not—"

"I am," said he. "Calm yourself, Annabelle dear, because there is nothing to fear. These coast burglars are notorious cowards—nothing but prowlers who are afraid to fight a man. You seat yourself here on the fence and remain quietly. I shall go up to the house and attend to these infernal wretches."

"I—I don't want to, Hobart. I'm afraid."

Hobart thereupon assured her again that there was nothing to fear from these timid Maine house-looters and that the incident would be over very soon. It might take him five or ten minutes to clear them out of the house. What he intended to do with the burglars after he captured them Hobart did not explain.

In fear and trembling she finally permitted her liege lord to start forward. Hobart kissed her fondly, picked up a large, thick stick and started for the house. Annabelle leaned weakly against the fence and wept. Marriage, she saw, was indeed a far more complicated thing than she had pictured it.

To the little bride, the moments that followed were intolerable and heart-breaking. The moon shone down upon her, and the waves of the Atlantic rolled up at her feet and seemed to mock her in her anguish. She pictured Hobart climbing softly through the open window, facing the murderous scoundrels, rushing manfully to the attack against desperate odds, hurling himself upon half a dozen vicious manslaughterers all armed to the teeth, and perishing like a hero, with wounds in every part and bludgeoned beyond recognition. Annabelle sobbed at the thought. She saw her Hobart's limp and inert form in its final wiggle, while his assassins stood gleefully above him and gloated.

In the meantime, nothing of the sort was happening to Hobart Hupp. To begin with, Hobart had not the slightest expectation of finding burglars at all, because he had never heard of burglars in a Maine coast summer home. If there were burglars, they would be a particularly silly sort, probably boys, and easily handled. Furthermore, Hobart did not intend to rend them limb from limb or batter them to a jelly and hurl their bodies into the sea.

He meant to ask them quietly and politely if they would not please finish up their burgling and go quickly back to the mainland, taking whatever loot they wished, and leaving Shelter Island to him and his bride. If they were not quite loaded up, he would assist them, because he probably knew more about the house than they did. If they suspected that Henry De Morgan had secreted valuables in the place, Hobart would lend a hand.

CLUTCHING his oaken cudgel in his fist, in case an impulsive burglar attempted to assault him before he could explain, Hobart sneaked quietly up the steps, walked across the veranda, crept up to the window, which was wide open, with the curtains gently stirring, and peeked inside. He was breathing in a repressed fashion, so as not to alarm the house-breakers. The room was a blaze of light, and as Hobart raised his head above the sill and gazed inside, a sharp exclamation escaped him. He rose at once to his feet, threw his club noisily aside and stepped through the window into Henry De Morgan's living-room.

Arthur Simmons, formerly of the New York Cactus Club, looked up from an extremely comfortable chair before the fireplace, his expression one of mingled alarm and amazement. Hobart confronted him indignantly. At first he doubted his eyes, but it certainly was Arthur and nobody but Arthur, king of the glooms.

"What in the name of heaven are you doing here?" Hobart demanded harshly, and adding a profane adjective which Annabelle would not have approved of.

"Hobart Hupp!" said Arthur, still filled with amazement. "Great jumping jehosophat, Hobart—can't you let me alone, anywhere?"

"What are you doing here?" Hobart again demanded, and this time he walked nearer to Arthur and glared down at him.

"I'm drinking myself to death," Arthur replied uneasily. "I told you I was going to. I came away to this lonesome spot all by myself, and I am steadily drinking myself to death."

"Yes," said Hobart, glancing pointedly at the table near Arthur, "and furthermore, you are apparently eating yourself to death, too. You are not one of these heavy drinkers who cannot eat while drinking."

The table at which Hobart stared contained plenty of ingredients for a desperate man trying to drown his sorrows. There were four or five decanters of choice liqueurs, some wine, a bottle or two of extra fine brandy and so on. There were also half a dozen tins of Henry De Morgan's very best cellar goods, such as potted chicken, roast beef, stuffed olives, pimentos, sardines, pickled onions, and chow-chow. A loaf of bread was beside the alcohol burner on which a coffeepot was gently hissing. Besides, there were other evidences of a meal just ended—and a very good meal, too.

"I can't see that my actions are of any concern to you," Arthur said sulkily. "I wish you'd let me alone. You have injured me enough without inflicting your personal presence upon me. I suppose you are happily married by this time."

"I am," retorted Hobart. "I am a bridegroom seeking his honeymoon and having a devil of a time finding it. There are too many infernal idiots getting in my way, and I'm losing patience. I have come to Twelve Gables for my honeymoon, and I am going to have it, regardless of you and your desire for alcoholic death."

ARTHUR put down his glass violently and looked up.

"You mean—you mean you have brought—" he began.

"Arthur," said Hobart firmly. "I always liked you. I have no desire to interfere with your plans, but you are now interfering with mine. My bride awaits without. She is now leaning against a fence and probably weeping. I need this house, and I am going to have it. Now, then—you are going upstairs quietly! Will you totter upstairs and permit me to lock you up, or will I have to knock you senseless and carry you?"

"You don't mean to say you would actually assault me?" Arthur demanded in astonishment.

"I am a desperate bridegroom," Hobart answered. "If you don't go upstairs and immure yourself out of the way, I am prepared to hit you with both fists until you cease to struggle. I will then tie you up and lock you in a bedroom. Take your choice and take it quick."

"In that case," said Arthur gloomily, "I shall walk upstairs under my own power. I am not in a physical state to fight a lunatic."

"Good!" said Hobart in a relieved tone.

"Not good at all," answered the aggrieved one, rising to his feet and filling his arms with edibles and bottled goods. "It is distinctly bad. It is what I call rubbing it in on a man. You not only steal and marry the one woman in the world whom I adore, but you search me out on this barren bit of rock in the ocean, and you actually come here with Estrella on your honeymoon. Fiendish, I call it."

Hobart looked startled for an instant. He forgot that Arthur knew nothing of his recent marital affairs. Arthur, of course, believed that Hobart had married Estrella De Morgan. There was nothing to do about it except let Arthur go on believing that he had lost Estrella forever; and for this course, there were reasons: if Arthur beheld the new bride and saw that it was not Estrella, it might make a great difference in the future.

Likewise, if Hobart permitted Arthur to go ashore, after seeing Annabelle, then indeed there would be trouble. Arthur was an undoubted idiot. His whole life proved that. He would instantly rush to Estrella's side with the glad tidings that Hobart Hupp was now the husband of another. It would never do to let Arthur leave Shelter Island for the time being, and if he did leave, he would probably drown himself trying to reach the coast, or would wind up in midocean and die of thirst.

DETERMINED that there should be no unpleasantness about it, Hobart urged Arthur out of the cheery living-room and up the stairs to the second floor. He steered Arthur into the pink room, which was the first bedroom beyond the landing, examined the room carefully and per-

ceived that Arthur could not escape even if he wished to do so, which he did not. There was an excellent lock on the door and a reliable-looking key. The room contained a fireplace, small tables and a first-class bed.

"Now," said Hobart seriously, "as long as you remain calm, this is your room, and there will be no trouble. If you get noisy or alarm An—alarm us, I shall come upstairs and attend to you. Tomorrow, if it is possible, I shall release you and send you back to New York."

"Awful rough way to rub it in on a chap," Arthur said, sitting down and pouring himself a bracer. "Not only marry a chap's girl, but to add insult to injury—"

"You brought it on yourself," Hobart said sharply. "I told you in the Cactus Club to behave; but no, you had to come rushing up here to Twelve Gables. Now be quiet. You are officially a burglar caught robbing De Morgan's home. I have just overcome you. You play the part right, or I shall come upstairs and overcome you in good earnest."

Hobart locked Arthur in the bedroom and descended hastily. He arrived at Annabelle's side just in time to head off an attack of bridal hysteria.

"O-h-h-h!" said Annabelle.

"It's all right, dear," he said, patting her gently on the arm and gathering up the luggage. "I told you there would be no trouble, and there was none. Only one burglar, after all—a thin, sickly fellow."

"Where is he?" she asked tremulously.

"I have him bound hand and foot and locked tight in the pink room. First I gave him a good thrashing for daring to break into the house; then I carried him upstairs. He's all right till tomorrow. I shall turn him over to the authorities, but right now we must feed our little bride and make her comfy."

Annabelle demanded other details, wondering how one tied up a burglar and whether the man would choke to death. After receiving repeated assurance that the fellow would not break his bonds and murder them, she consented to enter the house, timidly, to be sure, but with sublime faith in the prowess of her husband.

They found the living-room of Twelve Gables a cheerful and pleasant haven of rest. The fire was burning briskly, thanks to Arthur, who had rustled a load of pine-knots. The furniture had been stripped of its slip-covers and looked inviting to two tired souls. Annabelle decided one thing immediately.

"I shall not go upstairs," she said to Hobart, "and you mustn't. It's spooky enough to be downstairs, with a criminal up there."

"Very well," said Hobart, who had begun investigating the food supply. "Anything to make you happy."

"Who owns this house?"

"Friends of mine," he replied. "I spent some time here during the summer. Know every foot of the island."

"Would they like it," she continued, "would they wish us to stroll in and use their lovely home so informally?"

"Like it," said Hobart. "They don't know about it, but if they did, they'd be tickled almost to death."

CHAPTER IV

TO Arthur Simmons' everlasting credit, be it stated right here and now that he conducted himself like a gentleman and a scholar. For a young man attempting to flee the sorrows and woe of a heartless world, he behaved with admirable restraint, and not a sound came from the pink room during the entire evening. Several times Annabelle thought of sending Hobart upstairs to see if the poor thing had strangled to death, but she refrained. Finally the fire burned low on the hearth, and Hobart sat in the great armchair, while Annabelle rested on the rug at his feet and he told her eloquently that she was the most wonderful creature in the world. Hobart had picked up a satisfactory bridal supper by diligently rummaging through the cellar. They had eaten with gusto, and Hobart had opened a bottle of Henry De Morgan's very finest champagne. Silence and peace had descended finally upon Twelve Gables. In the pink room, Arthur Simmons must have retired early, for no word was heard from him.

Leaving Hobart and Annabelle there by the dying embers, which seems only a sensible and proper thing to do, as we might wish to be thus left to ourselves were we a young bride and groom, it may be just as well to hop rapidly down to New York City and go back a number of hours.

ESTRELLA DE MORGAN, with the assistance of her sister Barbara from the finishing school and her mother and a bat-

tery of dressmakers, had prepared herself for the wedding—her wedding to Hobart Hupp, little knowing the terrible blow that was to fall. When she was ready to be married, she was an elegant spectacle, and her friends told her so. Henry De Morgan paid the hotel bill in advance, and it was a large bill, because the St. Agnes is a large hotel with gold-leaf on the corridor columns, and room-clerks that are really dukes and viscounts in disguise. The orchestra arrived on the momentous Tuesday evening and began rendering selections of a choice and genteel character. The floral decorations were more expensive and lavish than any of the bellboys had seen since the last Chorus Girls' Ball.

At seven in the evening the early guests began arriving. Limousines drew up with their precious cargoes, and the elegantly clad ladies and gentlemen walked into the St. Agnes and assumed dignified attitudes. The scent of Oriental perfumes floated in the air, and one could see the rich glitter of diamonds and rhinestones. Society reporters for the morning papers pattered hither and yon, filled with pleasurable excitement and writing down mysterious notes on their copy-paper. At the doors of the large room wherein the gifts lay upon tables, two or three special officers saw to it that nothing untoward happened.

At eight o'clock Estrella and her father walked across the ballroom floor, and the young woman smiled graciously in reply to a dozen compliments. At eight-fifteen Estrella looked about with mild curiosity, feeling that perhaps her eyes would light upon Hobart in the throng. Presently she spoke to her father; and Mr. De Morgan, upon inquiry, learned that nobody seemed to have seen Hobart Hupp since Monday.

Under the calmest of conditions, Estrella De Morgan was what scientists call a very nervous girl. She was plump, but she was nervous, which was a characteristic of the entire De Morgan family. Estrella had nice brown eyes and wore her hair down over her ears, but there was no disguising the fact that she was nervous. At eight-thirty she spoke to Henry, her father.

"Do you mean that no one knows where Hobart is?" she inquired with an uneasy smile, because other persons were listening.

"He seems to have disappeared," replied Henry. "He will probably be along in a moment."

Henry was a fat little man. He perspired upon the slightest provocation, and the queer thing was that he seemed only to perspire on the forehead. The little beads gathered upon his shining dome and trickled into his eyes, except when he managed to mop them off in time. Mrs. De Morgan now appeared and manifested matronly surprise that a bridegroom should be late.

"It's rather annoying," she said to Henry in a low tone. "In fact, it's extremely annoying."

"I expect him at any moment," returned Henry. "He may be delayed."

THIS was such a foolish statement that Mrs. De Morgan merely glared at Henry. At that exact moment Hobart Hupp was on board the State of Maine Express, passing through Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He was holding Annabelle's hand and assuring her that blue eyes are heavenly when they are the right shade of blue.

At nine o'clock it was no longer possible to conceal from the multitude that all was not well. Estrella began to break down. The society reporters, scenting an even larger story than they had anticipated, skittered into telephone-booths and informed their editors that the situation at the St. Agnes looked very suspicious.

There was an eyebrow-raising contest among the guests as the horrid truth began to dawn. Messengers left the St. Agnes on motorcycles and rushed furiously about town seeking the lost principal. Telegrams were dispatched to Hobart Hupp's home and to his distant relatives. Somebody in the throng led Henry De Morgan aside, and asked him if he knew that the Hupp family had always been subject to aphasia and possibly the disorder was now breaking out in Hobart.

At nine-thirty the groomless wedding fête broke up, and the sympathetic and delighted guests flocked out to their limousines discussing the event in hoarse whispers. The management of the St. Agnes officially locked the room containing the wedding gifts, and the society reporters hurried to their various offices, bursting with importance and misinformation. Henry De Morgan gave out a statement to the press in which he said that to him it looked as if something must have happened to young Dr. Hupp.

"He's dead," sobbed Estrella in the privacy of the De Morgan limousine. "There is no other explanation. Nothing

but death could keep him from my side at a time like this."

"It may be that a train hit him," her mother suggested. "He is so careless about trains."

"It will be just as well for him if some serious accident has happened," remarked Roderick De Morgan. "No man can treat my sister in this manner without a good cause."

And so, talking of this and that, the De Morgan family went sadly home to the elegant town house on Park Avenue, and on the following morning, the jolly old New York newspapers had a Roman holiday with the story of Hobart and Estrella. Most of them explained Hobart's absence with a wealth of detail that seemed astonishing, and was astonishing in view of the fact that not one of them had the slightest genune information. It was stated in the public prints that young Dr. Hupp must have suffered an attack of aphasia, and might even then be wandering in a daze about the streets of the metropolis.

AT detective headquarters, whither a request had come in, the officers gave the matter some attention, but not a great deal. The ordinary New York detective does not believe in aphasia, as a general thing. Whenever a man or a lady disappears within the metropolitan area, the police will believe that many things might have caused the disappearance—but not aphasia.

Without delaying over it, Estrella De Morgan gave herself up to nervous prostration, and the family physician was summoned. His name was Dr. Morley Finucane, and he was elderly, wore hay-colored sideburns and had extensive dealings with the better classes. He informed Mrs. De Morgan and Henry that their daughter was in a serious state and that she must have complete rest and calm after the nerve-racking experience.

"You will certainly have to remove her from the city," said the physician. "Her nerves are completely shattered."

"We might take her to Florida," suggested Henry.

"Not at all," said Mrs. De Morgan. "We shall take Estrella at once to Shelter Island."

"And a very excellent place to take her," admitted Dr. Finucane, who had himself spent a couple of weeks there. "In fact, as I recall it, just exactly the place. Let her be disturbed by nothing. Complete rest is what she requires."

That very night, with two special nurses to attend her, and with her entire family as bodyguard, Estrella was taken down to Grand Central Terminal. A special car was attached to the State of Maine Express, and Estrella started north. That evening's papers stated that, according to very reliable information sent by trusted correspondents, Dr. Hobart Hupp of New York had been drowned off the coast of Cuba. One paper had it that Dr. Hupp was in Mexico City and had been seen in public cafés with a well-known Spanish dancer. These bits of information did not improve the temper of the De Morgan family, as it started gloomily for Maine in its private coach.

CHAPTER V

IN the morning, Hobart sneaked quietly upstairs in Twelve Gables, carrying a can of condensed milk and a box of cereal. He unlocked Arthur's door and fed him. For a man drinking himself into eternity, Arthur ate with a right hearty appetite and even inquired if Hobart couldn't stir up a plate of ham and eggs.

"How long am I to be kept here?" he demanded. "Why can't I go back to New York at once?"

"That's the trouble," said Hobart. "You've always been able to do what you want when you want to. You're going to stay right here till it suits me to release you."

Arthur mixed some cereal, put in a requisition for more bottled goods and indulged in vague threats of what he might do if pushed too far. Downstairs, Annabelle cheerfully prepared breakfast. The quaint notion of honeymooning in the same house with a desperate burglar began to seem attractive to her, because if a burglar remains quietly in his room, there is nothing obnoxious about it. Hobart came down from his conference with Arthur. Breakfast was eaten heartily and the two happy ones decided to take a walk about Shelter Island.

They were discussing this plan, when there came to Hobart's ears the unmistakable crunching noise of footsteps upon sand. Hobart glanced up. He looked out of the window, and his rosy countenance paled. Apparently people were coming in

all directions, and at first it seemed to Hobart that there were hundreds of them. Men and women were popping into sight here and there, but the largest group was walking slowly up the main pathway from the lagoon, and the first object presenting itself to Hobart's horrified gaze was Estrella De Morgan, supported on either side by a white-clad nurse. Henry De Morgan and Mrs. De Morgan and Roderick followed, and then came attendants. There was no time to escape, and nowhere to escape to. Hobart rose, took Annabelle's hands in his and said in a low, hoarse voice:

"Annabelle, we are in another emergency, and this one is worse than the others. Please do everything I tell you to do. Do not be astonished or indignant at anything I may say. I shall be able to explain all later on, but I will not have time to explain until this crisis is over."

He would have said more, but Roderick De Morgan was already mounting the veranda steps.

"Beloved one," Hobart whispered, "if I order you to faint, please faint. Drop on the floor and pretend you are dead."

ANNABELLE was too astounded for words. Roderick came across the porch, opened the door and refused to believe his eyes. An instant later Mrs. De Morgan entered the room followed closely by her husband. A serving man or two passed in with luggage. Then Estrella and her nursing convoy stepped across the threshold, and meanwhile Hobart and Annabelle stood beside the remains of their breakfast, waiting for whatever might impend.

"Hobart!"

It was the voice of Estrella De Morgan. She cast her nurses aside with amazing strength for an hysteria patient, ran quickly across to Mr. Hupp and flung herself into his arms. He staggered, caught the lady, who partly swooned, and remained as he was, with Estrella sort of hanging from him. Annabelle looked at this little scene and shivered. Presently Miss De Morgan revived.

"Sweetheart," said Estrella, pawing Mr. Hupp to make certain it was he, "they said you were dead. They told me you were wounded. Some of them said you had a stroke of aphasia and were wandering in a daze."

Almost instantly the word *aphasia* stuck in Hobart's mind. He seized it eagerly and hoped it would save him.

Henry De Morgan walked over to the affecting scene and took Estrella away from Hobart.

"What happened to you?" he asked very coldly.

"Me?" said Hobart, looking dazed, and doing it without acting.

"Yes, what happened?" the old gentleman repeated, still the perfect picture of parental indignation.

Hobart brushed his fingers across his eyes, as though trying to clear a foggy mind and remember. He slowly smiled a wan smile.

"This is very peculiar," he said weakly. "Where are we?"

"Where are we," snorted Roderick De Morgan. "You know darned well where we are. We're on Shelter Island."

"Something must have happened to me," Hobart faltered, facing the curious group. "I can now remember a little of it. It seems to me I started from New Haven. The next I remember, I was rowing a boat and now, here I am. Must be an attack of aphasia. Peculiar, isn't it?"

"Very," said Mrs. De Morgan, who all this time had been staring fixedly at little Annabelle.

"But dear Hobart," said Estrella, "can't you recall anything?"

"No," Hobart answered firmly. "Aphasia is a terrible thing. Wipes out your memory. Now that I come to think of it, I haven't been feeling right for weeks. I suppose this was the climax."

"That," said Mrs. De Morgan, "of course, would explain why you neglected to appear at the wedding; but there are several other matters. For example, may I ask who is this young woman?"

AT this, everyone turned from Hobart and looked at Annabelle standing behind a sofa, rubbing her fingers nervously up and down the velvet. As they turned towards her Annabelle trembled more than ever, but Hobart was calm.

"To be sure," he said cheerfully, "my attack of sickness was a frightful thing, coming as it did upon the eve of—of the event. Still, it was very fortunate that I happened to—to wander up here to Shelter Island. It was lucky I came here when I did."

"*Who* is this young woman?" Mrs. De Morgan asked again, and with even greater

emphasis. Estrella looked at Hobart with an inquiring smile.

"That," he replied, "is the burglar's wife. Rather pitiful case, too."

"Burglar!" exclaimed Henry, the father. "What burglar?"

"The one upstairs," Hobart continued.

"What's he doing upstairs?" Roderick inquired.

"What's he doing!" laughed Mr. Hupp. "He's recovering, that's what he's doing. I had a mighty hard time saving your property, but I saved it. He was desperate, so I had to be rough with him."

"Where is he?" Henry demanded.

"Tied up tight in the pink room. Can't move until I get ready to hand him over to the police."

"That's interesting," said Roderick. "Let's have a look at the fellow."

Roderick started briskly for the stairway. His father likewise moved as though to go upstairs. Hobart held up his hand and shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, "but you can't look at him now."

"Why not?" they asked. "Why can't we?"

"Because he's too low. You see, I had to mash him up a good bit before he surrendered. That and the operation laid him out pretty badly, and he may die, though I hope not."

"Operation?" the De Morgans murmured.

"Yes," said Hobart. "I had to take out a bit of his skill. The man is a criminal, of course—very peculiar shape to his head. I regard it as my duty to society. If he recovers, the chances are he will become an honest citizen. Old theory of mine, you know."

THEY all did know. Roderick was aware that during Hobart's college days the authorities had plenty of trouble keeping him from carving up criminals upon whom he chanced.

"Is he getting better?" asked Mrs. De Morgan uneasily. "We don't want him to die in the house, you know."

Hobart admitted that the burglar's chances were fair, but that any undue excitement, or the appearance of strangers, would certainly send him into the next world. It was out of the question to peek at him.

Annabelle Louise Landis-Hupp listened to this conversation with round eyes and a sense of growing wonder. To her, Hobart had said nothing whatever about opening up the burglar's cranium. She failed to understand what was going on; but then, Hobart had asked her not to be astonished at anything, and she was resolved to do her best, like the game little sport she was. The one circumstance that did worry her was Estrella. Why should this plump young woman come into a room and throw herself upon Hobart? What was all the vague talk about a wedding? It was mystifying, but Hobart had asked her to wait and trust him, and she meant to.

WHEN Roderick and Henry learned that they were barred from the burglar's bedside, they immediately turned to Annabelle. So did Estrella and her mother.

"She's rather a pretty little thing," said Estrella, going over to Annabelle and examining her carefully. "Peculiar type, isn't she—not much personality, and no character whatever."

"On the contrary," said Hobart, "she has one of the sweetest characters I have ever found."

"What do you mean by that, Hobart?" Mrs. De Morgan inquired.

"I mean," he said hastily, "that despite the fact she is a burglar's bride, she seems to have an excellent mind. Very interesting case, to me."

"I suppose she has associated with criminals since childhood," remarked Henry, staring hard at Annabelle. "However, she doesn't look particularly vicious. It might be a good thing if I took her in hand—*I* might be able to lead her back to the right path."

"You're not going to lead her anywhere," Mrs. De Morgan said, giving Henry a sharp look. "You're going to mind your own affairs."

At this point the family surrounded poor little Annabelle and inspected her. Mrs. De Morgan asked her to raise up her chin so that they might study it for vicious indications. Roderick turned her around and looked at her feet, finding them a particularly easy pair of feet to look at, especially as they were covered with pumps costing twenty-four dollars, and silk hosiery. Hobart Hupp then took the situation into his own hands, because he saw very plainly that Annabelle could stand the inquisition no longer.

"I am afraid," Hobart said with a note of apology in his tone, "that you have interrupted me at an inopportune moment."

The De Morgans looked at him in wonder.

"Interrupted you," snapped Mrs. De Morgan. "That's really too bad. What I wish to know, is, why were you sitting here amiably talking to the wife of this criminal upstairs? Why don't you lock her up?"

"That's just the point I'm coming to," continued Hobart pleasantly. "This young woman has been telling me her life history. I investigated, because, as a surgeon and a scientist, I am interested. I have operated upon her husband, hoping to remove his criminal taint. The young woman likewise is suffering from a criminal reflex."

"A criminal what?" asked Henry De Morgan.

"A reflex," repeated Dr. Hupp. "I am certain from a close examination of her cranial formation that she is not a real criminal at all, and that a slight operation on the posterior ends of the parietal bones will remove the cause of her living a life of outlawry."

Here Annabelle looked at Hobart in profound astonishment. Mrs. De Morgan admitted that Annabelle's face was a curiously criminal type but stated that in her opinion no operation would cure her.

"I was just about to operate," continued Hobart. "The lady has given her consent, wishing to lead an upright life, if possible. So you see your arrival at this moment was a bit unfortunate. In fact," said Hobart and here he paused—paused abruptly.

It happened that as Hobart talked, he stood near the piano, while the others were opposite him, away from the windows. Hobart, from where he stood, discussing reflexes and operations, could see down the graveled walk leading from the lagoon. In the middle of his last sentence, he paused, as stated. His mouth remained partly opened, as though the unfinished sentence was coming out in a moment. He perceived, that although the situation in which he found himself and his bride was a difficult one, it presently was about to become more so.

THE walk was again occupied. More persons were coming to call at Twelve Gables, and this time, there were no ladies. All were men—led by Uncle Cupples and Norman. Behind Uncle Cupples came five of the most expert criminal-catchers in the Portland police department—hard-featured, flat-footed detectives, and from a quick glance at the faces of the posse, Hobart saw that mercy was not one of the qualities brought over to Shelter Island from the mainland. Silently and determinedly Uncle Cupples and his bloodhounds bore down upon the house.

"And," said Hobart, walking swiftly across the room to where Annabelle was standing, "as I said, science and duty come before all else. This young woman must be operated upon at once, or there is no telling how quickly she will plunge back into a life of crime. I will now take her up stairs and remove part of her small foramen spinosum. Please do not interrupt us."

It was now a question of moments. If that stern-faced crew entered the living-room before Hobart could disappear with Annabelle, he felt that all would be over. They would tear his young bride from his arms and probably Norman would shoot him, being a nervous young fool and unaccustomed to firearms.

"Faint," said Hobart, bending close to Annabelle's ear.

Annabelle closed her eyes, remembered what Hobart had said, and sank gently into his arms. He gathered her up, rushed for the stairway, and as he reached the upper landing, he heard the hoarse murmur of voices below, indicating that Uncle Cupples and his merry men were within the house.

The De Morgan family with mingled emotions watched Hobart carry the burglar's wife upstairs. Estrella started to swoon and thought better of it as she noticed the new visitors. Hurrying along the upper hall, Hobart turned into the blue room of Twelve Gables, which adjoins the pink room, wherein Arthur was incarcerated. He closed the door, stood Annabelle on her feet and breathed hard.

"It's getting thicker every minute," he said, mopping his damp forehead. "I wish we had gone somewhere else."

"I don't understand anything that has happened," Annabelle replied.

"I'll explain," said Hobart; "but at this moment there is only one thing to be thought of—how do we get out of here with both our lives intact?"

From below came the sound of voices.

"That's Uncle Cupples," said Hobart drearily. "He has arrived with his bodyguard—seventeen policemen, I suppose."

"Can—can they take you away from me?" the little bride asked with a quaver.

"They can if they lay their hands on me," said he.

"Who is that plump girl with the queer hair?" Annabelle inquired.

"Wait till we reach the mainland," replied her husband. "Then I'll tell you all."

CHAPTER VI

IN the lower reaches of the De Morgan summer home things were not getting on any too well, and the atmosphere was sultry with suspicion. Judge Cupples and Norman, with their butler and police guard, came swinging into the living-room without even so much as a knock on the door. Three hours before, they had learned that a young man and a young woman had rowed from Point Lowe in the direction of Shelter Island, and the description tallied with Hobart and Annabelle. Mr. Cupples came to an abrupt halt when he saw the large number of De Morgans present.

"My name is Cupples," he announced.

"Yes, and your address is liable to be the nearest jail," snapped Roderick, the son. "What is the idea of trespassing upon private property. This island belongs to us. What are you doing here?"

"My name is Cupples," repeated that person. "I have come for my niece. If I don't get her, I am going to know the reason why."

"That's interesting," said Henry De Morgan gravely. "What would your niece be doing on my island?"

"She had been abducted," snorted the judge. "I have reason to believe the miscreant brought her here."

"What sort of girl is she?" Estrella asked suddenly, thinking of Annabelle.

Mr. Cupples rapidly described Annabelle. The police officers prowled about the room, pushing curtains aside. Several of them wandered outside and began trying doors.

"Certainly she is here," said Estrella. "But we have nothing to do with her. We have just arrived, ourselves, to find our summer home being looted by a burglar. Perhaps you will explain, if she is your niece, how she is found robbing our home?"

"Robbing your home," sneered Uncle Cupples. "Don't be silly. My niece is not a thief."

"No, but she is the wife of a burglar," sniffed Mrs. De Morgan, "and she goes about with him, looting summer homes."

"There must be some mistake," roared Uncle Cupples. "Are you people all crazy? My niece is Annabelle Landis of Portland, Maine, and the Landises are not thieves. I want her, and I want her now."

"The only woman on this island," said Roderick, "besides those in this room, is the young wife of the burglar whom we captured. She is now upstairs."

"I'll go and see her," shouted the Judge. "This damnable nonsense has got to cease."

"You can't see her," they shouted back at him.

"Why can't I?" he demanded. "Why can't I?"

"Because she is being operated on, to have a piece removed from her skull," volunteered Estrella in her high, shrill voice, "and you ought to get down on your knees and thank heaven if it comes out successfully."

"Good God!" said Uncle Cupples, sinking down on the sofa.

"IF I were you, I'd cheer up," Roderick remarked irritably. "Even if your daughter did marry a burglar, it might be worse. After the operation, she may get over this criminal tendency."

"She's not my daughter," Uncle Cupples snapped. "She's my niece. And the fellow is a professional burglar. I knew it. Heaven help us!"

"You must be a very careful uncle," said Mrs. De Morgan, "to let you own flesh and blood marry a burglar!"

"I didn't let her. And furthermore, there is something mighty queer about this whole business. I'm going uptairs and see Annabelle."

"If you do," warned Henry, "you'll kill her. You know you can't go bursting into a room where a surgeon is trephining a lady's skull—that is, you wont if you care for the lady."

"You can go out and sit on the porch," Estrella offered. Estrella was feeling worse than when she left New York. "We are not entertaining guests. If you will sit on the veranda, some one will inform you when your child's operation is over."

Uncle Cupples grunted and rose.

"I'll wait outside just fifteen minutes," he said. "Then I'll send the police through the house."

He passed Norman ahead of him. Halfway across the room, Uncle Cupples stopped in front of a chair, seized an overcoat, hurled it to the floor and stamped

upon it. He also swore, despite the ladies. Estrella pushed him off the overcoat and gathered it up.

"You beast," she said. "The minute I saw your whiskers, I knew what you were."

"And that's what I'll do to this fellow," snorted Judge Cupples. "That coat belongs to the fiend who abducted Annabelle."

"This overcoat," retorted Estrella, "belongs to my fiancé, one of the foremost surgeons in New York City. He is now trying to save your sinful niece from a life of crime."

"It belongs to the infernal whelp who ran off with my ward," the Judge repeated, glaring at the family. "Don't I know? Ask Norman. Ask Hicks."

Norman and Hicks both identified it.

"You are mistaken," Henry De Morgan said loftily. "I presume you are not responsible, owing to recent excitement. The overcoat belongs to an old friend of our family—to my future son-in-law, who is now upstairs operating upon your wayward relation."

"It's a gosh-hangled conspiracy," roared Uncle Cupples, using some private adjectives of his own. "You're all in this scheme. Annabelle was stolen, and now you are trying to hide the man. I'm going to find my niece."

HE started for the stairs, and Roderick De Morgan attempted to stop him. The officers pushed Roderick to one side and told him to behave. Norman Cupples again drew his revolver, thereby endangering the lives of all. Mr. Cupples started rapidly to the second floor, followed by detectives. When he reached the upper landing, he gave a whoop.

Hobart Hupp had been standing in the doorway of the blue room, feeling that the end of everything was but minutes away. He knew he was caught, and that Annabelle would be torn from him. Yet a Hupp never quits trying. If he does, he is not a real Hupp. Hobart saw Uncle Cupples' head coming up stairs.

"Keep perfectly quiet," Hobart said to Annabelle. He then closed the blue room door and walked towards Mr. Cupples and his gang.

The Judge stopped, pulled a revolver from his coat and pointed it at Hobart.

"Stand where you are," he said in a deadly tone. "You woman-stealer, stand still or I'll shoot."

"You are too late," Hobart said calmly, but coming to a diplomatic halt in front of the revolver. "You are also making too much noise, considering that two human beings are fighting for their lives in these two rooms."

Hobart indicated the blue room and the pink room.

"You scoundrel!" continued Uncle Cupples. "Where's Annabelle?"

"As I said," Hobart repeated, "you are too late."

"Too late for what?" sneered the Judge.

"Too late to go on running Annabelle's estate," Hobart smiled, "and stealing her money for yourself and your son. The estate now belongs to me. As Annabelle's widower, I shall take immediate possession, and kick you and Norman out at once."

"You mean you've killed Annabelle?" the Judge asked in an awed tone.

"Killed her? No," said Hobart quietly. "I am not a murderer. She drowned, but it was quite accidental, I assure you."

AT this point Henry De Morgan and Estrella and her mother and Roderick and the Cupples butler came hurrying up the stair, followed by detectives. Estrella started for Hobart, intending to throw herself into his arms again, but her father restrained her.

"You hear what he says," Uncle Cupples gurgled, the horror increasing in his tones. "He's made away with the child."

"He has not," sniffed Roderick. "Didn't we just see him carry her upstairs. If he's killed her, he must have killed her in the last five or ten minutes."

"We are not talking of the same person," Hobart explained. "You refer to the burglar's wife, who is still under the anesthetic, and doing nicely. I am talking of my wife, Annabelle Landis, who was unfortunately drowned when she fell out of the boat."

"Your wife!" Estrella shrieked, and fainted for the fifth time in two days. The two nurses immediately carried her downstairs and began reviving her.

"I will explain everything," Hobart said, looking as though he really meant to do so. "There are two ladies under discussion. One of them is the unfortunate helpmeet of this burglar in the pink room. The other lady is Annabelle, my lost bride, whom I married in Portland yesterday, and whose estate now descends to me, after being mismanaged by Judge Cupples in the interest

of himself and son. I regret to state that Annabelle fell out of the rear end of the rowboat, just as I was entering the lagoon, and although I searched for some time, I found no signs of her."

"So you didn't have aphasia!" exclaimed Henry De Morgan harshly.

"You sneaked off to Portland!" said Mrs. De Morgan.

"And married a girl, intending to murder her for her property," added Roderick, the son.

"He probably killed the lady with an oar," said one of the detectives thoughtfully. "We'll find the marks on the body, no doubt."

"Arrest him," commanded Judge Cupples. And immediately five of the largest detectives arrested Hobart and led him downstairs, where Estrella saw him coming and fainted again. The entire gathering started for the lagoon, taking Hobart Hupp with them, and leaving the burglar and his bride to come out of their respective anesthetics as best they could. Preparations were made at once to drag the harbor and find the body of the bride, if possible. Grappling hooks were discovered in one of the boathouses, and Hobart rowed around with the detectives and pointed out the spot on the water where he thought Annabelle went overboard.

"Of course," he said, "I can't be certain. It was dark, you know."

Meanwhile he wondered how he could get himself and Annabelle off Shelter Island and buy a couple of tickets to New York on a fast train. The prospect looked dim at the moment, with Uncle Cupples threatening to jail him for life, and Norman menacing him with his gun.

"I don't believe Annabelle is dead at all," announced Norman, after they had dragged and dragged, bringing up nothing but a rubber tennis-shoe and a tin that had held sardines. "This man has hidden her on the island. He's trying to make a fool of us."

"No," said Hobart. "God did that years ago."

THE expedition then returned to dry land, and for the next half-hour the detectives used all their art, prowling into boathouses, upsetting small buildings and looking into cellars. A careful search of Shelter Island revealed no Annabelle. Uncle Cupples finally decided.

"I don't care whether she's had her skull opened up or not," he said firmly, "I'm going to have a look at this burglar's wife. I'm going upstairs and see her with my own eyes."

It was then that young Dr. Hupp admitted to himself that things were pretty bad. With the gang heading for the blue room, it looked like curtains and the exit march. He had staved off disaster heroically, but apparently Old Lady Fate was against him.

"Very well," he said in his resigned way. "Go ahead. Burst into that room of pain and kill an innocent human being."

They paid no attention. Strong hands pulled him along, into the house and up the stairs. Uncle Cupples forced open the door of the blue room, peering in cautiously. Annabelle Landis-Hupp rose from the bed, wiped her eyes with her tiny handkerchief and glared at her irate guardian.

"There you are," shouted the Judge triumphantly. "I knew it. The charge is now changed from murder to abduction. I can send this man up for twenty years."

"Hobart," said Annabelle in a piteous voice, "what is the matter with everybody?"

"I don't know," returned her husband. "I believe that all these people don't like us."

"And this is the woman you married?" Henry De Morgan asked.

"I did," Hobart answered, "and I'm glad I had the chance."

"He did not marry her," corrected Uncle Cupples. "He stole her out of her comfortable home. They are not legally married, because he obtained the license under false pretenses. I know the Maine law. Can't fool me. This lad will cool his heels in jail."

"He is my husband," Annabelle said simply. "Where he goes, I go."

"You're going to a convent in Canada," snapped the Judge. "This so-called marriage will be annulled at once."

"I suppose," said Mr. Hupp quietly, "that the incident is over, and I am sorry to have caused trouble. I may have made a mistake in acting as I did, but I assure you all that my intentions were good. I thought I had married Annabelle, but if Judge Cupples says I did not, he must know. I have nothing to do now but agree with him. I shall give Annabelle up and try to forget it all. But before you separate us and take me to Portland, will you give me five or ten minutes for a last talk with my—with Annabelle?"

DR. HUPP'S manner was resigned. His tone was without emotion, as though he had come to his senses.

"That's the way to talk," said Judge Cupples, rubbing his hands. "If you're engaged to this other girl, you can marry her when you get out of jail. I'll have the first marriage annulled in the morning."

"I merely wish to talk over certain matters with Annabelle," Hobart said sadly.

"I have no objection," said Uncle Cupples. "But you are never going to fool us again. Norman, watch him, while he says good-by to Annabelle."

"That's the way to talk," said Judge wept bitterly. They stepped into the blue room, and Norman Cupples entered with them, and closed the door. Outside in the hall the detectives clustered about Uncle Cupples, who assured them that the city would pay them well for this day's work. The De Morgans went indignantly downstairs and tried to help the nurses with Estrella, who was now worse than ever.

In the blue room Annabelle sank upon the edge of the bed, and her husband bent over her, speaking in a low tone and assuring her that everything is always for the best, no matter how bad it looks. And then suddenly, without any formality whatever, Hobart turned and did something he had been longing to do since setting foot on Maine soil: he plastered Norman, the son of Uncle Cupples.

It was one of those punches that starts at the floor and ends with the victim in the hospital. It caught Norman unprepared and on the point of his long, lean jaw, and without so much as a murmur he crumpled up and sank upon the elegant carpet of the blue room.

Hobart removed the revolver from Norman's pocket, pushed his unconscious form into a closet and locked the door. He likewise locked the door into the hall. Outside, Uncle Cupples and his men paced to and fro, awaiting the end of the conference.

Then the desperate bridegroom opened the door between the pink and the blue room; and Arthur Simmons, who had been wondering silently all morning over the infernal noise in the house, rose from his bed in a suit of pale blue pajamas. Hobart held up his finger in warning and whispered.

"I want you to do one last thing for me, Arthur," Hobart said. "This young woman is my bride. I have not married Estrella. She is downstairs, waiting for you to console her. But if you do not help me and Annabelle to escape, you will never wed Estrella, for I shall shoot you."

"What do you want me to do now?" Arthur inquired, paling a trifle, and following Hobart into the blue room.

"They have given me five minutes to say good-by," explained Dr. Hupp. "Presently the detectives will break in, if they suspect something is wrong. I want you to stand here in the corner and imitate my voice. You are saying a final good-by to your beloved bride. Be mournful about it. When they pound on the door, urge them to give you another minute. But whatever you do, continue talking."

Arthur clutched his pajamas and said that he thought he could do it.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To New York," said Hobart. "If you live through this, I'll see you there."

HE pushed Arthur into a corner, opened a French window and stepped out. Arthur began saying good-by to the wall-paper; and to his credit, let it be stated that he threw a good deal of sadness and passion into his voice. In the hall, Uncle Cupples and the officers could plainly hear the agonizing though muffled tones of a young husband bidding adieu to a bride he never expects to see again; and though they grew impatient, they decided to give him another moment or two. In the dusky and murky depths of the locked closet Norman Cupples slowly came back to life, felt his jawbone and decided that the right side was broken in two places. Hobart and Annabelle flitted over the roof of the porch to the stairs at the rear of the building. descended rapidly to the ground and fled to the little pier at which all the craft on Shelter Island tugged at their moorings.

Finally Judge Cupples lost patience.

"That's enough," he said to the boss detective. "Open the door and take him away."

The door was locked. They called out to Norman, but Norman was still groggy, besides being locked up. Strong shoulders burst open the door to the blue room, and all they discovered was an odd blue figure in pajamas, standing in a corner of the room and apparently talking to the design on the wall-paper. They seized him, but did not recognize him until later, when Henry De Morgan explained that Arthur was an old friend of the family.

The trick was apparent in a flash. Some-

body noticed the moaning noises coming from the closet, opened the door and dragged poor Norman into the light of day. He was unable to talk, but pointed to his jaw mutely. Meantime the quick-witted detectives detected the open window, and the pursuit was on.

THERE were four boats at the little wharf in the lagoon. Two of these were motor launches, and the others were rowboats. Hobart worked swiftly. He tied the various tow-lines to the stern of the largest craft. Annabelle tumbled in and curled up on the cushions, and Hobart started the engine. The launch coughed a couple of times and headed for the open sea, and the other three boats bobbed along behind, making a rather pretty spectacle as the flotilla set out past the breakwater.

Hobart and Annabelle stood in the stern, with their arms about each other, and as the police force of Portland, and Uncle Cupples, and the butler, and some of the De Morgan servants, and others came rushing down to the beach, Hobart waved his hat at them genially.

"Go after them," roared Uncle Cupples.

"You mean swim after them," corrected the boss detective.

One of the officers threatened to shoot, but Judge Cupples asked him how he expected to hit Hobart with Annabelle clasped to him. The towing launch churned ahead bravely, and the three boats came along behind. Shelter Island slowly dropped into the background. Uncle Cupples stood on the wharf and surveyed the result.

"How do we get off this accursed island?" he demanded. "Are there no boats at all?"

"You don't get off," replied Roderick De Morgan, who had wrathfully come out to see the finish. "You stay here. And, likewise, you stay on the beach. We don't want any of you in the house again."

IT was late in the afternoon when Hobart and his little bride reached Point Lowe and their assorted craft bumped into a pier. A lone fisherman was cleaning a dory near by, and the husband addressed him.

"Do you want to make a few dollars?" he inquired.

"I always want to make a few dollars," replied the man, who was a tough-looking fellow.

"Tomorrow morning, you take these boats back to Shelter Island, and tell the people I said you were to have twenty dollars for rescuing them. Are you afraid of wild men?"

"I aint afraid of anything," returned the doryman.

"That's good," said Hobart, "because they'll be even wilder in the morning than they are tonight."

The man promised to start early next day with the four boats. Hobart and Annabelle, seeing nothing more to detain them in the neighborhood, set out for the railway station; and one hour later, they were enjoying a serene and comfortable dinner on the New York express—the train upon which they had met.

"Hasn't it been exciting?" Annabelle asked. The flush had returned to her cheek and the sparkle to her eyes. "Now, Hobart," she continued, "explain to me all about this Estrella."

"Very well," her husband answered, looking thoughtfully out of the window at the passing scenery. . . . .

That was two years ago, and young Dr. Hupp is still explaining.

THE END

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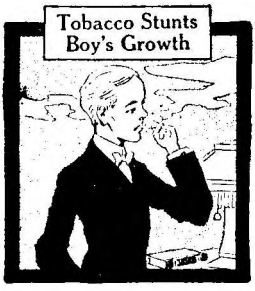

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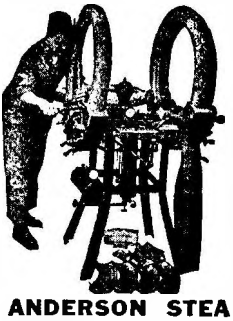

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